한국인의 집단주의 변화에 대한 탐색적 연구
Has the Collectivism of Koreans been changed? An exploratory study

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요약

이 연구의 목적은 한국인의 집단주의가 어떤 면에서 변화하였는지, 혹은 변화하지 않았는지에 대해 탐색적으로 살펴보는 것이다. 기성세대와 신세대들과의 심층인터뷰 및 FGI를 통하여 오늘날 한국인의 집단주의를 표현하는 키워드를 발견하였다. 첫째, 오늘날 한국인들의 집단주의는 '선택적 집단주의'로써, 이전처럼 주어진 집단이 아닌 스스로 선택한 구성원들로 이루어진 보다 축소된 형태의 집단을 기반으로 한다. 둘째, 기술의 발달과 함께 오프라인 집단주의와 대조되는 온라인 집단주의가 출현하였는데, 온라인 집단주의는 온라인 기술을 활용한 커뮤니케이션에 기초하며, 익명성을 통한 평등주의, 시간과 공간을 초월한 연결성 등을 중요한 특징으로 한다. 셋째, 한국인의 집단주의를 구성하는 가장 중요한 요인은 '정'인 것으로 나타났는데, 이는 집단주의의 변화하지 않은 측면으로 인식되었다. 마지막으로 한국인들에게 집단은 자아정체성과 밀접한 관련을 가지고 있으며, 이로 인해 한국인들은 예나 지금이나 집단에 대한 소속감 및 구성원들과의 관계에 집착하는 모습을 보인다. 연구의 의미와 한계에 대해 논의하였다.

■ 중심어 : | 집단주의 | 온라인 집단주의 | 한국문화 | 정 | 관계 |

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how the collectivism of Koreans has changed or has not changed. Through in-depth interviews and FGI with the older and new generations, keywords that express Korean collectivism today were discovered. First, the collectivism of Koreans is defined as 'selective collectivism', which is based on a more compact group consisting of self-selected members rather than a given group as before. Second, with the development of technology, online collectivism, in contrast to offline collectivism, emerged. Online collectivism is based on communication using online technology, and is characterized by horizontal relationship based on anonymity and 24-hour connectivity that transcends time and space. Third, the most important factor that composes Korean collectivism was found to be 'Cheong', which was recognized as an unchanged aspect of collectivism. Lastly, for Koreans, the group is closely related to self-identity, and for this reason, Koreans are obsessed with the sense of belonging to the group membership and the relationship with the members. The implications and limitations of the study were discussed.

■ keyword : | Collectivism | Online Collectivism | Korean Culture | Cheong | Relationship |

I. Introduction

It is often argued that the Koreans are collectivistic. The 'Red Devil' of World cup 2002 and the candlelight protests are often brought up as an example to explain Korean people's collectivistic aspect. In the academic field, Korean culture has been defined as a collectivistic culture as well. In the study conducted by the famous cultural scholar Hofstede(1984, 2001), Korean culture was classified as highly collectivistic, just like the neighboring countries in North Asia including China and Japan[1][2]. In most of previous cross-cultural communication studies, Koreans represented many aspects that were considered as typical characteristics of collectivistic culture: for example, Koreans tend to avoid aggressive communication and avoid direct communication in conflict situation[3][4].

However, some of the recent studies started to question whether the Korean culture is really collectivistic. It was proposed that there are certain characteristics of Korean culture that do not seem to reflect collectivism as defined in Western academic literatures. Moreover, the new generation in Korean society is known to behold different values from the previous generation. The millennials (generation M) and the generation Z are known as the most individualistic (i.e., less collectivistic) generation in Korean history[5]. Some even argue that Korean culture will no longer be a collectivistic culture.

Has the Korean culture, especially the collectivism, been changed? If so, how has it been changed? Is the long-held assumption that Korean culture is collectivistic no longer valid? If the younger generation beholds different cultural value from the older generation, especially in terms of collectivism, what are the contents of the difference? Since 2000, Korean scholars published studies proposing that Korean culture is becoming more and more individualistic. It was proposed that increase of individualism emphasizing self and close family, increase of egalitarianism, and the increase of assertiveness are observed among younger generation[6]. Some argued that Korean culture is becoming individualistic focusing on family, thus coined the individualization of Koreans as 'family-oriented' individualism[7][8]. Recent studies generally agree that both individualism and collectivism seem to be observed in Korean culture[9]. However, few empirical studies addressed in what aspects the Koreans are becoming individualistic. Previous studies were mostly based on quantitative social survey or theoretical arguments. In order to understand the changed (or unchanged) aspects of Koreans' collectivism, it seems necessary to take a more descriptive approach to this phenomenon, as an intial attempt to understand the changing aspect of Korean collectivism, and how the Korean people perceive the phenomenon. Understanding the changed (or unchanged) aspect of Korean culture will eventually help the older and younger generation understand each other better, thus help reduce the generation gap in Korean society.

Therefore the aim of the study is to explore the perception of the changed and unchanged aspect of the Koreans' collectivism by the younger generation and the older generation.
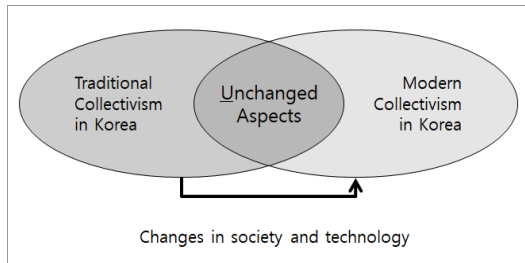
Figure 1. Context of the study

II. Literature Review

1. The concept of collectivism

According to Triandis(1995), members of collectivistic cultures consider themselves as parts of the groups (e.g., family, nation) and are motivated by the norms and duties imposed by the groups. It was argued that the collectivists pose priority to the goals of the groups over their own goals and emphasize their relationship with the members of the groups[10]. However recent studies on collectivism-individualism challenged the notion. In review of the previous studies regarding collectivism-individualism, Oysermann and his colleagues (2002) proposed that the concept of collectivism is actually multi-dimensional. Collectivism is composed of the relationship between the self and the group and the relationship between the self and other members of the group[11]. In this sense, Brewer and Chen (2007) identified two types of collectivism: group-based collectivism and relational-collectivism. Group-based collectivism values obligation to a group, obedience to the group norm, and subordinate self-interest to that of the group. On the other hand, relational collectivism values interconnection between members, mutual cooperation and dependence

[12]. It was argued that the collectivism of North Americans is group-based collectivism, while the collectivism of East Asians is relational collectivism. East Asians are less concerned with group membership, but more concerned about their personal relationships within the group[12]. As one of the East Asian cultures, Koreans seem to show similar characteristics to relational collectivism. And in addition, Koreans developed unique cultural characteristics which will be discussed in the next section.

2. The collectivism of the Koreans

Studies on the Koreans' indigenous culture identified several unique characteristics of Korean collectivism. Yu and Shim (2013) proposed five characteristics of Korean culture and among the five characteristics, valuing groups and emotionally attached relationships are closely related to the Koreans' collectivism[13]. Relationship based on emotional attachment is the most unique characteristic of Korean collectivism[14-17].

The word 'Cheong', which stands for the emotional attachment among group members, takes an important role to maintain the relationship among group members. Cheong-based relationship seems similar to the communal relationship in the sense that it contrasts with the exchange relationship. However, even in an exchange relationship such as monetary relationship, Koreans find it necessary to build minimum level of friendly and emotionally comfortable relationship[15]. The unique in-group membership based on Cheong is called 'Uri (we-ness)'. The most important objective of the Koreans' social relations is to establish and sustain 'we' group

and exchange Cheong within the group[14]. When the Koreans meet together for the first time, they try to find something in common, because finding a common element (e.g., same school, same friends, etc.) means to find an 'objective cue' to start we-relationship and share Cheong[15]. The collectivism of the Koreans focuses much on the emotional aspect of the relationship.

In addition to the emotional attachment, another characteristic of the Korean collectivism is the strong hierarchical relationship within the group[18]. The collectivism of Koreans is defined as 'dynamic collectivism', which is a multidimensional concept. The three dimensions of 'dynamic collectivism' includes in-group harmony, optimistic progressivism and the hierarchical principle[15].

Nevertheless, the characteristics of Korean culture is changing, as the new generations appear in Korean society. According to Ingelhart (1997), Korea showed the greatest generation gap in a survey of 43 industrialized countries. The older generations maintain modern values while the younger generations rapidly adopt and show postmodern, more individualistic value[19]. Previous studies regarding East Asian societies have reported the coexistence of rising individualism and traditional pattern of culture[20]. The young adults in Korea are also known to experience an intensifying tension between emerging individualistic values and the customary values of collectivism[21], which makes the communication between older and younger generation more difficult [22].

If this is the case, has the collectivism of the Korean people been changed? Although much discussed, few empirical studies addressed the issue in detail. It would be necessary to examine the current phenomenon in a more descriptive way, in order to gain a better understanding on how the Koreans, both the younger and the older generation, view and interpret the changes happening in the Korean culture. Therefore, the study adopted a micro-level, descriptive approach to examine the aspect of the Koreans' collectivism perceived by the Koreans today. And based on the previous discussion, the study proposed the two research questions:

RQ 1: What are the changed aspects of the Koreans' collectivism today?

RQ 2: What are the unchanged aspects of the Koreans' collectivism today?

III. Methodology

For the study, qualitative research method was adopted. Qualitative research method is considered suitable to understand naturally occurring phenomena based on real life[23]. And among the qualitative methods, interview methods are thought to be useful to obtain a broader view of the observing situation[24]. Since the aim of the study was to gain initial understanding on the changed and unchanged aspect of the Koreans' collectivism, interview methods were employed to let the interviewees directly and freely speak about what is happening in their everyday lives regarding group formation and collective behaviors and what that means to them.

Both focus group interviews and in-depth interviews were employed for data collection. Focus group interviews were conducted for 7 groups of people in their 20s and 30s, in order

to find out the opinions of the younger generation[Table 1]. Most of the participants were students or businesspeople in the field of communication, because they were assumed to have relatively better insights.

Table 1. Interviewees for the FGI

	No. of persons	Description of the group	Age range
Group 1	8	University students in their 20s (5 males, 3 females)	23~25
Group 2	2	Businesspersons in their 20s (2 males)	26~27
Group 3	3	Graduate students in their 20s (3 females)	25~27
Group 4	3	Businesspersons in their 30s (3 females)	30~36
Group 5	3	Businesspersons in their 30s (3 males)	30~36
Group 6	5	Graduate students in their 30s (5 females)	30~39
Group 7	3	Businesspeople in their 20s (2 males, 1 female)	24~29

In addition to the focus group interviews, in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 communication specialists who have longer than 10 years of work experience, including professors, PR consultants, marketing specialists, journalists, etc. The in-depth interviews were conducted to provide more professional insights on the change of collectivism in Korean society[Table 2].

Table 2. Interviewees for the IDI

	Profession	Gender	Age range
1	journalist	male	40s
2	consultant	male	40s
3	journalist	female	30s
4	professor	female	40s
5	consultant	male	40s
6	consultant	male	40s
7	consultant	female	30s
8	consultant	male	30s
9	communication specialist	male	50s
10	communication specialist	male	40s
11	professor	male	40s
12	journalist	female	40s
13	journalist	female	40s
14	consultant	female	50s
15	communication specialist	male	40s
16	communication specialist	male	30s
17	professor	female	50s

Interview questions were designed based on the literature reviews. Key questions are as follows:

- What kind of groups do you belong to? Which groups are important for you and why?
- Do you agree that the Koreans are collectivistic people and why?
- How do you think Koreans' collectivism influence on Koreans' communication behaviors?
- Do you think your generations' collectivism is different from that of the older (or younger) generation?
- What do you think is the unique, unchanging characteristics of Koreans' collectivism?

All the FGIs and in-depth interviews were voice-recorded under the participant's consent and transcribed after the interviews. Transcriptions were read repeatedly by the researchers to get an overall understanding before the coding. For the analysis, the researchers used grounded theory [25], and the data were analyzed in the process of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The researchers analyze separately and then met to discuss their findings and agreeing on the final themes to enhance the objectiveness of the analysis.

IV. Findings

1. The re-struction of Korean collectivism

How have the social changes in Korea

impacted on the Koreans' collectivism? The results of the interviews found that the collectivism in Korea has not been weakened, but re-structured, in terms of group formation and relationship within the group.

1.1 The emergence of 'selective' collectivism

Collectivism was still a critical part of the Koreans' everyday life, and exerted strong influence on the interviewees. Nevertheless, the collectivism today showed somewhat different characteristics compared to the past.

First, the meaning of traditional region-based and school-based groups has been changed. In the past, throughout the rapid industrialization, the indigenous people who left their hometown and started living in Seoul formed a group with the name of 'hyangwoohoe(鄕友會: same-hometown)'. The effect of the region-tie had become more powerful when combined with school-tie, especially among the people who graduated from the so-called prestigious schools. Alumni associations from the prestigious high schools, often based on the region, were active and served as the supporting groups for information exchange[16].

People who had no one to rely on in Seoul had to rely on the people from the same hometown. That string was the most reliable thing. Seoul was a chaotic place, so they made connection. (Male, 50s, IDI).

However, as industrialization stabilized since the 1980s, the movement of population was reduced. Millennials born after the 1980s did not experience major changes in their area of residence. They grew up in the community, graduated the local elementary, middle and high school within the community. Now the meaning of region-tie has changed from 'the people who are from the same hometown' into 'the people *who have grown up in the same community*'(*Male, 50s, IDI*). Nowadays, local community does not have such strong and exclusive characteristics of the traditional region-based school-tie. Nowadays the school-based relationship features more social characteristics, centered on the neighborhood friends, who grew up together and spent the school days together.

Closest friends are high school friends. Sophomore year was the most fun, there were a lot of friends who had similar interests. Because I liked soccer, we often played soccer together. Thanks to the relationship, I could talk about my worries when I was in the 3rd grade and even now, we meet at least once a month. (Male, 20s, FGI)

Second, the region-based group and school-based group are chosen according to the benefit of the individual. Here the benefit includes practical as well as emotional benefits. The old way of showing blind loyalty to the 'given' group works no longer. Koreans' collectivism nowadays features a more strategic use of the 'selected' groups within the 'given' relationships. 'Selective collectivism' has appeared with wider choice for the individuals to choose the groups they prefer to belong to.

I belong to the interpreter officer group. 95% of the members are people who studied abroad. People who studied abroad don't have many friends here in Korea, so we take care of each other a lot. Networking between juniors and seniors is formed very fast, and if you have any

questions, use the KakaoTalk to share information. This group is a bit tight and has a hierarchical order, but it is sticky. They seem to become more sticky because they are needed by each other. (Male, 20s, FGI)

While the traditional tie relationships functioned to show off the group-power within the society (such as in the workplace), the 'selected' group works in a different way. The selected group features smaller in size and weaker in connection, and the relationship among members seems more loose and private. Loose-relationship means that the membership and the behavioral rules of the group has become less compulsory but rather autonomous.

I think it's closer to **'selective collectivism'**. I think it would be nice if my interests are in line with the interests of the organization. I don't think that the interests of the organization are the same as my interests. What is important in the community is whether they are emotionally connected. (Male, 30s, IDI)

I think region-tie and school-tie are being de-constructed: people with similar values become a community even if they don't share hometown and school. (Male, 50s, IDI)

Relationship based on the selective collectivism, function as a strategic way to survive the competition just like the traditional tie-based relationship. The weakness of social security network in Korean society has been one of the crucial reasons why Koreans rely on private relationship-based network so much.

Since Korean society has a weak social safety net and cannot expect anything from the society, people try to secure safety through a private network, and relies on the groups that support me. I rely on the group I have been in for a long time such as school or workplace, not only for my emotional needs but also for practical needs such as information (Female, 50s, IDI)

I don't dislike the collectivist tendencies. When I live in the United States, I had to work hard to form network with people in order to survive, but in Korea I can benefit by simply joining a group I feel very comfortable because I am receiving more benefits than any other groups (Male, 20s, FGI).

In sum, Koreans' collectivism did not disappear, but it has been reorganized. The school-tie works around 'local friends', and the membership of the groups are chosen, not given, based more on the practical and emotional needs.

1.2 The emergence of taste-based community

As discussed, young adults today forms groups based more on their values and less on their given social conditions. Preferences for habits, lifestyles, values, for example, have emerged as the new criteria for group formation. These kind of groups are called 'taste-based community'.

My brother meets people through an application called 'So-mo-im(small group)'. My brother creates and runs a photograph-taking group, and seems to feel strong belonging there.

He hosts regular meetings but because there is a limit on the number of people who can participate, I heard the meeting is usually closed as soon as it is created, as there are so many people who want to come. I was surprised to hear that. (Male, 30s, FGI)

While the traditional groups are formed and managed mainly offline, the taste community nowaday is mostly online-based. Some taste community not only function for information sharing, but also for strong sense of membership among the members just like offline based groups. One of the interviewees in her 30s answered that she felt just as strong, or sometimes even stronger bonding with the members of her online community.

There is a friend on Twitter, and that person is just a cross-follower. Even though he is one of the oldest twitter friends of mine. I don't know his name, age, or anything. Still, it's fun to know his thoughts and there is a sense of intimacy that I feel there (Female, 30s, FGI)

For example, members of a online cat cafe(community) can share their thoughts about issues like animal rights, and even cooperate for some activities like caring for the street cats.

Even in the cat-cafe, you can feel the affection as a community that shares the value and taste of life. And it's not only about cats. You inevitably expose yourself in the community. The relationship is more democratic. For example, I adopted my second cat through a band community, and I became friends with a lady who runs a supermarket in

the suburb. We exchange cat photos and I feel kind of affection between us. (Female, 50s, IDI)

In this kind of community, the unique characteristic of an individual is more valued, and the criteria of traditional groups such as place of origin or the school background are totally unnecessary. The community features both collectivistic and individualistic character in the sense that it serves as a practical and emotional support group for the members yet its membership is totally chosen by individuals, not given.

This kind of collectivism found in the taste-based, online-based community can be coined as *'online collectivism'*. The level of online collectivism is likely to be higher among the younger generation who are used to the new technology. Factors such as how much active an individual is in his/her online community and how much time an individual spends online (especially on social media communication) were thought to contribute to the level of online collectivism.

We use a lot of smartphone, so it seems the group is maintained thanks to it. For example, my mom used to live in Seoul, but she moved to a local city for work, and then came back to Seoul for the education of the children. Now she doesn't have friends in Seoul. Because they were a group based on offline, so the group was disintegrated when they didn't get to see each other. We maintain the group better because we use smartphones, we can communicate regardless of the time and place. (Female, 20s, FGI)

In sum, the online collectivism has emerged

as an important mechanism to form and maintain social relationships for the younger Koreans nowadays. The groups based on online collectivism also function to address the practical and emotional needs of the younger Korean people, just as the offline-based group did to the older generation.

1.3 Hierarchical relationships challenged

In the traditional groups, the relationship among members was very much vertical. As discussed, the hierarchical order was one of the characteristics of the Korean collectivism. The authoritative order was considered as an essential element for the unity, and the sacrifice of individual members for the sake of the group was considered inevitable.

I think the biggest difference between my parents' generation and our generation is sacrifice. The parents' generation grew up making a lot of sacrifices. Maybe it was okay for them to sacrifice for my family and my country....And as a result, they tend to maintain groups through sacrifice. (Male, 20s, FGI)

However the recently emerged collectivism based on the online relationship pursues horizontal relationship. Horizontal relationship challenges the traditional way of hierarchical communication. In the online collectivism, horizontal relationship is realized by the anonymity of the members. What is interesting is that within the online community, certain rules exist to secure the horizontal way of communication among the members. Examples includes rules such as 'forbidding making friends with other members', 'forbidding expression that can hint

age or gender', etc. The anonymity is considered as the ultimate mechanism that guarantees the equal relationship of the group members although the anonymity can be misused in a violent way.

The community is unusually completely anonymous. If you are active with a nickname, you tend to recognize each other. Nowadays, people know that if they do that, and if they make a little mistake, their personal information get revealed. So people do communicate, but reveal yourself as little as possible. (Female, 20s, FGI)

And interestingly, this kind of pursuit for horizontal relationship and equal communication influenced on the offline relationships as well. For example, nowadays the students can upload his/her opinion about the school or the professors on the anonymous bulletin board and this can influence on the offline relationship of the group.

Since all kinds of stories are posted on the Facebook page such as 'I will tell for you' page, I cannot help becoming more careful when speaking in the class. Certainly, it is difficult to talk more comfortably compared to the past, so I normally don't talk in depth. Of course, there is a feeling that the collectivism or strength of relationship is weakened. (Female, 30s, IDI)

Does the horizontal relationship work against building the sense of membership and collectivism among the group? At least, the interviewees answered that although horizontal relationship sounds better than

hierarchical relationship, a group with ultimate equality seems to lose stickiness of the members inevitably. However it is also true that the younger generation keeps challenging the older generation's hierarchical order within the group, whether or not it is harmful for the unity of the group.

1.4 24-hours connected relationship

Online communication surpasses time and space. For the younger generation, perpetual contact with people is translated as the sense of group belonging. The fact that the conversation is being continued matters more than the content of the conversation. The younger generation who are used to the internet-based communication find it easier to join the online groups and to communicate online with the group members.

The younger generation seems to be very familiar with anonymity and open chat. They seem to have low psychological barriers to get into an online group. For them, joining a group is no big deal. Most of the communities are places where anonymity is guaranteed. Being anonymous is more comfortable and familiar for the younger generation. That's why it's easier to step into any group. (Female, 20s, FGI)

KakaoTalk made it easier to form a group, and now I can't just count how many groups there are on my Kakaotalk - based on various forms of relationships. (Female, 20s, FGI)

In some cases group members feel a sense of belonging without knowing each other's personal information. What matters is the fact that they can communicate anytime and anywhere without interruption. Conversation can be re-started at any time even though I cannot answer immediately. As online communication has increased, offline communication and meetings have decreased. And for those who are more used to offline communication, this kind of endless loose communication is not considered as a quality communication.

Even if we don't meet offline for a long time, I feel like I'm seeing them in chat rooms or on social media, as we are connected all the time. But it's very tricky. Because we cannot share quality talk via online, I feel having quality relationship is getting more difficult. A relationship can be built when you see each other and talk to each other seeing faces. (Male, 20s, FGI)

However, unlike the studies where the frequent exchange of messages is an important factor in intimacy and trust building, now there are new relationships that have not existed in the past, such as relationships with low intimacy in spite of frequent exchanges of messages, or high intimacy in spite of less frequent meetings[18]. Although the membership is connected loosely, there are more cases that the online networking exerts important influences on the personal life, sometimes more than the offline membership.

I think the question is whether the online network is collectivistic. If I can get reasonable benefit, I will try to maintain the group. The communities used to be closed ones, but nowadays the community is becoming more

open. The structure of the groups could be loose but still be well-tied. (Male, 40s, IDI)

How can the sense of bonding be strong even when the relationship seems to be loose? Not because of the depth of the relationship, but because of the speed, frequency and the continuity of the connection. In other words, continuous communication between members can be regarded as ritual interaction.[26]

2. The unchanged aspect of Korean collectivism

Despite the emergence of a new collectivism based on the online collectivism, the core characteristic of Korean collectivism seems to be still very strong even in the online groups. Koreans value 'Cheong' and 'sense of belonging' more than anything else, and tries to maintain good relationship by avoiding conflict because of the fear of becoming ostracized.

2.1 The sense of Cheong(情)

As discussed, Cheong influences on Koreans' communication behaviors in the past and present, both offline and online. The interviewees replied that 'Cheong' seems to be the most important factor that differentiates the Koreans' collectivism from the collectivism of other cultures. Koreans value the sense of Cheong and it is often considered as the core of the relationship, even by the younger generations. An interviewee in his late 20s replied that traditional relationship such as the school-tie became meaningful when 'Cheong' was developed among the members.

Cheong is like a small link. These are very small things, but I think Koreans value these thing. Like the seniors and juniors of you – it is a small connection, but as you spend time together, they become very precious for you. (Male, 20s, FGI)

Even in the online groups, the exchange of Cheong is still considered important. Just like offline groups, online groups strengthen the relationship of the members by developing an emotional bonding among the members. Then how is Cheong expressed online? The interviewees answered that they felt more sense of Cheong to those who frequently gave comments to their postings, or those who pressed 'like' often. The other interviewees said that they enjoy using emotions during the online talks and they felt more Cheong towards the people who use emotions often to express the friendly feelings.

I think I can feel the same thing like Cheong about the people who frequently comment on my postings, etc. After uploading something, I cannot help checking to if I received any comments or likes – when I find comments or likes, I also make comments or likes to the person in exchange of Cheong. (Female, 30s, FGI)

It is also needs to show emotions online – so I use emotiocons even to the people who are much older than me. I feel comfortable when the counterpart send me friendly emoticons. (Female, 20s, FGI)

What was interesting was that the interviewees considered 'having meals together' as an important way to build Cheong. For example, a group of people who met for

business can develop into a Cheong relationship just by talking over having meals(*Female, 40s, IDI*). It seems that for the Koreans, Cheong is expressed via food. Koreans often say hello to each other by asking questions "Did you have meal? (e.g., breakfast, lunch, dinner)".

For some reason, a person who opened a restaurant formed a group meeting for start-ups. That is, to match the CEO of start-up with people who want to meet them, and provide the restaurant so that they can have meeting over lunch or dinner, which was very successful. It was successful because they could network in a more comfortable way by having meals together – 'having meals together' seems to have special meaning for Koreans. (Male, 40s, IDI)

Even though they are foreigners, there are people who don't come empty-handed to the meeting, for example, they buy canned drinks for the people who participate in the meeting, and always buy canned drinks. Usually Westerners don't do such a thing. I think they learned how to express emotion after living in Korea for a long time. (Female, 40s, IDI)

The act of sharing food as a way of sharing Cheong is also found in the online collectivism, too. People tend to send 'gifticon (usually coffee coupon)' via Kakao Talk to the people he/she wants to develop 'Cheong', even when the relationship is purely online-based.

Sharing is often seen in the online cafes, and snacks are always being sent along with the items to be shared. Then the person who received it takes pictures and upload a thank-you posting, and this is the way how they exchange Cheong. (Female, 30s, FGI)

Yet the younger generation felt generation gap in the attitude towards Cheong. The traditional meaning of Cheong, expressed as 'Love Cheong and Hatred Cheong' was not well received by the younger generations sometimes. For the younger generation, Cheong is a positive feeling, while for the older generation, Cheong includes not only positive feeling but also negative emotions such as endurance, sacrifice, and even hatred. This is sometimes too much to handle for the younger generation. In the eyes of younger generations, older generation seems to use Cheong in an oppressive way to take advantage of others.

For me, Cheong isn't considered very positive. It makes me feel that I cannot take it off even when I want to take it off. Sometimes too much Cheong can be negative, but it is never easy to be free from it. I think the concept of Cheong is becoming narrow with the individualization of the people (Female, 20s, FGI)

When the older generations say 'why do you behave like that? Don't you have Cheng?' Here Cheong is something that the older generation forces us to do something, in the name of Cheong (Female, 30s, FGI)

It was found that the concept of Cheong is also changing. The meaning of Cheong has become narrow to include only the positive feelings caused by the relationship and the negative feelings are no longer considered as a part of Cheong. Cheong is still valued by

Koreans, but the meaning of Cheong has been adjusted over the generations.

2.2 Strong desire for group belonging

Even though the Koreans show individualistic collectivism, the desire for belonging to the groups is still very strong. A Korean psychologist described Koreans as 'addicted to the relationship'[27]. It could be argued that the desire for belonging is a part of human nature, but the Koreans' desire for belonging seems unique as it is more related to the 'fear for exclusion'. The strong fear for exclusion (or isolation) results in strong desire for belonging, and this is not very different among the younger generation. For example, Korean adolescents' fear of becoming a 'wang-ta(outcast)' is never less than that of the older people[28].

Koreans must belong to some groups. Even if they don't fit with the group, they still want to be part of the group by making another group on their own. (Male, 20s, FGI)

Another reason why Koreans have a strong desire for belonging to a group is because the group's identity is considered to represent the individual's identity. Korean people tend to judge an individual by his/her group identity, such as gender, age, school, company, region of residence etc. Sometimes the individual's personal identity is sometimes considered less important than the individual's group identity.

When you belong to a group, there are attributes that the group represents. They are gathered on the basis of them, so even if the content about myself is insufficient, through the

group, I can build up what kind of person I am. (Female, 30s, IDI).

When I graduated, I was very frustrated and scared. by the fact that I don't belong to any group. It was an emotional problem rather than a realistic problem. The group I belong to, I mean the sense of belonging, and when I talk to people who, I should, explain I am? I think I can express this as a longing for the business cards. (Female, 20s, FGI)

As discussed above, Koreans place great importance on the group to meet the practical and emotional needs of the individual. Moreoever, the desire to identify themselves with the group and express themselves externally through the group identity led Koreans to have strong desire for group belongings.

Summary of Results

The result of the study showed that there were changed aspects as well as unchanged aspects. The major change was found in the way Koreans form groups they want to belong to, as well as in the way that Koreans communicate with the members of the group. However, the sense of Cheong and the strong desire for group belonging (or strong fear for isolation in other words) remain unchanged. The factors found were summarized in the [Table 3].

Table 3. The changed and unchanged aspects of collectivism in Korea

Changed aspects	Changes in way of group formation	Transformation into selective collectivism
		Emergence of Taste-based community
	Changes in way of relationship within the group	Non-hierarchical relationship within the group
		24-hours connected relationship within the group
Un-changed aspects	The emphasis on 'Cheong(情)'	
	Strong desire for group belonging	

V. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the perception of the changed and unchanged aspects of collectivism in Korea by employing a descriptive approach. The interviews with both the younger generation and the older generation revealed several findings regarding how the Koreans perceive the collectivism of Koreans[Figure 1].

The first keyword explaining the changed aspect of the Koreans' collectivism was selective collectivism. The sense of collectivism still exerts important influence on the Koreans, however the way people belong to the groups and relate with the group members have been changed from the past. The kind of 'given' collectivism such as traditional region-tie or school-tie has become not as strong as before: Rather, the individuals want to choose the groups they want to belong to and relate with, even if it is region-based or school-based. A much smaller, intimate and exclusive groups are being selected and these groups address both practical and emotional needs of the members.

The second keyword explaining the changed aspect of the Koreans' collectivism was online collectivism. Online collectivism can be explained as the sense of belongings a person feels towards the groups formed purely online, usually based on same taste, interest or values. The younger generations are more used to join the online groups and start communication with the members. What is interesting was that the online groups function same as the offline groups: they address the practical and emotional needs of the members and the sense of belonging was even stronger than offline groups for some people.

Online collectivism is built on the online communication. The younger generation interviewees perceived that they can maintain groups better and communicate with the group members better than the older generation thanks to their skillful use of mobile technology. The two important characteristics of online communication were the pursuit of horizontal communication and the never-stopping, 24-hour communication. The anonymity, frequency and the continuity of the communication was a key factor that enables strong sense of belonging even though the relationships are loose.

Nonetheless, there were unchanged aspects of the Koreans' collectivism, which were considered unique characteristics of the Koreans' collectivism. The first keyword explaining the unchanged aspect of the Koreans' collectivism was the concept of '*Cheong*'. Although some of the younger generation interviewees felt that the concept of Cheong was often used as a pressure from the older generation, most of the interviewees agreed that Cheong is an essential component for developing and maintaining collectivism.

Even in the online groups, expressing and sharing Cheong is considered important. One of the unique way of sharing Cheong by Koreans was meeting over meals - sharing food, both offline and online, often works as a very effective way of developing Cheong among the members of the group.

The second keyword explaining the unchanged aspect of the Koreans' collectivism was the Koreans' strong *desire for group belongings*. As a social being, it may seem natural for the individuals to have a desire to belong to a group. However, the Koreans' strong needs for group belonging have additional reasons, and the interviewees answered that they were related to the Koreans' identity. The first reason is that Koreans fear for being excluded by the group members. Having an interdependent identity, the Koreans may find it very difficult to feel secure without the group membership. The second reason is that Koreans often identify himself/herself with the group identity. That is, the groups I belong to show who I am.

	Traditional Collectivism	Modern Collectivism
Changed Aspect	involuntary, given group membership	voluntary, selected group membership
	school-tie region-tie	taste-based online group membership
	hierarchical relationship within group members	horizontal relationship within Group members
	time, space-bound face to face contact	24-hours connected untact relationship
Un-changed Aspect	Cheong(情) Desire for group beloning	

Figure 2. Traditional collectivism vs Modern collectivism in Korea

What is the reason for the change of collectivism in Korea? This is certainly not a simple question to answer. According to the interviews, two major reasons emerged : The change in Korean society and the change in (media) technology. As for the change in Korean society, the interviewees mentioned about the functions that traditional groups used to provide to its members. In a society where the level of social security was very weak, the groups people belong functioned as a safety net of people's everyday life. However, the younger generation no longer feel the larger, involuntary groups will function as their safety net. So the younger generation's collectivism (or individualism) focuses on more narrower relationship, such as direct family or the community they grew up. In this sense, a scholar coined the individualization of Koreans as 'family-oriented individualization' or 'commuity-oriented individualization'[8].

As for the change of media technology, especially the younger generation interviewees considered it as a critical factor of the changed collectivism. The development of communication media technology enabled people to form various groups easily online, whether the members share established offline relationship or not. The increased number of the groups and the various characteristics of the groups empowered the individual to autonomously select and manage the groups[26]. In other words, the younger generation find their own identity online, by networking and communicating with people of their own choice, usually based on same taste, value or lifestyle. And these (online) groups function just like the traditional groups by providing emotional and practical benefits[29].
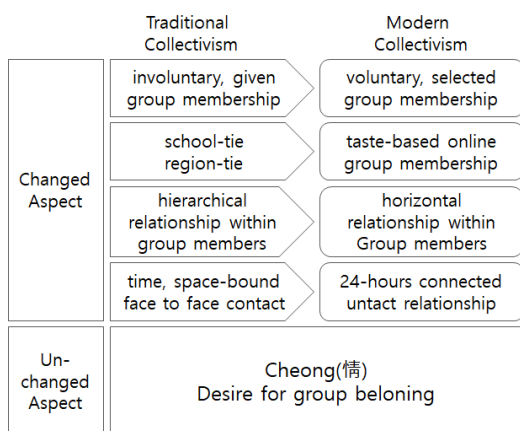
Although both the older generation and the

younger generation did not differ much in describing the changed aspects of the collectivism in Korea, what was noteworthy was that different evaluation was made between the older generation and younger generation regarding the changed aspects. The older generation did not necessarily prefer the traditional form of collectivism, however generally agreed the stickiness and collective power was stronger with the traditional collectivism. On the other hand, the younger generation did not agree with that, and answered they thought the changed collectivism, mostly based on online, featured better durability and communicativeness among the members. It seems each generation is relatively satisfied with the collectivism of one's generation.

As an exploratory attempt, this study examined how the Koreans perceive the collectivism of Korea. The study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study contributed to understanding the collectivism of modern Korea by empirically examining the dynamic aspect of collectivism in people's everyday lives. Practically, the study can contribute to develop programs to reduce the generation gap found in various settings. For example, in schools or in companies, by understanding the changed collectivistic values that the younger generation emphasizes and by understanding the unchanged factors shared by generation to generation, a more effective group communication program can be developed.

The study has several limitations. First, due to the qualitative research method, the findings of the study cannot be generalized. Future research should incorporate a quantitative approach further in depth. Second, the concept of collectivism was not a simple concept to discuss over. It is deeply intertwined with other cultural concepts in Korea but examining the relationship was beyond the boundary of this study. Therefore this study focused on the 'changed aspect' of the concept. But future research should attempt to define the concept of collectivism in Korea and examine its relationship with other unique cultural concepts in Korea.

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