Which Traits of Chinese Students Reduce Social Identity During Study in Korea?

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Abstract

Social identity plays a key role for foreign students who study abroad. In this paper, we provide a more explanation of social identity, introversion, ethnocentrism, and the need for cognitive closure. Furthermore, we also present the relationship between them. This study focused on introversion, ethnocentrism, and the need for cognitive closure, which are generally seen as negative traits, and investigated their influence on social identity. Through regression analysis, the results showed that all three traits are negatively correlated with social identity, and that ethnocentrism had the most negative effect on social identity. Accordingly, the research findings demonstrated that students who possess such traits would have less social identity with Korea. Furthermore, for such students it would be difficult to adapt to Korean society or communicate with Korean students. Thus, such phenomena may be considered as factors that could reduce life satisfaction and lead to less than perfect outcomes while studying abroad.

Keywords : social identity, identification, introversion, need for cognitive closure, ethnocentrism

1. Introduction

At present, the number of Chinese students come to Korea and study for achieving their goals. However, these students are both confronted with a different local culture and have to live in this new society. However, several factors may negatively affect how well students adapt to a new culture and lifestyle. In turn, such factors may lead to the negative performance of students who study abroad over time. Although a number of studies on aspects of life experienced by foreign students have been undertaken, very few studies have focused on the psychological effects experienced by foreign students.

Social identity plays a key role for foreign students who study abroad, but few studies on student’s social identity with their host country have been undertaken, and in particular very few studies have focused on negative traits and their effect on social identity. Social identity is important, and traits which reduce this social identification also exist. To avoid the situation  

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where foreign students have a low level of social identity, it is valuable to investigate any negative traits which may lead to this outcome. Amongst these possible negative traits, introversion, the need for cognitive closure, and ethnocentrism may reduce social identity. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate to what degree Chinese students possess these traits, and how possession of these traits will influence how much students identify with Korea. Furthermore, this study will also examine which of these traits has the most negative effect on social identity with Korea among Chinese students who are studying in Korea.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social identity

Identification has long been accepted as a key implication in several areas, such as the extent to which members feel that they belong to a group, feelings of satisfaction, social organization, and effectiveness at work [1]. Social identity has been defined by Tajfel [2] as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" [2: p. 63].

In this study, social identity is considered as individual's self-held views about society that people commit to and identity with, including such facets of the society as it's values, culture, behavior, and interaction. Identification with a collectivity could enhance interaction. Social identity refers to the phenomenon that people recognize unity and being part of a certain group when they live in a social environment [3].

Social identity theory contains three general consequences. First, people tend to choose those activities congruent with fundamental perspectives of their identities, and support schemes embodying those identities. Second, social identity affects the outcomes of group formation. Finally, social identity reinforces antecedents of identification [4]. Identification with a collective could enhance interaction and interpersonal cohesion, and have a powerful impact on behavior. They also emphasized that identity with an organization could improve commitment to and support for it.

Social identity makes people share the destination of an organization and recognize the characteristics of a group as reflecting their own selves. Thus, their identification is likely to be changed [5].
2.2 Introversion

Introversion is another individual personality trait. Before accounting for introversion, this study will first explain it's polar opposite, extroversion. An extroverted person has been defined as a person who has a tendency to be outgoing, warmhearted, sociable, expressive, talkative, and gregarious [6]. The same authors also suggested that if someone is extroverted than this may lead to participation in groups and organizations, and also lead to the development of interactional, public speaking, and social facilitation skills. In contrast, introversion refers to that quality that makes people less likely to get close to other people, not be open-minded, or often be in a state of doubt [7]. Thus, introverted students are likely to be more reserved and quieter than extroverted students. The research hypothesized that introverted students' social skills are less developed than extroverted students for working together with other members and this hypothesis was accepted [8]. Therefore, the results view introverted students as having less competent social skills.

2.3 Need for cognitive closure

The need for cognitive closure has been defined as an individual craving a firm and specific answer to a question, and a dislike of ambiguity or uncertainty [9]. Several researchers have found that the need for closure can improve the desire for consensus within a group [10]. A high level of need for closure could promote favoritism of in-group and derogation of out-group [11]. Therefore, students with high levels of need for cognitive closure may prefer in-group members to out-group members. In terms of identity or culture, they may commit more to their traditional situation and identity if they have a high level of need for cognitive closure, for the reason that they will be more likely to dislike uncertainty or ambiguity [10], [11].

2.4 Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is defined as "the technical name for the view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" [12: p. 13]. The Expression of degrees of ethnocentrism can be recognized during in-group and out-group communication. A highly ethnocentric in-group always engages in anti-social actions
towards out-groups and also holds generally disparaging attitudes towards the out-group [13]. They emphasize that the effects of an in-group favoring attributional bias or ethnocentrism are stronger than that for denigration of an outgroup.

2.5 The relationship between the three traits and social identity

Introverted learners are usually less successful than extroverted learners when it comes to learning languages [14]. The main reason for this is that introversion is related to unsociable, quiet, and passive behavior, which is not generally conducive to language acquisition. Accordingly, introversion may reduce the level of social identification. The results of a study further showed that introversion involves a lack of social attractiveness and social competence [7].

Ethnocentrism involves stereotyping and regards in-group behavior submissively, and on the contrary to this, regards outgroups subordinately, negatively and even with hostility [15]. Strong ethnocentrism, which can strengthen someone’s bond towards their in group, in students who study abroad, may lead to them liking less their host culture and make it hard for them to adapt in several situations.

People with a high level of need for cognitive closure may feel positively disposed towards other people who facilitate consensus. In contrast, people who feel negatively disposed toward dissenters, or those who deviate from and jeopardize consensus [9]. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1: Introversion is negatively related to social identity.
H2: The need for cognitive closure is negatively related to social identity.
H3: Ethnocentrism is negatively related to social identity.

3. Methods

3.1 Sample and procedures

We surveyed 212 Chinese students from 6 universities in Korea. For gender, there were 97 male students (45.8%) and 115 female students (54.2%). For age, there were 106 students (50%) aged 18-20, and also 106 students (50%) aged 21-23. In terms of the course being undertaken, 31 students (14.6%) were studying at a language school, 169 students (79.7%) were studying at a university, and 12 students (5.7%) were graduate school students. For accommodation, 43
students (20.3%) lived in a dormitory, 154 students (72.6%) lived with a friend, 14 students (6.6%) alone, and 1 student (0.5%) lived with family.

3.2 Measures

A social identity scale was developed by [16], and was composed of 6 items. Sample items included "I am very interested in what others think about Korea" and "When someone praises Korea, it feels like a personal compliment".

An introversion scale was developed by [17], and was composed of 2 items. The sample items included "I am a quiet person" and "I am a reserved person".

For measuring the need for cognitive closure, we used a 9-item instrument which was developed by [18]. The sample items included "I don’t like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it" and "I feel uncomfortable when I don’t understand the reason why an event occurred in my life".

For measuring ethnocentrism, we used the 22-item instrument which was developed by [15]. The sample items included "My culture should be the role model for other cultures" and "Other cultures should try to be like my culture".

For measuring variables, all items were measured with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly-Disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

4. Results

According to the results of a confirmatory factor analysis, AVE of all variables showed above 0.5 (introversion=.898; the need for cognitive closure=.637; ethnocentrism=.626; social identity=.622). The value of constrict reliability showed that all variables were above 0.7 (introversion=.954; the need for cognitive closure=.921; ethnocentrism=.961; social identity=.903).

Values for indexes included absolute fit index (X2/df=1.565, RMSEA=.052), incremental fit index (TLI=.910, CFI=.915, IFI=.916), and parsimonious fit index (PNFI=.753, PGFI=.706). From these results, the results of CFA exhibited validity.

After performing Cronbach’s α for reliability analysis, all values of variables were higher 0.7 (introversion=.904; the need for cognitive closure=.902; ethnocentrism=.958; social identity=.839). Thus, Cronbach’s α for reliability analysis has validity.

The results of the correlation analysis showed that introversion, the need for cognitive closure and ethnocentrism were all negatively related to social identity (r=-.254, p<.01; r=-.217,
p<.01; \( r=-.496, p<.01 \). In other words, the results showed that all the variables were negatively related to social identity. Thus, H1, H2, and H3 are accepted.

Through regression analysis, it was demonstrated that ethnocentrism had the greatest negative effect on social identity (\( \beta=-.460, p<.001 \)). Thus, it was found that students with strong ethnocentrism find it hard to experience social identity with their host country. According to such results such students will generally find it difficult to make friends with people who are from the host country that they are studying in.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Limitations and potential avenues for future study

This study only investigated Chinese students who study in Korea. Future studies will investigate students from other countries who are studying in Korea. Furthermore, it would also be a valuable exercise to undertake a similar study for international students studying in Western countries.

Further, Chinese students studying in Korea come from a number of ethnic minority groups. Accordingly, it would also be worthwhile to measure the varying degrees of social identity according to ethnic minority group.

This study focused only on three negative traits. Future studies should investigate both other negative variables and positive variables. Furthermore, researchers need to carry out studies on ways to improve social identification with host countries.

In this study, we focused only on the independent and dependent variables. Future studies should also investigate moderating and mediating variables. Finally, it would also be worth examining the effect of social identity on student’s personal outcomes.

5.2 Conclusions and implications

This study verified that introversion, the need for cognitive closure, and ethnocentrism are negatively related to social identity. Thus, this study suggests that foreign students with these personality traits may have reduced social identity with their host country, and that they will find it difficult to adapt to a different or new society and culture. In short, such phenomenon produces adverse effects that may impact negatively on foreign student’s personal effectiveness and outcomes. Contrary to this, we suggest that foreign students need to adapt to the society
and culture of their host country when they study abroad. In addition, it is important for foreign students, whenever possible to make friends with host country students, as foreign students can communicate with them in the host country language which will help their foreign language ability improve gradually. Resultantly, foreign student’s social identity levels with their host country could be improved.

References


