# Variations in the Asian Collectivistic Working Culture in Intercultural Collaboration: A Case of a South Korean Company in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the prevailing differences between the collectivistic values of South Korean and Malaysian workers in a multinational company operating in Malaysia. Descriptive data from participant observations and in-depth interviews were used to scrutinize the background of the variations in the collectivistic values, their impact on the employees' behaviour and the intercultural conflicts between the two parties. This empirical work observed that South Korean and Malaysian workers shared the same elements of collectivistic values. However, their interaction revealed variations in the target group of loyalty in the process of achieving solidarity and object of commitment. In short, the dominant values perceived in this analysis manifested strong orientation towards family, teamwork, and the relationship among the Malaysian workers whilst South Korean workers prioritized organizational interests, loyalty, and uniformity for the sake of solidarity and sense of belonging. Findings of this study also suggested how the variations in the collectivistic values have led to a differing interpretation of the situation, work, and relationship, thus resulting in diverse approaches in the workplace.

*Keywords:* Collectivistic values, intercultural collaboration, Malaysia, South Korea, working culture

## INTRODUCTION

Collaboration and interdependence between nations are prerequisites for economic growth in the era of globalization and neo-liberalism. Most nations in the world have some form of cooperation with other nations in the interest of their economy, and this

makes for a more interdependent world. In such a context, obviously a distorted view of other cultures can be the main source of strained relations between different groups of people. Such distorted views manifest the lack of integral social skill for the cultivation of mutual understanding based on some consensus of values in a given situation. More specifically, cultural misunderstanding or misperception can lead to conflicts at the workplace itself particularly when it comprises of workers from various socio-cultural backgrounds.

Most research on cross-cultural diversity or conflicts have focused primarily on the economic relations or contact between developed Western nations and the non-Western developing nations around the world.[1] Such research focused on the conventional trend where the investment cooperation basically consists of capital flowing from the advanced Western countries to the economies of the underdeveloped or developing nations outside their region. In spite of the fact that the South-South cooperation, meaning relations and collaboration among developing nations in particular among Asian nations, have been growing, there is still a conspicuous lack of research interest in this type of collaboration and the challenges accompanying it, including the problem of cross-cultural

conflicts. This lack of research interest can be explained to some extent by the following reasons. Firstly, given the relatively short history of the South-South cooperation, this trend cannot as yet boast of a long tradition with clear significance within the total global economy. Secondly, there is a general assumption among scholars, latent or implicit, that belonging to a vague notion of Asian culture; Asian nations share many values in common, rendering the chance of cross-cultural conflicts among them rather remote. By the same token, it is this vague sense of Asian culture that leads to the categories of individualism and collectivism in parallel with the division between Western and Asian nations, where individualism and collectivism are primarily defined with reference to industrialization. Hence, the matrix of Western, industrialized and individualistic against Asian, non-industrialized and collectivistic.

Hofstede (1980, 2002) elucidated the main cultural characteristics of a collectivistic culture, distinguishing it from the individualistic culture. From the point of view of understanding cross-cultural conflicts, some of the characteristics of the identity dimension enumerated by Hofstede can certainly influence workers and management in terms of their attitudes and behaviour, brooding cross-cultural conflicts in multinational firms whenever their differences are irreconcilable in group relations. Another group of scholars proposed other variations of collectivism, including what they typified as vertical and horizontal collectivistic culture (Triandis,

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[1]Asma Abdullah (2001); Bae and Chung (1997); Bhaskaran and Sukumaran (2008); Cho and Park (1998); Daria et al. (2015); Fontaine and Richardson (2005); Hofstede et al. (2002); Jamaliah (1996); Sinaga (1998); Triandis (2002); Schwartz and Bardi (2001); Leung and Tjosvold (1998); McSweeney (2002); Smith et al. (1996); Triandis (1998, 2002); Trompenaars and Hampden-turner (1993)

1994, p. 42). According to this construction, vertical cultures are characteristically traditionalistic, bent upon emphasising in-group cohesion based on deep allegiance to group norms and compliance with the directives of authority (Bond and Smith, 1996). In distinction from the vertical form, horizontal collectivistic cultures emphasize empathy, sociability and cooperation in social relations (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998, pp. 118-128). Hall (1976) coined the terms 'high context' and 'low context' to differentiate the communication styles of various cultural groups and his approach had been widely employed by researchers studying cross-cultural communication.[2]

Some other scholars consider another variation, male collectivism, as being moulded essentially from group membership, while the polar variety, female collectivism, is primarily derived from more specific or personal relations (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Others also made the point that in reality, these typologies are by no means exclusive of each other. For instance Triandis (1998, pp. 118-128)

[2]Hall (1976) distinguished cultures according to the way of communication, the way of presenting emotions, conveying intention and ideas among members of society; 'high context' and 'low context'. In his model, the context is circumstances and information which are used by group of people to interact and communicate with others. The workers from high context culture are depending non-verbal indication and situational factor to communicate and to understand other people as body language, intonation of voice, situation, and status all convey the message that decide the behaviour and interpretation. These characteristics of high context culture portray some similarities with collectivistic culture.

thinks that a single society may manifest both individualistic and collectivistic values simultaneously, as individualism and collectivism can co-exist within a single culture. House and his colleagues (2004) had proposed a typology based on the nature of group evaluation. They put forward the three levels of collectivism, namely societal, institutional and in-group collectivism.[3]

If indeed most Asian societies share similar values by virtue of their collectivistic culture as Hofstede had asserted, which presupposed some measure of consensus and solidarity among them, the cooperation between these collectivistic cultures should be relatively free of value conflicts and cultural antagonism. The authors take the case of Malaysia and South Korea as an example. According to his analysis, based on identity dimension, Hofstede (1980, p. 53) ranked Malaysia and South Korea as the 36th and the 43rd respectively in the list of 50 countries subsumed under collectivism. This paper has employed Hofstede's approach to analyse Asian collectivistic cultures over other approaches by scholars such as Hall (1976); House (2004); Triandis (1994) because it is most pertinent to the problems of cultural divergence faced by the Korean company being researched.

[3]Drawing upon their research on sixty two nations, they constructed varieties of collectivistic and individualistic groupings. This categorization contributes significantly to our understanding of the complexity of collectivism and individualism. Based on the characteristics of their cultural identities, House and his colleagues came up with the following grouping of nations: North Europe, Anglo Europe, South America, Confucian Asia, Southern Asia, and Africa.

Contrary to the harmonious picture conjured by many scholars, the relations and contacts between South Korean and Malaysian workers indicated many problem areas and even actual conflicts as they are drawn into a competition to safeguard and advance their respective interests in an era of intense globalization. [4] Indeed, Malaysian workers often find themselves in a situation of conflicts at their workplace since they have to adapt to the new conditions and demands of the industrial corporate culture, to the rules and expectations stipulated by various multinational managements. [5]

This paper aims to analyze the manner in which intercultural variations of the collectivistic culture influence workers' values and perceptions about work. The collective culture shapes the relationship between the workers as these variations of cultural orientation and mode of thinking between different cultural groups affect their reactions to issues, molds their management or working style and communication method. These culturally influenced behaviors, unless appreciated and skillfully handled could lead to a severe dispute or conflict.

## METHODS

For the purpose of identifying some root causes of cross-cultural conflicts between two Asian cultures, this study was conducted in a South Korean multinational company operating in Malaysia, adopting the empirical and socio-cultural approaches involving interviews, participant observations, and questionnaires. [6] However, this paper,

[4]Korean multinational companies' culture is considered to have various distinctive features. First, they have 'strong' corporate cultures which needed to be adhered to by their employees without exceptions. Second, they emphasize a strong sense of loyalty and belonging among the workers so that the workers identify the company's success as their own success. Third, they have extremely 'result-oriented' or 'success-oriented' evaluation practices. Fourth, they have an authoritarian leadership and 'top-down' procedure to coerce the employees to obey the orders of their leaders without questioning them. Fifth, they invest in the employees' improvement and development for the sake of the companies' future. Sixth, they emphasize prompt actions and modification of direction in their jobs according to the changes in the market or the demands of the clients. As a result, these conditions and expectations of multinational companies' cultures have been responsible for local workers' predicaments due to the cultural disparity between the workers' own culture and the Korean companies' culture. (Ahn, 1996; Bae & Chung, 1997; Cho & Park, 1998; Han, 2003; Kearney, 1991; Kenneth, Kimball, & Marshall, 1998; Kim, 1995; Kumar & Kim, 1984; Lee, 2001; Lee & Shin, 2000; Saccone, 1994; Shin, 2000)

[5]According to the MIDA's report (2003), multinational companies in Malaysia have selected Malaysia as their investment destination due to Malaysia's stable economic status, government's FDI policies, well-educated human resources, developed infrastructure, appropriate/favourable economic environments, and high-quality of life for expatriates. Meanwhile,

Korean multinational companies prefer Malaysia as it has strong foreign exchange reserves, business-friendly government, transparent, hospitable and supports the FDI investment policies, a satisfactory infrastructure, harmonious industrial condition, educated and trained workforces, high standard of living, and good record-taking practices. (KOTRA, 2007).

[6]Questionnaires were used as a preliminary research to gather basic data pertaining to cultural divergence between the respective parties. The author utilized the questionnaires in order to reap the benefits of direct personal contact, so as to be able to 'emphatically' understand the views of the respective groups have been used to collect basic data about cultural divergence and two sides' stance on the conflicts and back grounds. When respondents were asked about their perception of the other party, it is observed that most of the negative perceptions were

places considerable emphasis on the qualitative method, drawing significant insights from in-depth interviews with key informants and participant observations. Participant observations of the workers yielded significant data. The authors were fortunate to have many opportunities to conduct participant observations.[7] Based on the findings of the pilot study, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with 37 respondents in the year 2000 to 2013**.**[8] These informants represented a selection of managers based on years of service, educational background, position, gender and the nature of their work and experience. The main informants for this research comprised of two major groupings: local Malaysian managers and Korean expatriates who had experienced or directly witnessed cross-cultural misunderstandings or conflicts in the company. The authors had conducted face to face in-depth interviews with each participant and each interview

took on the average one and half hour to get the details of the intercultural differences and predicaments.

## RESULTS

Within this framework of the inquiry, this paper examines two illustrative cases of conflict between South Korean and Malaysian workers[9], seeing how value differences colored the way they interpreted their situation. It is generally acknowledged that one main trait of collectivistic values is its emphasis on loyalty and the sense of belonging to the society and organization. It is, however, interesting to note that although both South Korean and Malaysian culture are perceived as collectivistic, their perception of solidarity, sense of belonging and loyalty are different, as illustrated by the following cases.

## Case 1: Conflicting Concept of Solidarity

The marketing department had two separate programmes, a dinner gathering, and a company event within a week. All departmental staff were supposed to attend. Although Encik M[10] who has worked for a year in the department felt uneasy about

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invariably formed in trying times or 'the pressure of the situation' in the work place.

[7]These opportunities include the capacities of the authors as an interpreter, a lecturer of Korean and Malay language and culture in 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2013. These exposures and experiences have furnished valuable insights into the background of conflicts between two parties.

[8]In 2000 and 2005, the authors conducted an in-depth interview with 25 Malaysian workers and 5 Korean expatriates working in the company, who had experienced predicaments in intercultural cooperation while they were working together to achieve the goals set by the company. In 2010 and 2013, the authors have re-interviewed 3 Malaysians and 2 Koreans who were the initially interviewed in 2000 and 2005. Two new Malaysian workers were also interviewed in order to update the information and scrutinize any improvements in the cross-cultural management in the Korean company.

[9]This company hires 6804 local and foreign workers and the majority of workers are Malay ethnic group (75%). The conflict cases mainly involved Korean and Malay workers, whose values are markedly different from the Koreans respondents in this paper.

[10]To protect the informants, the real names of the informants are replaced with Mr. K for Korean informant and Encik M is used for Malay informant in conflict cases to differentiate them from the Korean. Encik means Mr. and Puan stands for Mrs. in the Malay language.

it, he could not attend because he had important family matters to attend to in his hometown. He felt better after asking his colleague to inform his Korean superior of his problem. When Encik M came to office the following Monday morning Mr. K, his Korean boss, behaved coldly towards him and seemed resentful of his presence. Encik M then checked with his colleague if he has informed Mr. K of his reason for not attending the company's programmes, and got an affirmative reply. Nevertheless, since then Mr. K was unfriendly towards Mr. M, who was totally at a loss as to the reason. Encik M became unhappy about coming to work and did not know what could be done to improve the matter.

**The Perspective of Korean Collectivistic Values.** When the Korean management announced any programme or event, the management expected not only good attendance but a perfect one. Although top management did not compel workers to attend the department dinner or gathering among colleagues, Korean superiors usually expect all the workers to attend the occasions for the purpose of induction, ice breaking and the fostering of intimacy between workers though they were outside of the office hours. The thinking of the Koreans reflects the following motifs: i) the lack of participation, enthusiasm or support for company events undermines or obstructs group solidarity, ii) company duty or responsibility should be accorded top priority, iii) worker's complacent or non-committal attitude cannot be excused. In this regard, therefore, the top management considered Encik M as an employee who did not appreciate the need for solidarity in the company. Korean management, as well as Korean workers, failed to understand why Encik M always cared more for his personal matters than his obligations to the company, and endorsed Mr. K's response to the affair fully. For the Korean management and workers, Encik M's attitude in giving priority to family matters at the expense of company's affairs could be interpreted as being individualistic, a behaviour capable of endangering company solidarity.

Besides, the Korean management and Korean workers attached a particular meaning to the department dinner, seeing it as an occasion for intimacy between Malaysian and Korean workers, since Korean workers and management seldom interacted at a personal level with Malaysian workers during office hours. The Korean management then saw workers' participation in company events as one of the criteria of their loyalty to the company. Even when an employee had a pressing family matter as in the case of Encik M, the employee was expected to accord greater priority to company matter. When an employee seldom support company events, pleading excuses of personal matters like family, he would be seen as being selfish, manifesting individualism of the kind which affects company solidarity. Such employee would be seen as relegating his work obligations and very much wanting in the sense of belonging to the company.

**The Perspective of Malaysian Collectivistic Values.** Over the same incident, the interpretation of Malaysian workers is far different from that of Korean workers and management. Malaysian values on solidarity are more flexible in accommodating exigencies and exceptions. Hence, the poor attendance of some individuals in the above case is excusable or understandable to Malaysian workers. Consequentially the strict order or compulsion of the Korean employer for workers to attend company events can be a source of stress or tension for Malaysian workers. Malaysian workers fail to understand that such expectations are part of Korean management, which to them seems to be excessive and coercive. Besides that Malaysian workers hope that the top management would consult them in advance before fixing the date and place of company events such as gatherings, dinners or other functions.

Malaysian values place considerable importance on the participation of all in such decisions, which should be arrived at by consensus, be it even in trivial matters. In such an atmosphere, the Korean top management should not expect Malaysian workers to participate in company's activities willingly and enthusiastically. Besides this, for Malaysian workers, a healthy family life, and strong relationships among family members are of the utmost importance, transcending career considerations or work obligations. Hence, to them, family obligations can be a compelling enough reason for being unable to attend company activities such as dinner functions or other

social gatherings. With such reasoning on their part, the Malaysian worker involved in the above case fails to understand the reluctance of his Korean boss to accept his apology for his omission.

## Case 2: Conflicting Idea of Loyalty and Sense of Belonging

Mr. K who has been working in Malaysia for two years as a manager in the department of human resources has trained Encik M, one of his inexperienced subordinates into an efficient and skilled worker ever since Encik M first joined the company as a fresh graduate. Mr. K has spent much time and energy mentoring Encik M to adapt to the Korean corporate culture and assimilating some of its values. Mr. K's investment in Encik M however, went wasted, when Encik M quit to join another company offering better terms and career advancement. This made Mr. K. feel that Encik M did not value their relationship nor appreciate what he has done for him. Such disappointment has hit Mr. K. twice before. Mr. K was exasperated and felt unsure if he could trust or rely upon his local subordinates anymore. It seemed to him that they did not have any loyalty to the company and were primarily motivated only by their personal interests.

**The Perspective of Korean Collectivistic Values.** There are many cross-cultural misunderstandings or conflicts arising from the differing perceptions of loyalty and sense of belonging felt by workers in the employment of the Korean company. In this regard, many Korean respondents express

disappointment and distrust of Malaysian workers in terms of the Malaysian workers' loyalty and sense of belonging to the company. In part, this disappointment is caused by the Koreans' expectations that Malaysian subordinates should subscribe to the ideal of life-long employment that they aspired to. This ideal is one of the primary core values of South Korean corporate culture, integrally bound with the idea of the lifelong workplace. When South Korean workers start their working life in a company, most will try to work in the same organization for their entire working life (Kim & Kim, 1996, pp. 33-34; Cho & Park, 1998). This element in the social values of Koreans integrally binds workers life and interests with the fate of the company, in reciprocation of the company's expectation that workers be loyal or have a deep sense of belonging to it. Based on this bound interests between workers and the company, South Korean corporations normally afford many opportunities for staff to upgrade their skills and qualifications through educational or vocational programs in the forms of workshops, courses, and seminars, both theoretical and practical. This is the company's way of investing in its future through their workers' development.

The loyalty of Korean workers to their organizations has been widely acknowledged in management or administrative studies. Emphasizing complex values like loyalty and zeal in upholding a good reputation and corporate image, the company expects workers to place the company first before self and workers, generally live up to this expectation (Lee, 2001). Consequently, from the perspective of South Korean workers, Malaysian workers would appear to be lacking in loyalty or sense of belonging to the company since they are generally more inclined to give priority to personal or career advancement in breach of the lifelong workplace value. To the South Koreans Malaysian workers switch companies too readily due to the lure of better salaries and perks, with no sense of gratitude to the company which has invested in them, hardly reciprocating the company with lasting loyalty and sense of common destiny.

**The Perspective of Malaysian Collectivistic Values.** To the thinking of Malaysian workers, the company is essentially a source of income for themselves and their families. Should the company's business prosper, they feel proud and pleased without planning, however, to work for the company 'rain or shine' for their entire life. Should there be better opportunities elsewhere, they would consider taking them up without feeling guilty of being unfaithful or disloyal to the company, as South Korean workers would be inclined to feel.

Although they are more amenable to switching companies, it cannot be said however that Malaysian workers are entirely driven by salary consideration. Besides monetary considerations, they do give serious considerations to the working atmosphere or social relationship when choosing their workplace, whether it is

harmonious or amicable.[11] For Malaysian workers, a good relationship takes greater precedence over abstract company objectives and interests. This explains why Malaysian workers are more inclined to develop personal loyalty to superiors who take personal interests in their welfare rather than to the company in an abstract and impersonal sense. Tactful relationship with people at the personal level is an important value emphasized by the Malaysian form of collectivism, in contrast to the values of the Western industrial capitalistic societies which are inclined to define success and achievement rather in individualistic terms (Sinaga, 1998, p. 42).

Most Malaysian workers in the South Korean company feel their chance of promotion is very slim due to the presence of a 'glass ceiling' within the company structure, which sees to it that the higher positions are filled by South Koreans, while the lower positions are given to Malaysian workers. This could be one of the reasons why Malaysian workers feel demoralized and lack a sense of loyalty or the sense of belonging to South Korean companies. Besides the issue of promotion, Malaysian workers also feel that they are not involved in the decision-making process of the company. In their thinking, 'If we are not given the right to participate in the decision- making and cannot voice our opinions through any legitimate channel,

the management should not expect us to be loyal or feel a deep a sense of belonging to the company as it is inconceivable to us that the company's future is our future too', expressed a Malaysian respondent succinctly.

## DISCUSSION

The conflicting perspectives of the two groups reflect the differences in their collectivistic values. Even as both value systems emphasize the ideal of solidarity and harmony, there are major differences in their very conception of solidarity and the mechanism of achieving it. Firstly, the conception of solidarity in the South Korean values places much emphasis on uniformity whilst that of the Malaysian accommodates heterogeneity and variations of solidarity. In many incidents in the South Korean company, the management hardly entertains any excuses or exceptions. This orientation in their social values reflects the Korean form of collectivism, which is determined by the masculine culture (Ahn, 1996; Hofstede, 1980) and homogeneity of their society. This is further reinforced by elements of the military culture, pushing Korean collectivism to lay excessive emphasis on solidarity excessively.[12]

This element of uniformity is a distinctive feature of some homogeneous societies like

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[11]To their thinking, an agreeable working atmosphere should be characterized by good relations among workers, including between superiors and subordinates (Jamaliah, 1996, pp.10-11).

[12]As it is compulsory for most Korean men to enlist for national service for 2-2.5 years, most Korean workers would have gone through military training, a conditioning which makes it difficult for Korean workers to accommodate exceptions and exigencies at the workplace.

Korea and Japan, with their particular social, historical background deeply rooted in sole ancestry, culture, language and social values. In such homogenous societies, if the majority adopts a certain stand, the rest of society would unconsciously or readily comply just for the sake of preserving uniformity. Triandis and Suh (2002, pp. 133-160) assert that homogeneity makes a culture 'tight' in the sense that its members have a barrage of rules and norms regulating behaviour and punishing deviation. This aspect of collectivism in the Korean society was discussed by Saccone (1994, p. 24), who noted that Koreans generally tend to accede to a group's decision for the sake of achieving uniformity among them. Such tendency engenders a sense of security or belonging among members of the society or organization.

The collectivistic values of Malaysian workers reflect more flexibility and inclusiveness or open-mindedness in accepting diversity or exceptions even as they emphasize solidarity in any social grouping, community, or organization. The collectivistic values of Malaysian workers have been influenced by a heterogeneous society with a multi-racial and multi-cultural background. These backgrounds are therefore, more accommodative of the differences and diversity that exist among them. The collectivistic values of Malaysians tend to privilege 'moderation' in any situation, neither keen standing out nor be ignored. This self-effacing preference for moderation does mean however that Malaysians seek to uphold uniformity the way South Korean companies do.

Secondly, the collectivistic values of Korean company prescribe strict and tough measures in ensuring solidarity while the collectivistic values of the Malaysians enjoin that solidarity is achieved through voluntary participation and consultation among members for the sake of group harmony. In the South Korean company, if an individual does not comply with the majority's decision he or she would be marooned or ostracized for his or her selfishness. Generally, the majority of South Korean workers feel socially compelled to accede to the decisions of their superiors and colleagues, although personally, they may not approve of the decision. This can be attributed in part to the influence of the masculine culture which frowns upon deviances, seeing them as going against society's interests.

Meanwhile, the collectivistic values of the Malaysian workers prescribe milder methods of achieving solidarity through mutual understanding, accommodation, and consensus, in line with its desire for harmonious relations. The collectivistic values of Malaysian workers can be said to emphasize the expectations and interests of the majority in an organization or community, no less than the South Koreans. Nevertheless, the collectivistic values of Malaysian workers are less authoritarian or compulsive in the sense that they are more accommodative of the interests and feelings of the individuals, always encouraging group consultation.

Hence, there is a marked difference in the conception of solidarity and the mechanism of achieving it between the Korean collectivistic values and that of the Malaysians. This differing idea of solidarity is a constant source of tension and frustration for Malaysian workers working in South Korean companies with its more authoritarian demands. The Korean insistence on uniformity and regimentation is alien to the experience of Malaysian workers based on their own culture.

Different social groups define the work-situation differently based on their value premises. The divergence in their definition of work-situation can clearly be seen through two motifs, namely: i) perception of the occupation and workplace, ii) the object of loyalty. South Korean and Malaysian workers differ in their perceptions of the workplace and occupation. The South Koreans show strong loyalty and identification towards their occupation and workplace compared to Malaysian workers. The Koreans are capable of conceiving the idea of lifelong workplace while for the Malaysian workers, a workplace is basically a means of livelihood, a source of income. In this respect, South Korean workers are generally considered as faithful or devoted to their companies since they are inclined to adopt their workplace as part of their lifetime commitment as noted by various researchers (Bae & Chung, 1997). Consequentially, they observed that South Korean workers are quite willing to make personal sacrifices for the sake of the company. There have been some changes, however, in the attitudes

of South Korean workers since the South Korean financial crisis of 1997.[13]

Notwithstanding this shift, it can still be said that South Korean workers generally work hard for self-gratification and getting the company's acknowledgement of their capabilities. The collectivistic values of South Koreans still regard occupation not simply as contractual but more as a symbiotic membership of an organization, along with its hierarchy of relationship based on loyalty between the superiors and the subordinates (Lee, 2000). Hence, whenever they work in a company they cultivate a sense of ownership and belonging, though not as strong as before the financial crisis. According to Lee (2001), South Korean workers do not work solely for their salary but also in pursuit of their dream or ambition of getting the organization's recognition. This motivates them to give their best in the performance of their tasks. They work diligently even to the point of neglecting their personal interests, including their family matters, for the sake of advancing their career through their work performance.

The form of loyalty Malaysian workers show to their superiors and colleagues is more of the personal type, analogous to the kind they feel towards family members or their community. For instance, Malaysian workers may be personally loyal to senior executives who show genuine concern for

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[13]During the crisis many Korean companies had to lay off workers who identified their security and future with the companies, therefore worked hard towards achieving company goals. The experience of being laid off caused many workers to be disillusioned with the idea of 'lifelong work place'.

their welfare and interests, whom they would consider as befitting of their conception of good leaders. The corporation or the business organization is far too abstract to be the object of loyalty for Malaysian workers, which then tends to be personified in the persons of superiors. As has been stated, a company is seen essentially as a source of income, a livelihood for workers and their family. Although working for a company or corporation can be a source self-gratification to Malaysian workers, the company cannot by itself be an object of devotion, giving meaning to his life in a fundamental way.

The collectivistic values of Malaysian workers accord higher priority to family and community compared to company matters. Consequently, although Malaysian culture has been categorized as collectivism along with the South Korean culture, Malaysian workers do not share the South Korean's idea of the company as an object of loyalty and devotion beyond a mere paymaster. Malaysian workers usually give priority to family matters over company demands, particularly after office hours. As economic beings, they give due regards to company matters up to a point, while as social being they remain devoted to the family and the community. South Korean workers, on the other hand, are able to give priority to the company because as both economic being and social being, they can identify themselves with it (Aron, 1968; Mills, 1959).

There are several social-historical factors for the inability of Malaysian workers to develop corporate loyalty in a more abstract sense beyond personal loyalty towards caring superiors or seniors. Basically, the Malaysian masses have been exposed to the industrial-capitalistic ethos in a significant way only recently, relatively speaking (Alatas, 2009; Asma, 2001; Khaliq, 2005; Maaruf, 2014; Sinaga, 1998).

It is clear then that though both Koreans and Malaysians subscribe to the values of collectivism, invariably their definition, object of loyalty and collective interests differ radically. For South Koreans, it is fundamentally the company, while for Malaysian workers what remains uppermost in their scale of values is the family or their community (Blunt & Jones, 1992; Daria, 2015; Khaliq, 2005; Liu, 2012; Norma, 1998). This difference is captured and elaborated by House (2004) in his approach to the different types of collectivism, namely institutional collectivism and in-group collectivism. The South Korean workers being researched did not, however, manifest many individualistic traits. Instead, they emphasized the 'stern' collectivistic line aimed at forging solidarity and loyalty among them. Their organization-oriented collectivistic culture transferred loyalty from family and local community to their corporate organization. Consequently, they generally develop a strong sense of belonging and ownership with regards to their organization and identify their fate with that of their corporate organization.

Although both the South Korean and Malaysian culture have been listed as belonging to the same category of collectivism, in reality, they have each

evolved differently, given their different social and historical background. In the process of industrialization and economic growth, these Asian societies have evolved and adapted their collectivistic values according to their own socio-cultural history or existential conditions. In this process of cultural adaptation or adjustment, both South Korean and Malaysian collectivistic values have synthesized themselves with other influences which are compatible or harmonious with their basic orientation, forming their respective distinctive variation. The outlook of South Korean workers and management reflects how it selectively merged collectivistic values with Confucianism, hierarchical principle, militaristic or authoritarian values, and secular influences. Consistent with the values of Confucianism, Korean workers takes full responsibility for their work and its outcome and this Confucian teaching on the ethic of hard work is not solely confined to the advancement of personal interests but also towards serving the interests of organization and one's society or nation.[14]

On the other hand, the outlook of Malaysian workers shows how it blended collectivistic values with consensual, feminine, and Islamic elements. This has moulded the collectivistic values of Malaysian workers towards the orientation of relationship-oriented horizontal collectivism with its emphasis on inter-relationship

of members. This is in marked contrast to South Korean collectivistic values, which strongly indicates the features of organization-oriented vertical collectivism with its emphasis on the organization and its missions.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that most South Korean workers and top management have transferred their homeland corporate culture[15] and have implemented it in a new environment in Malaysia whilst most Malaysian workers manifested strong tendency to preserve their own culture even after joining the South Korean multinational company.

The South Korean management emphasises the 'tough' collectivistic cultural values in order to forge solidarity and loyalty among themselves. Their 'organization-oriented' collectivistic culture transferred the objective of loyalty from family and local community to their corporate organization. Consequently they generally develop a strong sense of belonging and ownership with regards to their organization and do identify their fate with that of their corporate organization.

In this study, the South Korean management bringing along their cultural baggage, endeavours to instil South Korean collectivistic values in their new staff.

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[14]Shin (2000) thinks that Korean workers generally attribute failure to their own mistakes or omission, and traced this predisposition to the teachings of Confucianism which see failure as accruing to the lack of efforts, volition and spiritual strength.

[15]The Korean corporate culture believed that it has unique characteristics including being masculine, rigid, military style, collectivistic, authoritarian, hierarchical, high uncertainty avoidance, and formal relationship among member. (Cho & Park, 1998; Han, 2003; Kim, 1995; Lee, 2001; Shin, 2000)

Through various forms of organizational socialization[16], South Korean management strives to communicate shared values, norms, practices, and rules to fresh recruits, hoping to fit them into their roles of achieving the organization's goal, as Barley and Kunda (1992) has elaborated. As new comers to the organization, Malaysian workers make an effort to adapt to the new experience. The collectivistic values of the Malaysian workers', however, is incongruent with that of the South Korean since it is of the human-oriented variety as discussed in the above conflict cases. By virtue of its emphasis on the humanistic concerns, this variety of Malaysian collectivistic values has also been described as relationship-oriented (Norma, 1998), and group-oriented (Jamaliah, 1996, pp. 10-11). This incongruent situation might have caused some challenges for the Malaysian workers, and South Korean management as well when they needed to be re-socialized.

Group identities that focus on group exclusiveness, or world-views molded by particular historical context, can develop such rigidity of cultural form and style that make them misfits in an intercultural or multinational situation. In this respect,

perhaps Koreans should reflect on their insistence on 'organization-oriented' culture, while the Malays should face the reality that they are embracing the industrial ethos, and therefore should endeavour to neutralize the conditioning effects of their past non-industrial or traditional economy within the corporate situation.

To ensure this optimal collaboration in this South Korean Company, the encounter of two different types of collectivism should be benefited to generate new adjusted and modified collectivistic corporate culture, invented from the mutual understanding, readjustment and adaptation to each other in a process of compromise and negotiation. This unique and customized collectivistic culture should contains some integral values that are indispensable and prerequisite to cross cultural collaboration, such as inclusiveness, resilience, open-mind, reciprocal, and mutual respect; this 'glocalized' corporate culture enables two parties to minimize the conflicts while reinforcing optimal collaboration and harmonious atmosphere among the workers with various backgrounds.

The South Korean management as a policy maker and South Korean as well as Malaysian workers who have direct contact with other cultures might find this study useful in order to forge better collaboration. This study allows for an appreciation of the root of conflicts between the corporate cultures. The findings could reduce possible misunderstandings or conflicts between the South Korean top management, employees, and Malaysian employees as it could form

[16]Examples of the unique characteristics include: i) The Korean Company offers a week-long orientation for new staff to provide an introduction to the company's corporate visions, missions, philosophies, mottos and regulations. ii) The company prepares Korean language and Korean culture classes in order to help the staff to adjust to the Korean corporate culture iii) Malaysian workers are given many opportunities to attend workshops and seminars which are organized by the headquarters either in Korea or Malaysia.

mutual understanding between the two unique and synthesised collectivistic values. This improved understanding of cultural diversity could facilitate better synergy, resulting in more conducive working relations between them.

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