



**CROSS CULTURAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:
THE CASE OF GLOBAL KOREAN CORPORATION
AND THAI SUBSIDIARIES**

BY

MS. MINJEE KIM

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM IN
GLOBAL MANAGEMENT
(INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM)
FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND ACCOUNTANCY
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2020
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ENTITLED

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KOREAN CORPORATION AND THAI SUBSIDIARIES

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ABSTRACT

Extant studies have shown a correlation between cultural diversity and conflict in the workforce. Naturally, people tend to interact within cultures and the meaning of contextualization is often culturally specific (Glinow, Shapiro, Brett, 2004)

Global Korean corporations operating in a global scope has started in the 1980s along with the government lead economic growth project. Globalization and localization of Korean corporations have been accelerated along with the influence of numerous products and services and the implementation of the new southern policy has pushed the focus on South-East Asian countries.

Thailand has historically been a base for various manufacturing heavy industrial products. However, as the level of income and economic growth triggered penetration of various goods and services and the importance of the manufacturing base has been relatively declining since the 2000s.

The need for adjustment in localization and organization management strategies for those existing and new global Korean corporations has been raised, however, there are

limited studies that have been done until now. Past localization strategies on human resources management for Thai subsidiaries focused on cultural approaches such as Hofstede's cultural dimension theory (1984), Globe model (2004).

The studies concluded that understanding Thai's national cultures and characteristics is essential for efficient management and negotiation. There were attempts to investigate focusing on conflicts however, most studies took a theoretical approach or relied on quantitative research. However, as proven in the extant research, the Thai employees are naturally relationship-oriented and tend to avoid conflict, aspect of conflict should be discussed in depth.

This study intends to research employee experiences in these areas based on the approaches of cultural aspect causing issues in organization management. The author concluded that the differences manifesting towards face culture in the two nationalities cause misunderstanding and conflicts. The study selected two keywords in two cultures, 'Kreng-Jai and 'Chemyeon' which represents the perception and behaviors of each individual. The most frequent causes of conflicts occur in communication, time and work orientation, and the way two nationalities confront problems.

Also, recent studies have stated that not only expatriates and the host company need to understand the local culture, but it is also important for local employees to understand the characteristics of host nationals. It is important to investigate the aspect of the conflict from inter-communication to reflect integrated and diverse situations in the workplace.

Focusing on finding the root cause of conflict situations due to the differences in cultural contextualization among Thai and Korean in a cross-cultural environment. Understanding the cultural contextualization toward these two respective countries and implementing human resources management strategies can aid in improving organizational management and be a basis for successful localization.

In this research, the author intends to investigate the underlying core cultural aspect in conflict situations specific to cases of global Korean corporations operating in Thailand.

Keywords: Cross-cultural conflict management, Cross-cultural conflict, Localization, Cultural intelligence



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One and half year with the GEMBA program, I am very thankful to my classmates for exchanging with me academic knowledge and international diversity which is a great experience for my lifetime. I would like to acknowledge my family and friends for providing me with encouragement and advice, helping to find resources and candidates for interview. Especially, I would like to express gratitude for Joe, my best friend who stand by me and supported me during the whole process.

The whole process was very challenging, but this has been a great opportunity to have a wider view and insight towards the market situation in general. Due to the Covid-19 situation in Thailand, it was not easy to arrange a physical interview or find an interviewee for the research, I would like to thank everyone who spared their own precious time to share their own insight and experience.

By meeting with candidates from various industries was a good opportunity to indirectly experience corporations and get to know inductive methods for successful adaptation to a cross-cultural workplace. As a Korean professional working in Thailand, this whole process gave me an insight and chance to look back on past and current conflicts facing in work and move forward.

Ms. Minjee Kim

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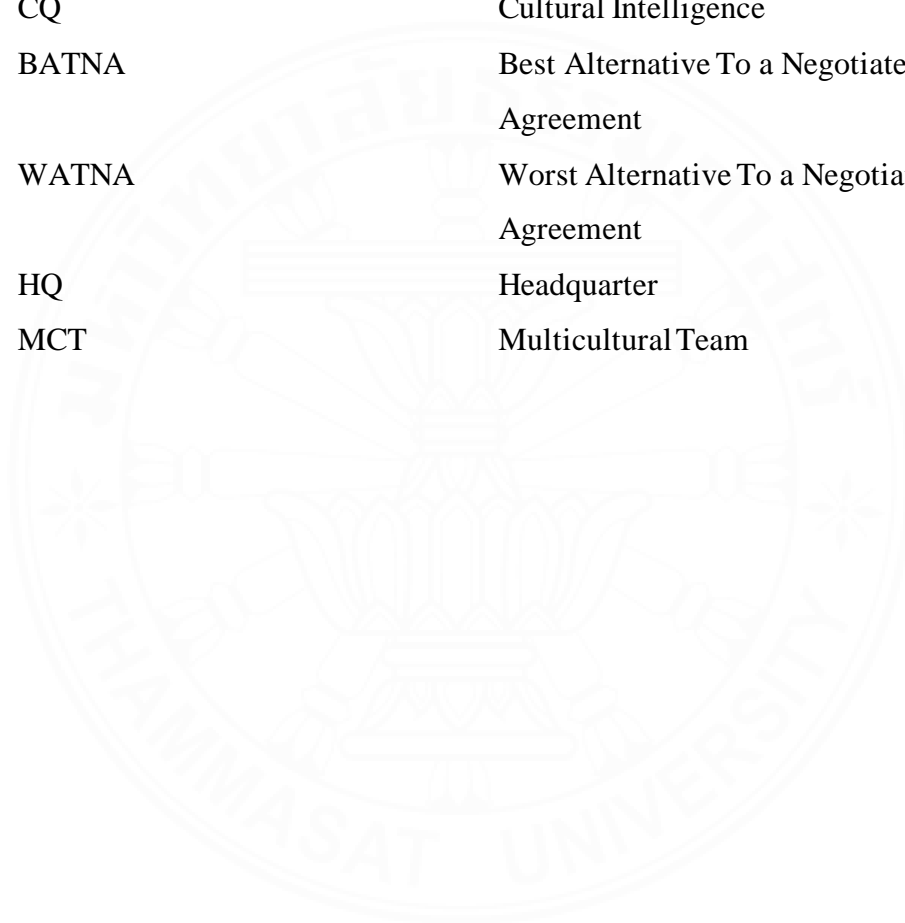
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Symbols/Abbreviations	Terms
ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
HR	Human Resources
CQ	Cultural Intelligence
BATNA	Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement
WATNA	Worst Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement
HQ	Headquarter
MCT	Multicultural Team



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The topic of this study began with a personal experience as a Korean professional working in Thailand. The author personally faced conflict multiple times due to the discrepancy present between these two cultures. Naturally in and outside of the work, the author frequently came across a situation where employees of both nationalities asking, 'Why Koreans/Thai..' questions. It was mostly questioned about behaviors that each national do not understand the other. Before starting the study, the author interviewed five Thai and Korean employees, who had experience in Korean Global corporations in Thailand. Some of the quotes from the interviewees share similar opinions towards common conflicts they have experienced.

'Working in a Korean global subsidiary company gives an impression of working in a multinational company, but rather it is like working in 100% Korean company. The Korean company has its own unique corporate culture and company forces headquarter cultures to local employees rather than conforming to local cultures.'

'When in an interview for new employee hiring, HR always describe how it is working with Koreans and emphasis on exploring the working environment. The interviewer usually asks them whether they can work for long term with long working hours and pressure.'

'I have a problem understanding Thai employees' style of working. They are slow and they never tell me what they really think. And I find the problem further down the line. I get emotional from time to time when I feel like I don't understand them.'

'There were a couple of colleagues who left the company due to the hierarchical working culture and Korean managers' harshly direct communication and rude behaviors to his reporting line staff.'

All the interviewees mentioned that they had experienced various type of conflict at work due to a cross-cultural working environment which led to stress, demotivation, burnout, low performance at work. Additionally, one of the recurring comments was that mostly Thai employees consider the working experience at a Korean company as a stepping stone for increasing their salaries and moving to another company with higher positions rather than staying for the long term.

Human resource management is essential in achieving high productivity in work performance and maximize profit. To cope with this, the Korean embassy and The chamber of commerce publishes manuals for human resource management and regularly conducts workshops. The workshop and manual explain Thai labor laws for general human resources management and explain characteristics of Thai with examples of what not to do from the management point of view.

Some corporations operating in Thailand have a policy of managing the cross-cultural workforce, such as providing language training. This approach is limited to the individual level of understanding the culture rather than systemic HR strategy.

Few existing research has tried to identify cultural differences or analyze the types of conflict that may arise specifically between Thai and Korean people. Current suggestions and guidelines are limited to recognizing cultural differences rather than providing solutions or guidance. Listed differences are mostly inductive answers, with a lack of theoretical support.

This study starts from the question that how different cultural conceptualization in cross-cultural organizations influences conflict within the workplace. The author intends to find theoretical support by studying cultural value in human resources management including conflict management along with the value of CQ in resolving conflicts. The comparison of national culture between Korea and Thailand will be followed to see the relevance of conflict from within the organization among cross-cultural environments. Followed by the interview the author will try to verify whether the conflict that the parties facing during the workforce is derived from different cultural backgrounds through in-depth interview.

Thailand is an industrial country with the second-largest economy within ASEAN and is a significant partner in the New Southern Policy by the Korean government's emphasis on investment and economic partnership. Since the 2010s Thailand has been considered a major economical partner to Korea resulting in a robust and lasting relationship between the two countries. Historically, Thailand has been in a strategic partnership with Korea since the Korean War in the 1950s. The two countries continuously developed friendly and cooperative relations in politics and economics. Thailand is the 17th largest export market and 27th among direct investment destinations (7th among ASEAN countries) with an accumulated investment of 28.5 billion dollars (2014) from Korea. (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, 2020)

As Korean Corporations expand their operations in Thailand starting in the 1980s up to 2021, approximately 400 Korean companies are operating in Thailand. (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, 2020). Thailand is ranked 3rd among ASEAN countries with the number of Korean corporations followed by Vietnam and Indonesia. Thailand is also favored to be a sub-headquarter location for many multinational corporations. Korea's investment in Thailand mostly composes the manufacturing industry (58.5%), 13.6% in publishing, video, broadcasting, and information services, 7.4% in construction, and 6.4% in wholesale and retail.

Table 1.1

Korea-Thailand Investment Status by Year (Export-Import Bank of Korea, 2019)

Criteria		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Korean to Thailand	Amount	280.9	131.1	177.5	110.5	111.7	110.5	3,387
	Frequency	251	208	164	191	227	189	3,210
Thailand to Korean	Amount	3	1.9	51.8	4.4	7.3	11.4	173
	Frequency	22	13	12	33	49	47	422

During the 1980s – 1990s, Korean companies expanded their operation in Thailand mostly from the manufacturing sector (e.g., Samsung Electronics Thailand

(1988), POSCO Thailand (1997), Hanwha Chemical Thailand (1989)). Since the 2000s along with the Thai economic growth, the wholesale and retail business sectors expanded, and sales increased. Currently, franchises, home shopping, IT industries continuously launching in Thailand and diversified the investment from Korea. (e.g. Lock N Lock Thailand (2008), GMM CJ O Shopping (2011), Amore Pacific Thailand (2012), Samsung Life Insurance (2013), Netmarble Thailand(2014), Kakao Entertainment (2021)).

Table 1.2

List of Korean corporations operating in Thailand (KOTRA, 2020)

Type of Industry	Number	Examples of Corporations
Manufacturing Business	210	(Electronics) Thai-Samsung Electronics, LG Electronics, POSCO, KG Steel
Wholesale and Retail Business	87	(Cosmetics) Amore Pacific, Skinfood, The Face Shop, Missha (Franchise) Toms N Toms, Sulbing, Kyochon Chicken, Bonchon Chicken, Toodari (Home Shopping) CJ O Shopping, GS Home Shopping, High Shopping (Hyundai) (General Trading) POSCO International, Samsung C&T, LG International, Hyosung, GS Global, Hyundai Corporation (Sales Subsidiary) Hankook Tire, Kumho Tire, LG Household & Health Care, Lock N Lock
Service Business	30	(IT) Line BizPlus, NHN, Cheil Worldwide, BIT Computer, Locus Telco. (Entertainment) Korea-Thailand Communication center, SM True
Transport, Logistics, Tourism	29	(Transport) Korean Air, Asiana Air, Jeju Air (Logistics) Cj Logistics, Pantos Logistics (Tourism) Hana Tour
Construction, Engineering	23	Samsung Engineering, Hyundai Engineering, GS E&C, Doosan Heavy Industries & Construction
Finance	3	Thai Samsung Life Insurance Pcl, Korea Development Bank, KTB Investment
Government Agency and others	18	KOTRA, AT, KOICA, Korea Midland Power
Total	400	

Unlike other international corporations, these Non-manufacturing Korean companies were mostly structured by Thai and Korean nationality only and consisted of Korean Expats, locally hired Korean, and locally hired Thai employees in the organization. In most cases, Korean Expats are non-proficient in the Thai language or culture and do not possess any background knowledge about the Thai Market.

To ease communication between the organization and headquarters, most of the Korean local hired employees are second to third-generation immigrants in Thailand since late 1980 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019) who speaks Thai or optionally English in the work environment and understands Thai culture. Local Hired Thai employees are the majority, but depending on the business functions and requirements, some Thai employees are proficient in Korean in the organization.

However, the cultural differences in these two nationalities and corporate culture led to interpersonal problems and conflicts in organization management. For successful localization, efficient human resource management is vital not only in terms of cost, but also lead to successful globalization in the foreign market.

1.2. Objective

The importance of Thailand as the economic partner with South Korea is increasing, however, the level of understanding towards the country and labor management is still in its infancy. And often, Korean corporation relies on pushing local employees to adapt into the headquarters' systems and cultures leading to a variety of conflicts and negatively impacts the organization.

This study starts from the questions that why there are still conflicts among employees from different cultures reacting in certain ways which lead to conflict in the organization even though they have no issues in communications. This study aims to investigate the root causes of conflicts in global Korean corporations operating in Thailand, and how the two nationalities' behaviors differ by in-depth interview, the author can figure

out how these different points of view between the lines of conversation lead to conflicts in the cross-cultural workforce.



CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the author intends to review existing ground theories related to the key concept of the study before diving into real case interviews. Since the study focuses on the conflict of global Korean subsidiaries in Thailand, globalization and localization theories and extant studies in human resource management will be reviewed. Along with this, the author will review the theories related to conflict management as well as cross-cultural management practices. By doing this, the author intends to point out the point of further research on the topic and verify how these works in real cases during the interview.

2.2 Globalization and Localization Practices in Global Korean Corporations

Preceding research emphasizes the importance of localization of global companies and the correlation between a company's success and the level of localization a company can achieve. (Taylor, Levy, Boyacigilerl, 2008; Edwards and Kuruvilla, 2005; Gerhart and Fang, 2005; Pudelko and Harzing, 2007)

Various studies have highlighted establishing a global paradigm for adapting to a globalizing society based on multiculturalism. Existing studies claim that in order to compete with those with advanced management experiences in the global market, the traditional Korean management method adapt. Additionally, these companies should adapt to a multinational management culture suitable for a new international environment where changes are inevitable (Lee, Kim, 2007).

The global expansion of Korean corporations is still in the developmental stage, and the employment structure is divided between local employees, local Korean hires and Korean employees dispatched directly from Korea. This employment structure creates a limited cross-cultural working environment rather than being a true-multinational

company. The general image of Korea coming from individuals outside the Korean corporate culture is positive (global Hallyu report, 2019) but, the impression of those experiencing the Korean corporate culture is rather negative.

One of the main issues that Korean expatriate managers face, is the managing of local employees. The main reason for this issue is that the cultural difference between parties is the basis for cultural conflicts. (Youn, 2008). The cultural differences in aspects such as values, standard norms and behavioral patterns related to a company's country of origin may prove the company's guidelines and policies inapplicable (Adler, Gunderson, 2007). The lack of information about the local culture may make it difficult to pinpoint the underlying problems when conflicts arise with local employees. (Uhlenbruck, 2004)

Korean companies need to develop a proper human resources guideline when advancing overseas while considering the cultural differences between the company's origin and the country they are advancing to. In cases where the cultural differences are minimal, the Korean management method may be applied but in cases where significant differences are present localization of human resource management is necessary.

Since the 1980s, the number of Korean companies that have entered Thailand has significantly increased, and as a result, the number of Korean technicians and workers entered the country with no background knowledge of the local mindset and culture. Without proper training and guidance, minor and major conflicts can arise between Korean and Thai employees which leads to building a negative corporate image of Korean corporation in Thailand with emphasis on high workload and divergent communication style. (Lee, 2008)

It is essential for these corporations to effectively manage human resources and yet few research have investigated this particular sector. Existing research has focused on figuring out national and corporate cultural differences between the two nationalities and suggested conflict management styles based on cultural differences. (Komin, 1991; Lee, 2008, Youn, 2008)

Traditional management focused more on managing low-skilled labor in manufacturing facilities, but along with the penetration of new industries, the new Korean

entities required a highly-educated, highly qualified, and younger generation of Thai employees.

Thai society is also facing rapid changes in politics, economy, and social dynamics as it has undergone a democratization process since the 1990s. Changes in cultural, traditional and belief values are transpiring and therefore there should be sufficient countermeasures against the conflicts arising from the adaptation of Koreans in Thailand due to Thais' rapid cultural change. (Lee, 2008)

Korean companies in Thailand all commonly face a high turnover rate of employees. (Korean-Thai Chamber of Commerce, 2011). Top-down management, common in Korean companies are effective and efficient but is also the cause of stifled innovation and a high dissatisfaction rate in employees. (Kwon, Baek, 2011; Lee, 2014; Kang et al., 2017)

Many Korean expatriates and managers who deal with Thai business, Thai employees, or partners face challenges in communications and teamwork due to the differences in cultures which they have not been properly trained upon, leading to inefficiencies in the workplace or a high turnover rate.

Korean corporations have their own unique style, a strong hierarchical corporate culture, and various points of conflicts due to distinct differences within the cross-cultural environment and generation gap between Generation X, Y, Z, and millennials.

In a developing country where it is relatively common to switch careers for highly educated individuals compared to developed countries (Chen, Francesco, 2000; Kang et al., 2017), Korean companies active in Thailand all face a high turnover rate. (Korean-Thai Chamber of Commerce, 2011) A higher educated workforce has a higher level of self-respect, independence and pride directly conflicting with an authoritarian and collectivistic organization.

Common impression toward Korean management style in companies are hardworking and valuing the result more than the process. Tasks are usually given at the last minutes and Korean managers expect the task to be completed as soon as possible.

(Korean Embassy in Thailand & Korean-Thai Chamber of Commerce, 2016) The author also observed during past work experiences that Thai employee have a general impression of Korean corporation as heavy workload, stressful, pressure working environment.

Below is one of the examples of former employee reviews on the Glassdoor website.



Figure 2.1 Reviews on Glassdoor Website for Samsung Electronics

Prior research focused on the personal struggles of the Korean expatriates, in these studies the main focuses were ‘willingness of cultural adaptability’ ‘cultural curiousness’ ‘past overseas experiences’. These studies proved ineffective at providing an optimal solution to the organization’s difficulties at the time.

The key to a successful localization of the company is to cultivate a successful local workforce. As Korean Expats are a minority and the locals are the majority in the organization, organizational management must be tailored to or include the cultural aspects of the local culture.

Still, the main strategies for managing local entities in global Korean corporations are focusing on acquiring local Korean and Thai employees with foreign language proficiency (Thai and Korean) as a localization method. Currently, these Korean corporations cannot be called to provide a truly multinational environment, it is rather a limited cross-cultural environment.

Businesspeople are recognizing the importance of cultural integration in their operation, for a successful operation, overseas training on cultural divergence must be emphasized.

2.3 Conflicts in Cross Cultural Workplace

Conflict inevitably occurs amongst organizations regardless of their purpose and format. There have been various attempts to define the definition of conflicts. Ultimately, most definitions of conflict have much in common and are separated largely by contextual details.

Effectively teaching the meaning of conflict requires the presence of multiple, valid definitions that the learner can choose from to find the definition that resonates with his or her experience and perspective. (O'Connell, 2013). Thompson stated the definition of conflict as; "the perception of differences of interests among people." A. Heinz-Jürgen, A. Milososki & O. Schwarz defined the conflict as "the clashing of interests (positional differences) on national values of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organizations) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their cases."

There are various studies defining types of conflict happening within the workplace over the centuries. According to Guetzkow and Gyr(1954) conflicts can be classified into 'affective' and 'substantive', Priem and Price (1991) classified conflicts as 'Cognitive' and 'Social -Emotional' and (Jehn, 1997) Jehn(1994) describes conflict as 'Task-related' and 'Relationship-related'. When we take a closer look at Jehn's theory (1994), two types of conflicts can be further emphasized as follows; 'Task-related' conflicts arise from the difference in opinions or viewpoints between various individuals in accordance to a particular 'Task'. 'Relationship-related' conflicts arising purely from the difference of individuals personality in relation to the members of the organization. An additional classification of conflict which was "Process Conflict' was introduced and studied in 1997 by the same author.

Scholars have defined divergence in values such as being careful, being innovative, and responsible (Jehn, 1994; Jehn et al., 1997; Jehn and Mannix, IJCM 18,4 3462001; Jehn et al., 1999) on organization environment such as trust, values, and cohesiveness (Jehn and Mannix, 2001), perception of inequality (Wall and Nolan, 1986).

The consensus of the research is that cultural diversity in most cases increase task and relationship conflicts (O'Reilly et al., 1998; Pelled, 1996a; Pelled et al., 1999) and the intensity of the cultural diversity's correlation on conflict is proportional to the group task and conflict variables (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003).

By studying the antecedent factors cultural diversity was found to have an association to each type of Task, Relationship, Process conflict and had a direct correlation to low satisfaction and performance. (Jehn and Bendersky, 2003)

Cultural diversity within an organization may lead to the collision of ideals and stereotypes resulting in an amplification of the pre-existing relationship conflict. (Jehn, Chadwick & Thatcher, 1997; Thatcher, 1999; Jehn and Mendenhall, 2003) In cases where Relationship Conflicts are present within an organization, cultural diversity may nurture negative perception and stereotypes. (Jehn and Mendenhall, 2003) Communications conflicts regardless of the source of the conflict create a negative sensation and are challenging to resolve (Jehn, 1997). Vodosek (2007) was able to prove the correlation between cultural diversity and conflicts within an organization.

Cross-cultural conflict is determined by the convergence of opposing ethics, perceptions, values, objectives classified by cultural boundaries on substantive or social issues. (Avruch, 2009; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Hofstede (1997) proposed that cultural differences are more frequently a source of tension than of synergy and depicted cultural conflicts as "a nuisance at best and often a disaster". Culturally diverse organizations are frequently prone to conflict, and some research shows that culturally diverse groups produce more negative group results compared to non-diverse groups due to ingroup favoritism, communication mishaps, and the differences in values (Adler, 1997; Ibarra, 1992; O'Reilly et al., 1998; Ravlin et al., 2000; Triandis, 2000; Vodosek, 2007)

In 2004, this study has been developed into the GLOBE project, determining which CEO's leadership behavior and traits lead to effective management, a survey spanning through 62 countries worldwide. The study listed 6 global leadership behaviors

and 21 leadership behaviors that combine with global leadership behaviors for each country.

There were attempts showing that cultural approaches in human management strategies are of significance in multinational corporations. Some studies have claimed that the norms and values of the origin country will affect their management method in local subsidiaries. (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede, 2003; Kogut and Singh, 1988; Tayeb, 1998; Shin, 2020). The discussion on the identity of the home country of multinational corporations can also be viewed as analyzing through a cultural approach. (Bae et al., 1998; Ngo et al., 1998). The so-called, 'Country of Origin Effect' reflects the home country identity of multinational corporations.

Other studies focused on cultural conflict in expatriates relocated to foreign subsidiaries, claiming that cultural environments affect task performances, and also from the same survey showed that the most difficulties come from human resources management including communication problems. (Youn, 2008) management approaches ignoring cultural differences and conceptualization among headquarters and local entities can cause loss and high turnover.

In order to manage the inevitable consequences of conflicts arising from cultural diversity in an organization due to the acceleration of globalization, many studies since the 1980s suggested the need for extensive training of staff. Cross-cultural training aids individuals to adapt to the culture more easily. Training can lead the employee to feel self-efficacy, which enables them to reproduce the behaviors that would lead to effective interactions more quickly than non-trained individuals. (Black, Mendenhall, 1990)

2.4 Cultural Intelligence in Managing Local Subsidiaries

When looking into the cultural adaptability of individuals, being able to speak the native language directly correlates to the success rate of being culturally integrated. (Kim, 2019)

Cognitively complex culture-specific knowledge structure is positively related to understanding the aspects of another culture, and in turn, to adaptive behavior (Porter and Inks, 2000; Hong, 2016).

For language proficiency for Korean employees in local subsidiaries, Thai took the highest place among other entities in ASEAN countries.

Table 2.1

Korean employees' ability to speak local languages recognized by employees (Shim, 2008)

			Malaysia	Thailand	Philippines	Total		
Language Proficiency of Expatriates	Barely Ready	Response	153	52	214	419		
		Percentage	29.0%	6.8%	29.6%	20.8%		
	Mostly Not Ready	Response	126	135	204	465		
		Percentage	23.9%	17.5%	28.3%	23.0%		
	Medium	Response	139	200	198	537		
		Percentage	26.4%	26.0%	27.4%	26.6%		
	Usually prepared	Response	69	302	71	442		
		Percentage	13.1%	39.2%	9.8%	21.9%		
	Well Prepared	Response	40	81	35	156		
		Percentage	7.6%	10.5%	4.8%	7.7%		
	Total			Response	527	770	772	2019
				Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

However, the answers in the survey towards local employees about management competency among Korean employees show rooms for improvement even though high language proficiency. Additionally, this is proof that language proficiency does not necessarily mean high cultural intelligence.

Table 2.2

Qualities that Korean expatriates evaluated by employees should possess (Shim, 2008)

			Malaysia	Thailand	Philippines	Total	
Required Competency for efficient management	Technical Ability	Response	167	133	234	419	
		Percentage	31.9%	18.2%	32.2%	27.0%	
	Management Skill	Response	226	280	256	762	
		Percentage	43.1%	38.4%	35.2%	38.5%	
	Understanding of local culture	Response	88	187	122	397	
		Percentage	16.8%	25.6%	16.8%	20.0%	
	Local Language Proficiency	Response	20	118	25	163	
		Percentage	3.8%	16.2%	3.4%	8.2%	
	English Proficiency	Response	23	12	90	125	
		Percentage	4.4%	1.6%	12.4%	6.3%	
	Total		Response	524	730	727	1981
			Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As stated in the table above, most Thai local employees questioned management competency as well as understanding local cultural traits as efficiency in work. We can draw an assumption that cultural intelligence skills should be implemented in workforce management.

To describe interpersonal interactions, multiple scholars introduced various concepts on defining Intelligence. When it came to cultural differences and non-familiar interactions many individuals faced, cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence was found relevant to an individual's ability to adapt to cultural difference (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004). Therefore, Cultural Intelligence 'CQ' is an essential skill for individuals who are operating in a culturally diverse environment. The necessity arises from the fact that cultural intelligence provides the individual with the aptitude to overcome cultural barriers, as an example, adjusting their behavior to work efficiently and proficiently in particular cultural and other situations (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

As a response to this requirement, Earley and Ang (2003) showed four components of cultural intelligence; metacognitive and cognitive, behavioral and motivational components. P.C Early and Mosakowski (2004): physical, cognitive, and motivational/emotional. Early and Ang describe CQ to be an individual's capability to be effective in dealing with situations portrayed as culturally diverse.

Ang, Linn Van Dyne, and Koh (2008) describes each factor of intelligence as below.

Mental Intelligence can be defined as metacognitive and cognitive capabilities, metacognitive cultural intelligence mirrors the path the individual uses to acquire and understand the knowledge of other cultures. Cognitive cultural intelligence is the general knowledge and knowledge structures of other cultures.

In motivational cultural intelligence, the force and direction of power applied towards learning about and functioning in culturally diverse situations. Motivational intelligence recognizes that most cognition is driven, and the magnitude and direction of the individual determine the motivational intelligence.

Behavioral intelligence is focused on the actions of the individuals (i.e., their overt actions) rather than the individual's feelings or thoughts (i.e., thoughts and emotions). Behavioral cultural intelligence is the capacity of an individual to exhibit the proper verbal and nonverbal behaviors when interacting with individuals from the diverse cultural background.

Daniel Goleman, a renowned psychologist emphasizes the important commonality in cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence is "a propensity to suspend judgment-to think before action". A person with high cultural intelligence may take hours to days for this process, but a person with low cultural intelligence may take weeks or months. This involves using one's senses to account for all the way that the various personalities an individual is interacting with are different or similar to an individual's home culture. Once the individual can observe and assess the differences in cultures and evaluate this into a familiar pattern, the individual may start to predict future encounters and be able to be a more culturally intelligent individual. (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004)

Şahin and Gürbüz (2014, p. 399) note that “Individuals with high CQ know how to correctly apply their knowledge of cultural intelligence, pick up skills toward learning about appropriate responses and operate and simultaneously exhibit verbal and nonverbal behaviors appropriate to the situations leading to efficient interaction between culturally diverse environments. Consequently, the enhancement of cultural intelligence may provide a way to an increasingly adaptive performance which includes multinational assignments Şahin and Gürbüz (2014)

Grounding of CQ as a form of intelligence allows precision about the nature of CQ as a set of relatively malleable capabilities that can be enhanced over time. (Earley and Peterson, 2004) Ang, Koh, proposed that four dimensions of CQ positively relate to task performance. Results suggest that CQ has important implication for practice – especially for selecting, training and developing a culturally intelligent workforce. (Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, Ng, Templer, Tay, Chandrasekak, 2007)

2.5 Previous Research on Localization Strategies Among Thai and Korean Cross-Cultural Environment

Cultural differences inevitably cause conflict(Earley and Ang, 2003). Therefore, in a multicultural environment, differences in culture may prove to be an obstacle in the operation of an organization but may be hard to perceive until the conflict has caused irreproachable damage. In the operation of a multicultural organization, the analysis and communication of the cultural root causes of conflicts are vital while individuals within the organization should evaluate how they will approach and resolve the conflict for an efficient operation. (Brett, Behfar, Kern, 2006)

Brett emphasizes the conflict in the workplace occurs when social interdependence between individuals is present. In the management of the workplace conflict, the application of ‘BATNAs’, an acronym for Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement was a sustainable solution (Fisher et al., 1991), however in real-life applications

‘WATNA’s; which means ‘Worst Alternative to Negotiation Agreement’ was found to be prevalent because exit usually does not occur in the workplace. (2017)

Understanding these different behaviors for confrontation in this framework, various emotions and expressions of negative feelings, and outside mediation. Finally, the development of cultural intelligence is required by the workforce along with appropriate intervention strategies.

Similar studies focused on the emotional conflict in MCT performed by Glinow, Shapiro and Brett stated that the difficulty people have in interpreting communications when its delivery includes ‘contextualization conventions’ that differ across cultures. The study concluded that the increased understanding of other people’s contexts and therefore, to strengthen people’s ability to engage in perspective-taking and empathy skills that have been identified helping people to adopt multiple perspectives. (cf. Parker & Axtell, 2001) The goal is that knowledge and understanding of differences will calm emotions in the workplace. (cf. Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius & Kanov, 2002) Engaging in such training is surely time-consuming, even daunting but ignoring this training option may mean that global teams cannot manage their emotional conflict. Numerous studies attempted to figure out cultural differences and their interpretation from various approaches.

Leung and Cohen focused on the concept of self-worth among individuals with workplace conflict. Socially interdependence in an organization can negatively affect one’s emotions because the acquisition of self-worth and the concept can be interpreted in various ways depends on the culture. The study explained these concepts in three ways: dignity, face, honor cultures. Cultural logics accumulates various scripts, behaviors, cultural patterns, and practices around the principal idea, providing the author a meaning and a particular logical consistency and consistency for individuals of a culture. (2011)

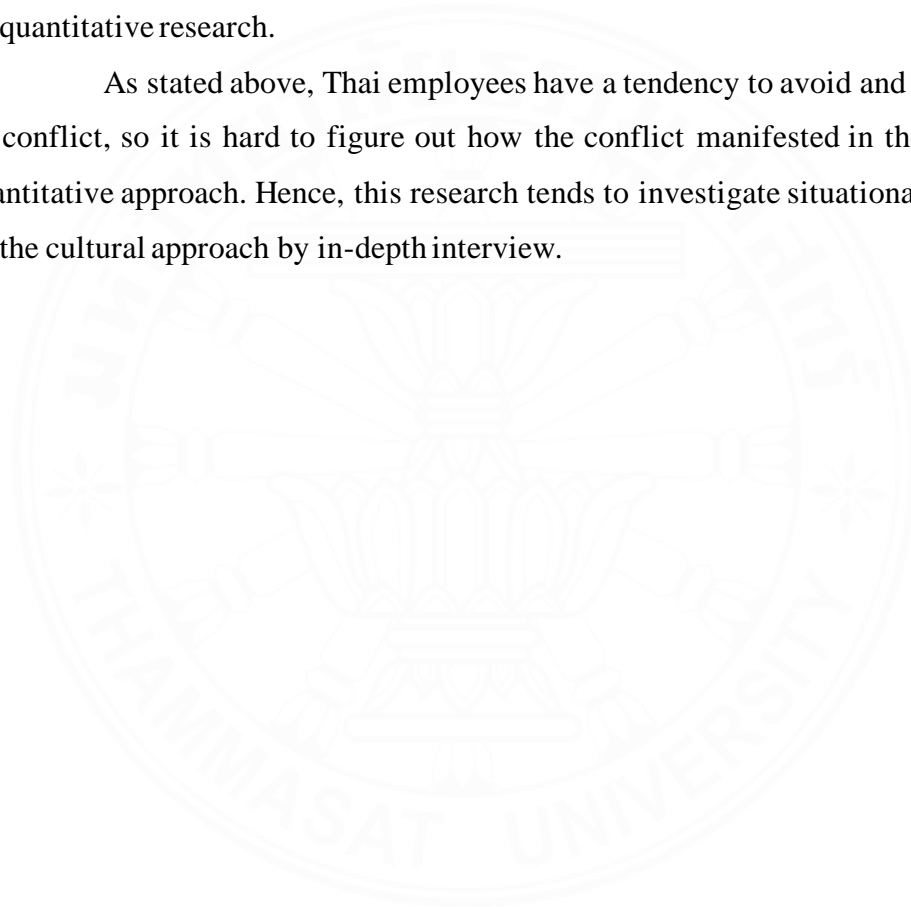
Even when the organization is positive in accepting the Korean operational style, careful consideration of the local culture is recommended.

Management of cultural divergence may be classified as openness, a sense of leadership, ability to deal with uncertainty but careful observation is required to understand

the consequences of a culturally diverse organization. In other words, conditions where culturally diverse activities and an organization's specific field must be taken into account when performing studies on the matter. (Youn, 2008)

Likewise, even though an employee has a basic level of cultural intelligence from their previous background, it is necessary to understand cultural contextualization and aspects of a specific condition, which is global Korean corporations in Thai Subsidiaries. Past studies focused on theoretical analysis based on cultural approaches and heavily rely on quantitative research.

As stated above, Thai employees have a tendency to avoid and pretend there is no conflict, so it is hard to figure out how the conflict manifested in the workplace by quantitative approach. Hence, this research tends to investigate situational conflict based on the cultural approach by in-depth interview.



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Question

The author developed two main research questions after reviewing the questions.

1. What are the conflict situations occurring in the cross-cultural environment with the focus of Korean subsidiaries in Thailand? What are the common situations that employees face and how do these two nationals perceive them?
2. What are the root causes of conflict and how cultural conceptualization among two nationals influence in creating conflict?

The first question is to understand the ongoing phenomenon leading to analysis on the following questions. A discussion of the results explains the root cause of different cultural perceptions and aspect of conflicts in the workplace. In doing so, global Korean companies benefit from a deeper understanding of context so that they can utilize it in human resource management.

3.2 Introduction

The objective of this research is to analyze the conflicts due to cultural diversity in Korean subsidiaries in Thailand (Bangkok specific) and verify the core potential conflict triggers originating from cultural differences. This research method was chosen due to limitations of access to internal HR policies and case studies published in public.

This study will take a deeper look at national culture's influence on the identity of those Korean corporations in Thailand. There were attempts showing that cultural approaches in the human management strategies in multinational corporations focused on

the national cultures on the country of origin. This point of views claims that the norms and values of the origin country will affect their management method in local subsidiaries. (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede, 2003; Kogut and Singh, 1988; Tayeb, 1998; Shin, 2020). The discussion on the identity of the home country of multinational corporations can also be viewed as analyzing through a cultural approach. (Bae et al., 1998; Ngo et al., 1998). The so-called, 'Country of Origin Effect' reflects the home country identity of multinational corporations.

The interview was tailored to find first-hand experiences from the employees who have working experience in these targeted global Korean corporations for more than 1 year. To reflect the cultural approaches toward the national culture and perception, the author selected bilingual or trilingual employees. Rather than focusing on classifying types of conflict or communication conflict due to fluency, the author tried to identifying core cultural values and the influence of those in reacting to such situations.

3.3 Sample

The sample size and sampling method that the in-depth interviews are targeted at employees who have working experience in global Korean corporations in either non-traditional manufacturing industries or non-manufacturing function in Thailand. The group of interviewees has been chosen due to their unique experiences and to analyze the common conflicts or problems due to cultural differences relative to the characteristics of Korean corporate culture.

In this study, there were a total of 15 employees participating by interview. 9 were Korean nationals and 6 were Thai Nationals. Among 9 Korean nationals, 4 employees were Expats and 5 were local hired Korean employees employed by Thai subsidiaries. The number of total companies included in this study is 9 including IT, Consumer Electronics, Finance, Wholesale and Retail business industries which do not fall manufacturing sector. Each interviewee's tenure and position ranged from 1 year to 10 years ranging from the associate to director level.

All the interviewees were bilingual or trilingual limited to fluent working proficiency including Thai, Korean, English. Unlike previous studies done for human resources management exclusively for manufacturing factories or low-skilled laborers, these specific parameters were chosen because the author noticed that there was various type of cross-cultural communication with Korean and Thai nationals or other nationalities beyond the host company's language or local language. This was to eliminate variables that might influence conflicts arising from miscommunication.

The below table is the demographic of interview participants and their position.

Table 3.1

Demographic profile of interviewees

Interviewee	Nationality	Type	Position
A	Korean	Local Hired	Marketing
B	Korean	Local Hired	Marketing
C	Thai	Local Hired	HR
D	Korean	Local Hired	Marketing
E	Thai	Local Hired	Product
F	Korean	Expat	Product
G	Thai	Local Hired	Product
H	Thai	Local Hired	Finance
I	Korean	Local Hired	Finance
J	Korean	Expat	Media
K	Korean	Local Hired	Marketing
L	Korean	Expat	IT
M	Thai	Local Hired	IT
N	Korean	Expat	Sales
O	Thai	Local Hired	Media

During the sample selection process, the author's intent was to include interviews with various levels of management that accurately reflect current circumstances. Previous research focused on a specific type of relationship between the Korean supervisor and Thai employee. In recent times, there is various type of management structures existing with blurred hierarchical structures. The author recognized that interviews searching for conflict in diverse relationship structures regarding hierarchical relationships will provide a comprehensive recommendation in the organization management.

3.4 Interview Question

The interview question was a tailored in-depth interview to a specific group of individuals. The interview may take one to two hours per session and if necessary and there were follow up sessions for some interviewees. The interview questions consisted of three main sections including general questionnaires and several questions related to conflicts that each employee faces in a cross-cultural environment.

Based on the information collected from the first part of the interview while building a rapport with the interviewees, the author asked these questions below.

1. Conflict situation that each employee has experienced or witnessed. How each employee has felt and cope with the situation. And the reason for conflict based on their explanation.
2. Traits of Korean expatriates or locally hired employees whom they are working close to. Any characteristics that 'Korean' people have the potential to cause conflict with Thai people in work?
3. What is difficulty working with opposite nationalities?
4. (Thai interviewee only) what are the differences between working with expatriates and locally hired Koreans? Does fluency in the local language and background knowledge of culture affect the working relationship?

3.5 Data Collection

The author conducted interviews with each member, with three chapters from one hour to two hours in length. All interviews were carried out in private. These were audio-recorded or through email communication, this was transcribed for further analysis. The comments and dialogues are reconstructed, not a direct quote from the interview.

On the day of the interview, the author started from the self-introduction, informing the interview objectives including the non-disclosure agreement of the interview. During the interview, there will be open-ended questions for the interviewee that can answer the questions independently.

The beginning of the interview started with general questions about the company and the interviewee's background (Spradley and Mccurdy, 1972; Jenn, 1997). The author tried to break the ice and build a rapport with each interviewee. Collected information was utilized as a basis for the next part.

The second round of interviews occurred simultaneously with the observation and was semi-focused, with questions about specific topics and research questions. Because of the sensitive nature of the conflict (Kolb and Putnam, 1992; Jenn, 1997), I used techniques to elicit information. 'Describe a typical conflict that newly joined Thai employees would experience.'

The last part, as the rapport grew, ask interviewees to identify and describe specific conflict situations they have experienced with other nationality. In each of the units, there were a number of participants who identified and reported the same conflicts. This increased the reliability of reports of the same conflict by cross-checking across informants. (Tyler and Bogdan, 1984; Jenn, 1997).

The time it took for each interviewee was different and there was multiple interview session if failed to move to next part. The author conducted 4 follow-up interviews with some of the interviewees in case the interviewee was not willing to proceed to the third party.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data for the qualitative research will be examined for correlations and answer patterns of the interviewees. The information will be analyzed in a descriptive manner by comparing the differences of the three main groups regarding experiences and root causes of the problems in those conflict situations.

The cause of conflict in communication will be examined to testify whether inter-personal communication conflict in a cross-cultural environment is due to difference in perceptualizing culture how this gets manifested in the workplace by example. And the author intends to grasp whether cultural background knowledge or CQ can contribute positively to preventing or managing conflicts.

Through this research technique, the author intends to analyze different aspects of cultural value in each country and research inter-personal context in two ways. The difference in perspective drawn by both Thai and Korean employees by various type of positions and departments to suggest optimal approaches in managing conflict in the subsidiaries and better localization strategies to Korean corporations in Thailand.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through in-depth interviews with each individual, the author found that there are overlapping common clues in underlying situations of conflict. Examination of samples and the root cause of conflict due to the cultural differences will be explained in the following part.

4.1 Initial Finding

The findings of the previous studies indicate that communication problems between Thais and Koreans are associated with different features that originated from national cultures. The study focused on the actual case studies of the conflict occurring in the workplace by the interview.

All employees have certain cultural intelligence based on their previous background and had limited to fluent working proficiency in Thai, Korean, English. And rather than relying on one language, all three of the languages were utilized in the studies.

As previous studies have analyzed, Thai employees are hesitant usually to confront conflicts, and this led to multiple interview sessions until the interviewer and interviewee were able to build a rapport.

Thai Interviewee A mentioned that A never had a conflict at work.

“I don’t recall any conflict that I experienced in the workplace, not only with Koreans, also Thai. Of course, we argue from time to time, but I try to understand the counterpart, and we work as a team. It is just little disagreement rather than conflict.”

As previous studies have stated, both countries have collectivism and hierarchical traits in national characteristics (Hofstede, 1984, GLOBE, 2004), which made top-down headquarter based workflow smoothly executed and most expatriates could adapt and manage the work units overall easily. Also, Thai people’s tendency to avoid conflict

and respect power distance, most expatriates in the interview do not face rejection or conflict raised against them frequently.

3 out of 4 expatriates from headquarters did not speak the Thai language, nor have taken any cross-cultural management training except the Thai language course. The course is not mandatory, and they still can manage the work in Korean and English, they did not feel the need to continue learning.

Thai employees comment that they have less frequent conflicts with local hired, Thai speaking Korean employees than expatriates from the headquarter. It seems like those local Korean employees acting as a buffer between the other two employees and understanding the local culture positively contribute to reducing conflicts.

Locally hired Korean employees profile varied from 2nd to 3rd generation immigrant to contemporary expatriates. They work very closely with both Korean expatriates from headquarters and Thai employees. It seems the longer they have stayed in Thailand and deeper the understanding of the culture and language positively contribute to effective communication. However, there were some interviewees facing cultural differences with their expatriates or Thai employees depending on their personal background.

The source of conflicts between the two nationalities stemming from how these two nationalities approach and prioritize their working cultures. This study interpreted the root cause of conflict using variables claimed in the previous studies with cross-cultural management approaches. Focusing on the 'Kreng Jai' and Face culture of Thai nationalities, this study attempted to figure out cultural conceptualization of Korean to support the need for mutual understanding in both nationalities. In particular, the difference in flexibility of timeline management proves to be a frequent source of conflict between the two nationalities.

Overall, the author noticed both nationalities were group-oriented and put harmony in their team as a priority. At the same time, their social image to others important, but this manifest in different ways.

4.1.1 Different Aspect of Face Culture in Two Countries

In both Thai and Korean culture, public persona to others works as one of the common social interactions at work or any type of group organization. One way to describe this is 'Face culture'.

The face is defined as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact.” The face represents the consciousness of individual public image. Face-work includes motives, preparations, public performances under the control of individuals in order to build a positive image. It is impression management (Goffman, 1967; Yvonne, 2008) Face culture exists in many Asian cultures, however, the interpretation and behavior due to the influence of face culture turned out differently in each country. Usually, this face culture has an influence in a collective society. (Lim and Choi, 1996; Kim and Jang, 2018)

During the interview, all participants mentioned the Thai word 'Krengjai'. According to Wendell Blanchard in 1963, the meaning of 'Krengjai' is “related to the Chinese concept of saving face,” explaining the emotions of 'Krengjai' to be “self-effacing, respectful, humble, and extremely considerate.” While being 'Krengjai', the Thai person tries to avoid intrusion and avoid causing trouble (Blanchard, 1963).

On the other hand, the face culture in Korea is referred to as “Chemyeon.” Chemyeon is similar to most aspects of otherwise mundane social interactions within Korean society (Lim and Choi 1996). Chemyeon is similar to the Western concept of face in that 'Chemyeon' is part of the basis for social relations. For example, 'Chemyeon' plays a substantial role when an individual wishes to maintain good social relationships with others (Lim and Choi 1996) since he or she tends to “save” Chemyeon by selectively exposing his or her best sides to others (Goffman 1959, 1967). However, Chemyeon is a unique construct similar yet different in some regards with regards to the Western concept of face. 'Chemyeon' has many subsets (Kim and Yang 2011a, 2011b, 2013)

1. Ethics Chemyeon is associated with moral and ethical decision-making situations where people can feel that their face is threatened.

2. Social performance Chemyeon, related to people's social networks and social achievements.
3. Social personality Chemyeon postulates people's thoughts about how others view them.
4. Social pride Chemyeon, relates to one's social status within a social group or within the workplace.
5. Competence Chemyeon, which evaluates an individual's ability by their personal performance or achievements.
6. Demeanor Chemyeon, which is linked to an individual's adequate behavior or appropriate manners.
7. Shame Chemyeon, which describes an individual's feeling of embarrassment in circumstances of high pressure and in cases where an individual's expectations were not met and exposed to others.

Extant cultural approaches to understanding Thai negotiation strategies and characteristics of Thai used Kreng Jai as one of the distinct traits. Jung (2016) analyzed conflict resolution and negotiation strategies based on cultural dimension theory and found approaches from cultural conceptualization 'Kreng Jai', 'Jai Yen', 'Face Culture', 'Keeping Silence', '3rd Party intervention', 'Soft negotiation' and concluded that Thais prefer collaboration, middle way of conflict management strategies with avoidance toward conflict situation itself.

Another research done by Hyun (2020) studied cultural conceptualization underlying intercultural business communication problems in Thai subsidiaries. The study focused on linguistic features in inter-cultural communication and concluded that four cultural conceptualization causes interpersonal conflict; For Thais, Kreng-Jai, and Phi-nong, for Koreans were Ppalli ppalli, and gunsinyuei. The analyzed Krengjai allows the avoidance of interpersonal conflicts in favor of maintaining harmonious relationships between community members.

Even though both countries share the concept of ‘Face culture’ the social behaviors manifested in a completely different way. The following excerpt (1) is an illustration of conflict due to the collision of Krenghjai and Chemyeon reconstructed from an interview with a Thai manager A (Male, 30s) and Thai HR manager B (Female, 50s), Korean expatriate C (senior manager, Male, 40s).

1) A is a valued employee in the company, with a tenure of 7 years. A got an offer from a competitor company with a 20% salary increase. He loves current work, but the offer was very good, so he was hesitating. A decided to reach out to HR about the offer.

A: Phi C, I have got a better offer from company A, with a 20% increase.....

B: Nong B, I see... that must be a very good chance for you. Congratulation. You deserve it. When do you think would be the resignation?

After the conversation, A reached out to his senior manager, who is Korean expatriate C.

A: Khun C, I have something to tell you. I have got the offer from competitor company with 20% salary increase. It is a very good package for me, I might have to resign.

C: No way, are you serious? We can adjust your current salary, don't leave. I will talk to HR for you.

A: I have talked to them already, and they asked me when would be the last day.

C: What? (he gets mad) ... Let me talk to them.

Why didn't you tell me in the first place?

Expatriate C talked directly to his director and adjusted A's salary, and he blamed the HR managers behavior that she just let him go and report this.

Previously introduced Krenghjai and Chemyeon underlie in the situation and this both negatively affected to opposite nationals. Differences in expressing their social self-worth in the community resulted in communication style.

Leung and Cohen explained cultural variation as a combination of CUPs(Culture X Person X Situation) and the culture helps to define psychological situations and create meaningful clusters of behavior according to a particular logic. (2011)

During the conversation, there are both Thai employees, A and B felt Kreng-Jai for the situation. First, B felt ‘Krengjai’ to reach out to his Korean manager asking adjustment for a better package and tell the HR manager about the reason he was considering the offer. Second, when the HR manager knew that Employee B got better compensation than the current position, she felt ‘Kreng-Jai to ask him to stay.

Unlike Thai employees who did not show any objection because of ‘Krengjai’, Korean manager feels left out and they .lost their face due to Thai employee’s hesitance to reach out to their manager with negative news.

This led Korean expatriate C to misunderstand the HR manager’s reaction toward the situation that she does not do her job to keep the valuable employee. C expected the HR manager to reach out to a person in charge in order to give a counteroffer to B. Due to the fact that expatriate C did not understand ‘Kreng-Jai culture, he reported this to the Korean director and caused a conflict with B.

At the same time, Korean manager C felt he lost face because his trusted Thai staff did not reach out to him when he first got an offer. In order to avoid losing the face by letting the result (letting the employee go), C talks to the director directly to make a critical deal. This is related to the ‘Chemyeon’ as the subset of his social performance and network.

The following excerpt (2) is an illustration of conflict reconstructed from an interview with a Korean employee A (female, 20s) and Thai employee B (male, 30s).

Employee C(Thai, female, 30s) used sick leave and went on a trip to Pattaya. B noticed this because they are following each other on the social network service, no one reported this to manager D (Korean expatriate). Later, A realized this and asked B.

A: B did you notice that C has been using sick leave and going on vacation to Pattaya? How did this happen, did you talk to manager D about it?

B: No. I did not say anything yet.

A: Why haven't you? At least you should have told C or at least you need to reach out to the manager that this behavior is unacceptable, and C should never repeat such behavior.

B: You are right, I understand that C's behavior is unacceptable.

A: Why didn't you take any action when you found out?

B: Because I felt 'Kreng-Jai' to talk about it.

A: (What should I do..?)

During the interview, the author has noticed that in such cases where an employee breaches compliance or regulation, Thai employees hesitate to confront the person in charge. Normally, they keep silent and if the situation continues, they rather reach out to tell this manager. Thai employee will want the reporting to be anonymous because they afraid this might hurt the face or the relationship with other (Kreng-Jai).

However, Korean employee A should decide whether to reach out to the manager and reports and ignoring the fact what she has found out. Her decision can be analyzed as the choice between saving the face('Social Chemyeon') at work or losing the face ('Personal Chemyeon') as a demeanor subset of Chemyeon.

Many studies claimed that Thai highly value 'Ego' and 'Relationship', so people tend to show a smooth, kind, no-conflict interpersonal relationship in the workplace. (Komin, 1990; Shim, 2008)It is necessary for Korean expatriates and locally hired to understand this cultural conceptualization, otherwise, Koreans might not notice the ongoing conflict with Thai employees.

At the same time, Thai employees need to know the intention of such intervention and direct communication among Korean employees is due to the same core concept of face culture in order to prevent future conflict happening from the same issue.

4.1.2 Work Responsibility and Timeline

One of the common factors causes of conflicts between Thai and Korean during the interview was triggered from the different point of view toward their work responsibility and time management style.

Interviewee C(Thai) commented that

“Koreans including Korean headquarters, love work. Sometimes I feel like they are addicted to work. And they always want to get the work done “Ppali-ppali”. They do not want to wait; the ad-hoc task has to be started right away. They have too much ownership towards the work and no life. For me sometimes, it seems like they only care about the result and does not care how Thai people work and push Korean style.”

On the other hand, interviewee (Korean) A commented

“It is not necessarily always, but Thai employee seems like having a lower responsibility toward their job than Korean employees. They value family, friends, and their own personal life more than work. It is hard to intermediate in between when Korean headquarter pushes urgent work to a local entity. Because Thai employees hardly understand why they have to work until the midnight for director meeting on tomorrow 06:00 am local time.”

It is important to Koreans and Korean corporate culture to avoid conflict by maintaining good relations with others in the same organization and saving another face. Indirect and high-context communication is the result of saving ‘Chemyeon’ for themselves and others. (Kim and Jang, 2018)

And in this case, there are two values existing in the context. Time and work responsibility. Koreans includes speed of task completion or immediate execution as their KPI and work responsibility. This is due to Koreans’ ‘Ppali-ppali’ culture combined with a corporate culture influenced by Confucianism traditions.

Since the 1960s, government leading economic development triggered emerging big corporations nationwide. Korean’s ‘Ppali-Ppali’ culture and unique corporate

culture began to appear. This word means ‘Hurry, hurry’ or ‘Get the work done fast. This social tendency was generated during rapid economic growth and modernization during the 1970s along with the government leading economic growth movement. Competition to survive and become a wealthy country after the Korean war, this trend made Korean society competitive, social norms that fast is a virtue. (Kim, 2005).

Additionally, there are several unique factors in Korean corporate culture. The first is influenced by Confucianism tradition which led to top-down management level. Confucianism ethic system makes individuals in the organization show loyalty, respect to their seniors – so there is hardly visible resistance in the decision making process. (Lee, Yoo, 1987; Chan Sup, 1983). The second is a performance-based human resource management system since the Asian financial crisis in 1997. Control- and Merit-based focusing on short term financial performance and efficiency of manpower management was used to recover from the financial challenges. (Ka, 2013)

These two cultures have been incorporated into putting time value, precisely the speed of the task completion as a performance target.

The basic standard and expectation for setting up a timeline and work intensity were quite different. During the interview, both respondents mentioned this issue in a different direction. Korean interviewees showed a clear perception that It is important for a Korean to complete the given project or task in a short time, if urgent, Koreans were willing to do overtime to meet the due rather than causing a delay.

This can be interpreted as an attempt to complete the task within a given timeline and try not to cause any friction because of individual or team from a collective point of view. If the work could not be completed as planned, this means losing face over the team or the company, not only individual level, this includes losing the face of their boss or even higher level.

However, Thai employees are more flexible in terms of rules and timeline management. Komin(1991) explained Thai are not principle oriented, and with the high value for a personal relationship, they also appear not to be strictly law-oriented. In practice, it is hard for Thai to stick to company principles and company project

management guideline. Interviewees mentioned that they did not understand why Korean employees stick and obsessed original timeline and inflexible during the process. Thai interviewee mentioned that it seems like Koreans cares about result only.

Below is the case of employees working for Thai – Korean joint project for launching new corporation and services in Thailand.

“The project took around two years, and it took longer than a usual project that I managed previously in Korea. My overall impression was the work speed was slow. Thai employees spoke very good English and I also have experience in studying abroad in the US for 6 years so not many communication problems besides the timeline.

One thing I did not understand was during the meeting when we request some things from them (Thai) they say they will do it, but no update after. It seemed unprofessional from my point of view. I tried to intermedate the two sides by giving more timeline and trust to Thai side and make Korean HQ understand.” (Interviewee I)

“The project took two years and the total process was very tough and required longer working time than before. I normally worked from 09.00 – 19.00~20.00. When I was working with Koreans, it was very surprising that no matter what time I send a request to follow up or help, *the helpdesk was working almost 24 hours...*

Sometimes *we had problems causing a delay in the timeline, then Koreans complained and blamed* us. They think it is a problem, but we Thai people think that if there is a problem and reason, it is okay to extend the timeline. So later, in order to manage the communication problem, our Thai PM tried to update the timeline often and explained the reason if there is any delay” (Interviewee H)

A previous study done by Lee about the conflict in cross-cultural environments shows how Thai people perceive this Korean culture. The author ran a survey of Thai workers working in Korean companies and the dominant comments were;

“Koreans are quick and clear, but work efficiency is low due to the lack of understanding of the local culture. Koreans often ignore the local way of work and force

the Korean style. Also, “It is true that Thais do work slower than Koreans. However, they tend to be accurate in my job, even if the timeline is delayed. It can be said that it is a cultural difference between Thais and Koreans who prefer to work in a less regulated environment. It is not helpful to force Thais to adapt “Ppali-ppali’ culture. (2008)

Below is the comment of local hired Korean employee D.

“I usually have trouble with the sales team. My position is SCM, so I will need to prepare stocks for the upcoming promotion. From time to time, there are occasions that the assigned products arrive late or do not arrive at the store.

Before the promotion period, in order to make the product arrive at the store on time, I must first enter inventory on the system to upload payment and obtain payment approval from Thai managers, expatriates, and corporate heads.

It takes physical time to create a payment request form, and it takes about 2 days to be approved by the head of the company after entering the system. *In order to send the product on time, I complete the task by overwork* managing uploading the payment and delivering the approved details to the sales team.

However, it happens sometimes that the products were not sent on time or missing. When I ask the sales team to explain why this was happening, I would say "I missed the email", "Because I(the interviewee) didn't tell them to send the product," "The approval date is already too late (the interviewee delivered it on time), et cetera."

There seems to be a big difference in terms of how employees feel responsible for their work. Since I put my best effort to manage the task on time even with overtime, I usually expect Thai people to proceed with the next process, but it is not so.”

Promotion could not start on time and the Korean expatriate blamed and scolded D. In this comment, interviewee K shows his perception relating to timeline management and his responsibilities. Thai employees do not understand the need to work overtime to strictly fit into the given timeline, they think if there is a reason, the timeline or deadline can be negotiated either takes this as his responsibility.

The author figured that this interviewee felt offended by losing face over the expatriates for the work result that he did not cause, and team performance affecting his social 'Chemyeon'

However, the frequency of conflicts reduces once Thai employee starts to fit into more Korean working culture and promoted to deal with Korean expatriate directly.

Interviewee E commented that

“Korean corporations have high expectations and standards for pushing KPIs and workload compared to other international or Thai companies that I have experienced. Work process and task management style is different. Sometimes Korean headquarter or regional HQ gives me a last-minute task or push me top management decision, I normally try to listen and follow the decision because I understand how the company works. I think the company knows that my hard work, Korean company provides employee good career & personal development program compared to Thai traditional company.”

The following excerpt (3) is an illustration of miscommunication reconstructed from an interview with a senior manager A (Korean, Male, 50s) and newly joined manager B (Thai, Female, 30s).

Manager B (Thai, Female, 30s) started working in a Korean company. In a team, senior manager A (Korean, Male, 50s) are working in the same team. A calls B to give a task.

A: B, there is an urgent task from the regional headquarter that I need you to do.

B: Okay, I have another task that I need to finish, so I will do it after I complete the ongoing one.

A: No, this is a very *urgent one from the top management*. You should do it now.

B: (surprised) Okay... I will try.

A: Can you finish it by today? B: I am not sure...

A: *We must complete this today.* The top management wants to see the result in the meeting tomorrow morning, Korean time.

B: Okay... I will try.

B worked until 11 pm on that day and completed the task.

B did not clearly understand why the manager gave the task last minute and why she must totally cut the current task and prioritize the new task given by the top management. Korean manager expects the given task to be started immediately and with ha, not to disappoint top management and save his(and team's) face.

Rigid timeline management applies to work during weekends and overtime. For the employee who mentioned that normal working hours are five days per week, 8 hours but they seem to work during weekend and holidays.

Interviewee A commented that

“I normally work during weekend and holiday. It is because the target timeline is very short and there are many ad-hoc and reporting process that we need to follow up on. Often there are times where the headquarter sends the request last minute, I struggle sometimes to convince Thai employees to meet the given timeline. Because in the Thai employee's point of view, it does not make sense. So there are additional tasks that I needed to complete on behalf of local employees”

According to the case study of a Chinese subsidiary in Thailand (Holley Electric Group (Thailand)), Thai people do not like pressure and are more easy-going and prefer a friendly working environment. Also, Thais prefer to work in a more relaxed and tolerant environment. Thai people do not worry about making mistakes, because they merely fear unpredictable situation. (Yoshifumi, 2017)

Clear communication and regulatory strategy for task management and the core value in corporate culture would be necessary for managing local employees in Thai subsidiaries.

4.1.3 Different Aspect of Face Culture in Two Countries

As shown in the interviews, different conceptualization, especially concept toward face culture manifest differently among the two nationals. This often leads to misunderstanding in behaviors and communications.

Most of the expatriates from HQ did not receive cross-cultural training or guideline nor speak the local language. Even if they have an understanding of cultural intelligence from their past background, without understanding the cultural aspect of respective local entities, it was hard to prevent conflict with Thai employees.

Thai employees, a large majority has cultural intelligence from their personal background as well, try to adapt to the Korean corporate culture and prevent unnecessary conflict by using their CQ. However, there was still a situation of conflict due to difference in communication style based on their cultural contextualization. Along with their Kreng-Jai culture, most of them hesitated to reach out and reveal about it. Most Thai employees who have long tenure adapt and fit into ‘Korean style’

Interpretation on face culture was differently manifested in Thai and Korean employees. For Thai, it can be represented as ‘Kreng-Jai, and for Koreans was ‘Chemyeon’. The main point of conflict due to the collision of these two concept was; communication style and responsibility and work management.

Local hired Korean employees were working as intermediary between two parties. All these employees could speak a certain level of Thai language. Thai employees agreed that due to the presence of local hired Korean, positive in reducing conflicts and effective communication. However, based on the level of language

proficiency and level of understanding, there was conflict due to cultural contextualization. Depending on the level of understanding by personal background seems to influence these nationals to feel conflict between both Korean expatriates and local Thai employees.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study intended to identify the various aspects of conflict situations in cross-cultural environments with focus on Korean subsidiaries in Thailand. By utilizing in-depth interviews, the author observed frequent situation of conflict with the root cause of problems occurring between Thai and Korean employees in the workplace.

The conclusion of the study are as follows; First, employees working in Thai subsidiaries of global Korean corporations' face conflicts due to the different cultural contextualization of their face culture. Each national's self-worth and social image toward others manifest differently in a work environment, this led to interpersonal conflict with other nationals. The common aspect for potential conflicts is based on a different point of view in communications, time management and priority in work. Second is the necessity of implementing a cross-cultural approach in an organization's management, trainings and guideline should be provided to both nationals for mutual understanding to each other.

Contrary to the extant studies of workers in the traditional manufacturing sector, employees in non-manufacturing industries were able to contribute to breaking down the barriers of communication by their English skills in addition to their mother tongues and basis of CQ from their personal background.

At the same time, these groups require more sensitive and efficient human resources management, because the higher the education level of local employees, the

easier it for them to relocate to another company. It is because of the fact that high-educated personnel have high self-esteem, independence and this can lead to resistance against the Korean corporate style. (Kang et al, 2017)

The empirical interview intends to reflect various workplace situations and inter-communication conflicts in both nationals. The examples listed above shows common conflict originated from cultural diversity. The different conceptualization toward face culture by each nation in the workplace can be a high potential source for causing conflict multi-dimensional conflicts regardless of the language of communication.

Expatriates and Thai workers attempted to deal with cultural differences with respect and utilization of their CQ. In addition, in the case of local recruitment of Koreans, most of them have experienced living in Thailand and are hired as Thai-speaking workers to help them understand and adapt to multicultural situations.

However, there are still un-translatable situations underlying in the context, which leads to conflict between two nationals failing to understand the different cultural value of the counterpart. For those participants who are expatriates or local Thai employees who do not have culturally specific knowledge might cause issues as they begin to work in a cross-cultural environment even though they have a certain level of cultural intelligence level from their previous background.

Both Korean expatriates and Thai employees regardless of their lack of language skill managed to naturally accumulate cultural knowledge using their cultural intelligence and utilize it in the workplace even without prior knowledge of the cultural specificity of whom they are working with.

However, as shown in the result above, this often seems to lead to misunderstandings and the conflict element remains unsolved because it stays on a personal level. Along with this, due to Thai's conflict avoiding tendency from 'Krengjai' culture made it hard to draw attention by management level.

To manage the cultural gap, commonly corporations hire Korean/Thai employees in the local entity, who have experienced living in Thailand with language proficiency. This positively contributes as an intermediary between two parties and

provides a bridge to multicultural situations. However, the number of employees is minimal and cannot cover all potential conflict at all times.

5.2 Recommendation

Earley and Erez highlighted the importance of understanding the cultural value of ineffective management practices (1996). According to Brett, Behfar, Kern, cultural challenges are manageable if managers and team members choose the right strategy and avoid imposing single culture-based approaches on multicultural situations. (2006) For those employees in cross-cultural environments, it is vital that both manager and team members understand the cultural aspects of counterparts.

Current attempts for localization have not been greatly emphasized except for the hiring process. During the interview, some of the expatriates mentioned that they had received a language course (Thai or English) before the relocation, however, the author could not find any regulatory practices for improving such situations in any of the nine corporations that these 15 employees are working.

Hence, cultural differences that frequently occur in the workplace forces workers to adapt themselves through experience and time. It is necessary to establish a formal system so that both sides can understand such cultural differences by creating a system of continuous education and communication.

In the past, frequently Korean corporations dealt with employee turnover with a 'take it or leave it' approach. Most employees including HR consider this as the 'Korean style' and let new employees either adapt it or leave. When employees want to resign, they try to incentivize them to stay by providing more financial benefits than other competitors rather than trying to solve the fundamental issues.

There are previous studies dealing with multiple individual identities. Studies proved that individuals in multinational corporations create their identities in various context. Recent discussions show people can feel a sense of belonging to various groups at the same time rather than only one. (Lewis & Sherman, 2003).

Zhang et al (2006) explained the dual identity through the case of local chief executives of overseas subsidiaries of multinational corporations. They showed a sense of the local national identity and the identity of the organization in which the company's headquarters are located at the same time.

Shin analyzed national identity as a social construct in multinational corporations from various angles, asserting that national identity plays a role in differentiating the culture of the mother country from other national cultures and that the degree of commitment to ethnic groups from multinational backgrounds tends to be strengthened. (2020)

Previous studies proved that CCT has a positive effect on cultivating employee's CQ by developing cross-cultural skills, behavior, adjustment, and this can lead to higher job performance. (Black, Mendenhall, 1990).

Global Korean corporations are constantly expanding their operations worldwide, and especially market penetration in Thailand is expecting high rates of growth in the long term.

Given the results derived from empirical interviews and research in the study, it is vital to understand the nuisance of cultural differences from an organization management's point of view, and a customized management system suitable for the local situation should be established. So far, this responsibility was on the individual level. Attempts to rectify cultural conflicts should not stay at the individual level but should be approached as a team and a company level.

For these Korean subsidiaries to mature and permanently settle in Thailand, it is a vital task for both headquarters and local HR to communicate actively and passing down to establish an HRM system considering cultural values of both host countries and subsidiaries would be necessary. Expanded implementation cultural approaches should be

reinforced in providing regulatory guidelines to prevent the potential cause of conflict throughout overall HRM including recruiting, training for onboarding and retentive, evaluation, organization management. By providing a comprehensive HRM for both nationalities, employees will gain a higher level of CQ to deal with problematic situations smoothly and build a healthier working culture ultimately.

More studies would be required to determine the conflicts between the expatriates with Korean local hired employees, to determine how we should approach these two types of expatriates from the different cultural background.

5.3 Limitation

In this study there were several limitations.

First, the duration of interviews was held in a short period of time starting from 14th March 2021 – 30th April 2021 with small number of respondents. Hence, further interviews with more respondents from diverse industries and numbers might be needed to gain the in dept insight into the issue. Multiple corporate cultures and characteristics depending on each industry were not implemented in the study.

Additionally, the later parts of the interviews were mostly held online due to covid-19 pandemic situations. This could lead to limited observation and rapport with respondents. Considering the national characteristics of Thai, it was an obstacle to investigate on such sensitive issue.

The study separated Korean employees based on their association to each entity. During the interview it seemed that there were cultural differences and conflict between Korean local hired employees and expatriates from the head office.

Because these studies focused on differences between the nationalities, these issues were not included in the findings.

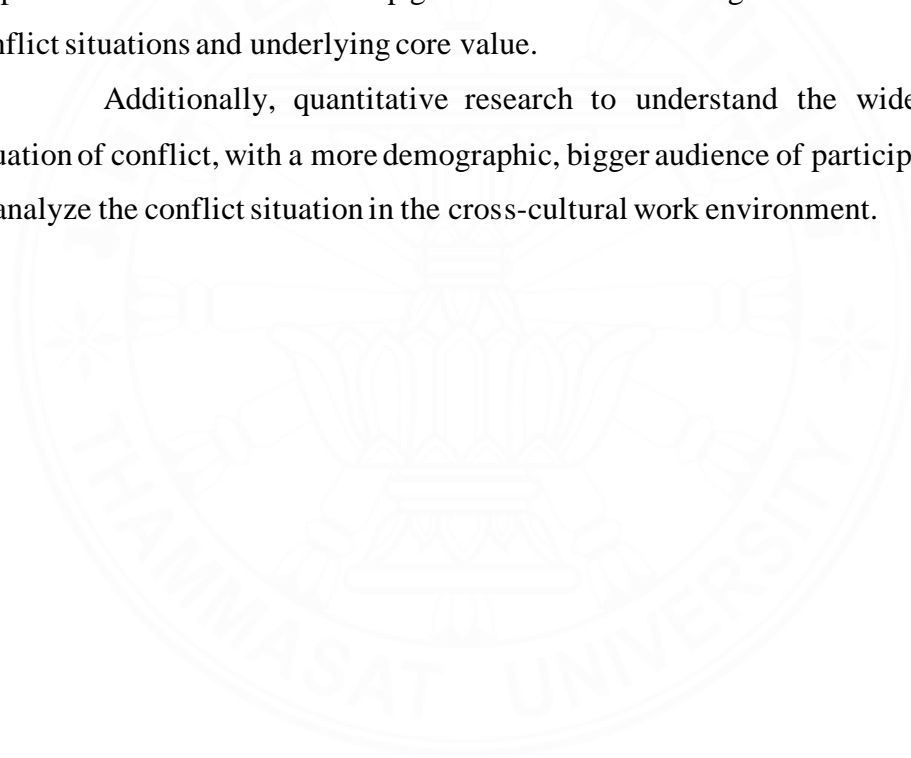
Most previous research did not separate these two types of expatriates, but there are also potential conflict derived from structure and communication. However, there are proven case studies done in localization in the US and China (Kim, 2013), focusing on

national identity of Korean Chinese employees. Considering that majority of Korean local hired employees grew up in Thailand as the second to the third generation of Korean-Thai immigrants, they have mixed ethnicity as a Korean but also share Thai characteristics. This suggests room for future localization research about the function of national identity and ethnicity in human resource management.

5.4 Direction for The Future Research

This study suggests the direction of future research to invest longer time for research to make sure that the interviewer builds a rapport with respondents. Building rapport with interviewees will help genuine answers and insights toward understanding the conflict situations and underlying core value.

Additionally, quantitative research to understand the wider and various situation of conflict, with a more demographic, bigger audience of participants would help to analyze the conflict situation in the cross-cultural work environment.



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