

# **Stress of Cultural Adaption Perceived by International Students Living in South Korea – Focused on Q Methodology**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study was designed to understand how international students in South Korea perceived their stress in order to adjust new different culture compared to their own one. In terms of statistics, authors used Q methodology and analyzed personal characteristics, eigenvalues, variance, correlation and z-scores through using the QUANL PC program with scored twenty-eight Q statements among twenty international students lived in South Korea. There were three factors, which accounted for the differences among six types with their self-perception of stress for cultural adaption with from the most agreeable statements to the most disagreeable ones. All six types showed their own perception about the stress of cultural adoption without any similarity. This research showed that international students studying in Korea perceived as a stress to adapt to the culture of being disadvantaged and not being treated the same as Koreans because of their skin color, their own culture and prejudice about themselves, while using Korean or eating Korean food was relatively low as perceived stress of cultural adaptation. The authors will anticipate that through the results of this research, Korean society can use it as useful basic data for practical intervention cultural adjustment stress of foreign students residing in Korea.

**Keywords:** Cultural adjustment; Stress; International students; Q methodology; Perception

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## INTRODUCTION

Unlike in the past, it is neither surprising nor special to see foreigners anywhere in South Korea at present because of globalization, development of technology, improving science and so on. Also, many young generations in the world are interested in Korean culture especially Korean pop music. Los Angeles Times described that “there’s no doubt that K-pop broke through in the United States in 2018(Wood, M., 2019).” According to Korean International Cultural Exchange Agency (KOFICE), the majority of international students from Asia, 51.7%, said the Korea Wave called “Hallyu” influenced on studying abroad in South Korea(Korean International Cultural Exchange Agency, 2012; The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). In addition, in December 2019, the Korean Ministry of Education reported that total number of international students studying in South Korea was 160,000 and 145,747 were from Asian countries, accounting for 91% of the total (The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014; Oh, C. W., 2019).Such an increase in the number of foreign students has recently been very important in the process of transforming Korean society into a multicultural society (Oh, C. W., 2019;Park, E., Hwang, B. & Jung, T., 2010) because it is changing many aspects of Korea, such as various restaurants. In addition to this, it is necessary to change the perspective of not only looking at the international students as such just foreign students, but also as members of our community. Furthermore, our society should expand its cultural tolerance to understand and respect their own culture. Although living in an unfamiliar place away from the family and hometown is a hard job for everyone in their but it is a much harder task to international students living in other countries with all new surroundings while adapting to other cultures. Studying in another nation has the advantage that international students can learn the language of another country and experience various cultures, but in other words, it also has some problems such as adapting different languages, cultures and environment (Oh, C. W., 2019;Park, E., Hwang, B. & Jung, T., 2010; Lee, et al 2012; Cross, E. S., 1995;Kuo. C. H. B., 2013).Therefore, authors studied the stress of cultural adaptation among international students studying in Korea in order to understand their point of view and to provide the basic data establishing some intervention program of managing the stress of cultural adaption.

## MATERIALS & METHODS

In this research, authors used the Q methodology, which is a research technique or methodological concept focusing on the subjectivity or first-person perspective of studying participants known as William Stephenson contributed to Nature in 1935, in order to

investigate how international students studying in South Korea perceived the stress for adapting cultural differences between their own culture and Korean one. This study was conducted from May 8 to May 15, 2020, and 20 international students stayed in Gangwon province with their own willing to participate in this research. Authors applied them for convenience sampling method with scored 28 Q statements selecting forced normal distribution. Researchers analyzed eigenvalues, variance, and z-score through using the QUANL PC program. In Q methodology for the forced normal distribution, participants classified the Q statements from the most agreeable to the most disagreeable through each individual point of view called as the self-categorizing (Kim, H. K., 2009).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### General characteristics

In terms of participants' general characteristics, the average age of participants in this study was 22 years old, males were 13 of the total (65%), and female students were 7 of the total (35%). For less than one year, 14 people lived in South Korea, accounting for 70% of the total. Among the participants, each 9 students came from Mongolia and Pakistan, 90% of the total as well as others came from Russia and Turkey shown in Table 1.

Table 1. General characteristics (n=20)

Items		%
Gender	Female	7(35%)
	Male	13(65%)
Ages	20 years old	3(15%)
	21 years old	5(25%)
	22 years old	5(25%)
	23 years old	3(15%)
	24 years old	2(10%)
	25 years old	1(5%)
	26 years old	1(5%)
Length of residence	Less than 1 year	14(70%)
	More than 1 year less than 2 years	6(30%)
	More than 3 years	0(0%)
Nationality	Mongolian	9(45%)
	Pakistani	9(45%)

	Russian	1(5%)
	Turk	1(5%)

### Research result

Three types of factors of stress for cultural adaption that international students recognized were reported. In terms of Table 2, there were each eigenvalues, factor I-3.6724, factor II-2.4015 and factor III-2.2559. The variance explains 41% to this research. The correlation coefficient shows in Table 3 and similarity of each type is not seen.

Table 2. Eigenvalues and variance percentage

	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III
Eigenvalues	3.6724	2.4015	2.2559
Variance percentage	0.1836	0.1201	0.1128
Cumulative frequency	0.1836	0.3037	0.4165

Table 3. Correlation

	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III
Factor I	1.000		
Factor II	0.3721	1.000	
Factor III	-0.2960	-0.5520	1.000

Three factors show six different types. In terms of Type I, there were four participants and Table 4 shows the top six agreements of high z-score while the bottom five disagreements. They strongly agreed they understood to live in Korea insecurely but firmly disagreed Koreans treated them differently because of their different appearance.

Table 4. Descending array of z-scores of type I (greater than  $\pm 1$ )(n=4)

	Q-statements	Z-score
Positive	Q21. I feel unsafe in Korea.	1.87
	Q28. I feel that my position in Korean society is low because of my cultural background.	1.71
	Q27. I feel guilty about living in South Korea for other lifestyles.	1.30

	Q20. I feel that I am treated unfairly because of my appearance different from that of Koreans.	1.1
	Q18. I feel that people from abroad like me in Korea are discriminated against.	1.08
	Q7. Others have a prejudice about me.	1.02
Negative	Q23. Because the different appearance such as skin tones compared to others, I'm treated differently.	-1.01
	Q13. I feel uncomfortable with Koreans, so I usually spend time alone.	-1.31
	Q2. I am uncomfortable adjusting to Korean culture.	-1.53
	Q22. I don't feel a sense of belonging to society in Korea.	-1.69
	Q1. The nostalgia of my hometown makes me suffer.	-2.21

Five participants were belonged to Type II. In terms of Table 5, there were the top four agreements of high z-score while the bottom five disagreements. They strongly agreed Koreans depreciated their own cultural value while strongly disagreed Koreans treated them unfairly.

Table 5. Descending array of z-scores of type II (greater than  $\pm 1$ ) (n=5)

	Q-statements	Z-score
Positive	Q15. Koreans do not appreciate the value of my culture.	2.27
	Q6. I feel hesitant to participate in social activities.	1.61
	Q14. I feel inferior because of my cultural background.	1.57
	Q5. I'm sad to live in an unfamiliar environment.	1.13
Negative	Q10. I feel that I am being treated unfairly in Korea.	-1.06
	Q9. After moving to Korea, I feel a lot of pressure.	-1.27
	Q16. I miss the people of my homeland and its place.	-1.44
	Q8. In Korea, I do not have many opportunities to do something.	-1.65
	Q7. Others have a prejudice about me.	-2.22

In Type III, there were four participants out of twenty with the same proportion of men and women. Table 6 shows the top six agreements of high z-score while the bottom six disagreements. They strongly agreed they had the feeling of guilty living in South Korea with different lifestyle but strongly disagreed their cultural background led them to treat unfairly,

they living in Korea made them unsafe and Koreans treated them differently because of their different appearance.

Table 6. Descending array of z-scores of type III (greater than  $\pm 1$ ) (n=4)

	Q-statements	Z-score
Positive	Q27. I feel guilty about living in South Korea for other lifestyles.	1.80
	Q3. I am treated differently from Koreans in the same social situation.	1.42
	Q16. I miss the people of my homeland and its place.	1.42
	Q20. I feel that I am treated unfairly because of my appearance different from that of Koreans.	1.33
	Q1. The nostalgia of my hometown makes me suffer.	1.03
	Q26. After coming to Korea, I feel my self-image lowered by fear.	1.02
Negative	Q28. I feel that my position in Korean society is low because of my cultural background.	-1.02
	Q21. I feel unsafe in Korea.	-1.02
	Q23. Because the different appearance such as skin tones compared to others, I'm treated differently.	-1.02
	Q10. I feel that I am being treated unfairly in Korea.	-1.18
	Q12. I am not receiving enough treatment in Korea.	-1.57
	Q11. When Korean people do not understand the value of my culture, it is heartbreaking.	-2.36

Only one female international student was found in type IV. There were each six agreements and disagreements at the top and at the bottom in Table 7. She strongly agreed to feel sad thinking about the problems of people in her homeland while strongly disagreed she felt tension communicating with others in Korean, her self-image lowered by fear, and uncomfortable adjusting to Korean culture.

Table 7. Descending array of z-scores of type IV (greater than  $\pm 1$ ) (n=1)

	Q-statements	Z-score
Positive	Q24. I feel sad when thinking about the problems of people in my homeland.	2.10

	Q3. I am treated differently from Koreans in the same social situation.	1.57
	Q23. Because the different appearance such as skin tones compared to others, I'm treated differently.	1.57
	Q8. In Korea, I do not have many opportunities to do something.	1.05
	Q22. I don't feel a sense of belonging to society in Korea.	1.05
	Q2. I am uncomfortable adjusting to Korean culture.	1.05
Negative	Q4. I am nervous to communicate with others in Koreans	-1.05
	Q26. After coming to Korea, I feel my self-image lowered by fear.	-1.05
	Q2. I am uncomfortable adjusting to Korean culture.	-1.05
	Q18. I feel that people from abroad like me in Korea are discriminated against others.	-1.57
	Q17. I do not appreciate the value of the new culture I learned in Korea.	-1.57
	Q16. I miss the people of my homeland and its place.	-2.10

Three participants were in type V with one male and two females with top three agreements and the bottom four disagreements in Table 8. They powerfully agreed they were under a lot of pressure after staying in Korea while disagreed to be under tension when communicating with others in Korean.

Table 8. Descending Array of Z-scores of Type V (greater than  $\pm 1$ ) (n=3)

	Q-statements	Z-score
Positive	Q9. After moving to Korea, I feel a lot of pressure.	2.54
	Q8. In Korea, I do not have many opportunities to do something.	1.91
	Q12. I am not receiving enough treatment in Korea.	1.07
Negative	Q4. I am nervous to communicate with others in Koreans	-1.01
	Q6. I feel hesitant to participate in social activities	-1.56
	Q10. I feel that I am being treated unfairly in Korea.	-1.91
	Q5. I'm sad to live in an unfamiliar environment.	-2.19

Three international students belonged to type VI. In terms of Table 9, there were the four agreements of high scored Z-score and the bottom five disagreements. They strongly agreed that Koreans treated them differently because of their different appearance while powerfully

disagreed that Koreans depreciated their own cultural value. Additionally, there was no consensus item among six types.

Table 9. Descending Array of Z-scores of Type VI (greater than  $\pm 1$ ) (n=3)

	Q-statements	Z-score
Positive	Q23. Because the different appearance such as skin tones compared to others, I'm treated differently.	1.78
	Q22. I don't feel a sense of belonging to society in Korea.	1.57
	Q14. I feel inferior because of my cultural background.	1.43
	Q12. I am not receiving enough treatment in Korea.	1.13
Negative	Q15. Koreans do not appreciate the value of my culture.	-1.05
	Q4. I am nervous to communicate with others in Koreans.	-1.27
	Q3. I am treated differently from Koreans in the same social situation.	-1.35
	Q2. I am uncomfortable adjusting to Korean culture.	-2.02
	Q1. The nostalgia of my hometown makes me suffer.	-2.25

Lastly, there was no consensus item among six types. Some international students in type IV and type VI strongly agreed Koreans treated them differently because of their different appearance while some participants in type I and type III firmly disagreed the same Q statement.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there were three different factors with six different types. This research showed that international students studying in Korea perceived as a stress to adapt to the culture of being disadvantaged and not being treated the same as Koreans because of their skin color, their own culture and prejudice about themselves, while using Korean or eating Korean food was relatively low as perceived stress of cultural adaptation. Additionally, the authors will anticipate that through the results of this research, Korean society can use it as useful basic data for practical intervention such as program development and management for prevention and intervention of cultural adjustment stress of foreign students residing in Korea.

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