

# Hofstede's Dimensions of National Cultures Revisited: A Case Study of South Korea's Culture

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**Abstract.** In about thirty-five years since the first publication of Hofstede's (1991) study on the dimensions of national cultures, people all over the world have evolved in various directions and to various extents due to the phenomenon known as *globalization*. The present paper aims to investigate whether within this time span South Korea, a technically and economically developed country, whose way of life is strongly influenced by Confucianism, has complied with or resisted this phenomenon. The data that will be discussed have been collected from a Korean best seller (Shin's *Please Look After Mom*, 2012) that approximately covers the period in which Hofstede conducted his investigations on national cultures. Hopefully the findings will indicate that the deeply rooted values have remained almost the same, while the outer layers of culture (such as the symbols or rituals, also known as 'practices') have changed due to the influences exerted by the other important economic and cultural powers of the world (such as Japan, the United States or some of the European countries) Korea has come in touch with.

**Keywords:** cultural dimensions, changes, values, practices, Korean culture.

## 1. Introduction: Why Korea?

One may wonder why from all the countries in the world the one I have chosen to focus on in this paper is South Korea. There are several reasons for this choice. First, I have been living in this country for half a year now and in this short period of time I have experienced mixed feelings about it. When I arrived on the Global Campus of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, I thought I had been dropped in a deserted village: no shops, no restaurants, no huge buildings, just a couple of low, though modern-looking dormitories and school buildings scattered along the road that is winding through a forest. This was not at all what I had expected when I left Romania. But soon I came to visit the capital city, Seoul, which is breathtaking: the very sophisticated skyscrapers, the modern office buildings,

expensive brand shops, the crisscrossing highways, the hustle and bustle of the town, all made me feel I was in a different world. This was one of the many contrasts that Korea revealed to me and, at the same time, intrigued me.

The second reason for my choice is my interest in intercultural communication. This was my first encounter with an Asian culture and in my everyday interaction with the Korean students and strangers I have sensed a lot of differences between their way of thinking and behaving and mine. In my desire not to act improperly while living among Koreans, I started reading books about their culture, which helped me gain deeper insight into the history, customs and rituals, the education system, and economic growth which made this country one of the strongest in the world. Michael Breen is of the opinion the Koreans' "rise out of poverty into democratic capitalism is one of the inspirational themes of our age" (2014, ix). On the other hand, Tudor shows his admiration towards this country by saying that "quite simply, South Koreans have written the most unlikely and impressive story of nation building of the last century. For that reason alone, theirs deserves to be called 'the impossible country'" (2012, 10).

Thirdly, among the books I got hold of was the Korean best-seller *Please Look After Mom* written by a Hyung-Sook Shin, whose plot unfolds in two time periods: the first one closely following the Korean War (i.e the 1960s), while the second one is closer to the present (the 2000s). This is exactly the time span in which Korea grew from its ashes into a flourishing and strong economic power of the world.

The purpose of this paper is to bring to the fore some changes that the Korean culture underwent in this period of development, the framework of the analysis being Hofstede's (2010) cultural dimensions. The paper is structured as follows: the next section (section 2) contains an overview of the framework employed, which will be followed by a short presentation (section 3) of the book that constituted the main data base for the analysis. Section 4 revisits four of the six cultural dimensions put forward by Geert Hofstede, using data from the bestseller *Please Look After Mom* by Kyung-Sook Shin. In the last part of the paper some conclusions will be drawn on how this country has changed within a period of approximately thirty-five years.

## 2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

In this section I will provide an overview of Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures as they emerged from a series of studies beginning with the large-scale research project he carried out on the employees of the IBM subsidiaries in forty countries. As time went by, Hofstede extended his investigation to other countries and to people involved in other activities (such as students or commercial

airpilots), so that in the 2010 edition of his book *Cultures and Organizations. The Software of the Mind* a number of eighty-five countries were mentioned (Hofstede et al. 2010, 36). Though initially Hofstede came up with four dimensions, namely *power distance*, *masculinity*, *collectivity*, and *uncertainty avoidance*, two other dimensions, *long term orientation* and *indulgence vs. restraint*, emerged from the investigation of the people in the East, in an attempt to account for the differences in thinking between the eastern and the western world. Hofstede defines the dimension as “an aspect of culture that can be measured relative to other cultures” (2010, 31), all the cultures he investigated being characterised by a score along each of the dimensions. Let us now have a closer look at the dimensions, so as to have a better understanding of the Korean culture, bearing in mind the fact that they are reflected in all aspects of life, starting with the family, continuing with the school, the workplace and the society, as a whole.

The first dimension, *power distance*, can be defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede et al. 2010, 61 and <http://geert-hofstede.com/>). South Korea's score on the cultural scale of Hofstede's analysis is 60. This means that in comparison with other countries, such as Austria, where the power distance index is low (wealth is distributed equally among the members of the country), in South Korea there seems to be a gap between the rich and the poor people, as well as a hierarchy of social positions which the Koreans have to respect very strictly, as we shall see in section 4 of the paper.

*Individualism* has to do with the relationship between individual persons or with the extent to which individuals are integrated into groups. In the individualistic cultures, the ties between individuals are loose, which means that everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his/her immediate family, while “in collectivistic societies, in which most of the world's population still lives, one conceives as oneself much more as belonging to a community, whether this be ethnic, regional, or national, and one's sense of identity derives mainly from that group affiliation” (Hofstede et al. 2010, 23). Korea, with a score of 18, classifies as a collectivistic culture in which the family, the school, and the institutions encourage *sharing* of food, of feelings, of places. The Korean culture is characterized by the concept of *jeong* “a bond that exists between people, and gives them a sense of mutual destiny” (Tudor 2014, 10).

*Masculinity* is related to the way in which roles are distributed between genders. In masculine cultures the social roles played by men and women are quite different: the former are expected to be the breadwinners, to be tough and protective of their families, while women have to focus more on the house chores, to look after the children and to create a pleasant family atmosphere. In feminine cultures the social gender roles are not so distinct, which means that house

chores and child-rearing can be carried out by either sex. South Korea's score on this dimension is 39, which places it in the category of feminine cultures. Japan, on the other hand, which geographically is very close to Korea, has the highest masculinity index (95).

The fourth dimension, *uncertainty avoidance*, indicates the level of comfort with unfamiliar or ambiguous situations, in which such situations are novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual. In Hofstede's terms, *uncertainty avoidance* can be defined as "*extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations*" (Hofstede et al. 2010, 191, emphasis in the original). If this is the case, these people will feel more comfortable and less stressed if certain rules exist according to which they have to act. Korea's uncertainty avoidance index is 85 (much higher than that of Germany – 65 or Austria – 60, two countries known for their keenness on exactity).

Two other dimensions, *long-term orientation* (Hofstede 1991) and *indulgence* were added later, when researchers realized that some of the findings related mainly to the Asian countries could not be accounted for in terms of the previous four, due to the strong influence of Confucianism, "a set of pragmatic rules for daily life derived from Chinese history" (Hofstede et al. 2010, 237). The former refers to the people's preference for fostering values for the future (long-term orientation) or for the past and present (short-term orientation). The latter stands "for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun,"<sup>1</sup> as opposed to restraint that characterizes societies in which people's actions could be restrained by social norms, where enjoying life could lead to a feeling of guilt.

For reasons of space, only the original four cultural dimensions will be approached in the present paper.

### 3. The Data: Kyung-Sook Shin's Novel *Please Look After Mom*

The data I have employed for the present study have been excerpted from a book that was first published in 2008, entitled *엄마를 부탁해 Please Look After Mom*.<sup>2</sup> This novel has been a best seller both in South Korea, as well as all over the world, being translated in a number of languages, including Romanian.<sup>3</sup> For this novel,

1 <http://geerthofstede.nl/dimensions-of-national-cultures>

2 The fragments I have excerpted for analysis come from the 2012 Vintage Books edition.

3 The book has been translated into Romanian by a distinguished professor and colleague of mine, Oum Tae-Hyun, at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Korea, whom I am very grateful for sharing his work with me.

the author, Kyung-Sook Shin was awarded the “Man Asian Literary Prize,” being the first woman to receive such a prize. The plot of the story focuses on a family with 5 grown-up children, in which the mother, suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, is accidentally left behind on the subway platform at Seoul Station and is searched for by her entire family. Making use of her still existent long-term memory, the Mother,<sup>4</sup> who is completely helpless, starts looking for places where her children had once lived. Each of these places triggers flashbacks related to all the roles she played in her past life: as a wife, mother, sister-in-law, neighbour, and friend. The unfolding of plot is interrupted by flashbacks of each and every family member. The first-person flashback technique employed by the authoress brings to light aspects of the Korean society. This enabled me to find out how the Korean culture changed from the generation of the parents, who were young people after the Korean war (1950–1953) to that of their children, who are adults in present-day Korea, i.e. in a time span of about thirty-forty years, along the dimensions suggested by Hofstede (1991, 2010).

The reason why I have chosen this particular book for the present paper is twofold: on the one hand, I wanted to get a glimpse into Korean literature, as Romanian or English translations of it are not very accessible in Romania; on the other hand, by reading this book I came to understand the driving force that has radically changed Korea in the past fifty years.

The research questions that guided my analysis are as follows: a) what aspects of life have changed in Korea between the 1960s and the present moment? b) which cultural dimension has been more affected by the passing of time? c) what is people’s attitude toward the changes? With these questions in mind, let us now proceed with the analysis of the available data.

## **4. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Revisited in South Korea**

As mentioned previously, the Korean culture is very much influenced by Confucianism, a philosophy or religion that stemmed from China and spread over most of Asia. “At its heart is a belief that humans are improvable through cultivation and moral action, and that collectively, a harmonious society can be created when all members fulfill certain obligations” (Tudor 2014, 78). Confucius was of the opinion that people should act with virtue, empathy and justice. At the same time, he also encouraged them to learn from their ancestors. He taught an attitude toward one’s fellow humans of respect, particularly respect for one’s parents, teachers, and

4 I will capitalize the word in keeping with the English text and also for the sake of highlighting the importance of this character in the book.

elders. In his mind, he envisaged a strict hierarchy between family members (father-son, husband-wife, older brother – younger brother). The dependence relationships shape not only the family life of modern Korea, but the society as a whole.

The teachings of Confucius are still very much respected in current Korea. This is obvious especially in what the dimension of *collectivism* is concerned. Unlike the Western cultures, which, according to Hofstede's framework, are individualistic, Asian cultures are characterised by collectivism. What this means is that the family and the community, in general, play an important role in someone's life. The Koreans cherish 'jeong' (a feeling of affection or attachment) for their close families, neighbours and friends. "Koreans who live together with their acquaintances believe that sharing happiness and sadness together is a virtue" (Nam 2014, 104). This living together and sharing everything is very nicely depicted in Shin's book in a number of instances. Thus, when one of the characters (i.e. one of the adult daughters of the family) recounts her childhood, she mentions the fact that they used to share the same room for sleeping: "It was the way they used to sleep in the large room at home, rolling around as much as they pleased" (Shin 2012, 108).

As each of the five children grew up and settled down, the relationships in the family loosened. The only moments when they still got together was when they celebrated their parents' birthdays, and, sadly, when they started searching for their missing mother.

Currently, the drive for *sharing* seems to characterize the older generation rather than the young one. In the early 60s, when Korea was extremely poor, people could hardly make ends meet. Food was very scarce and women had to ration it. But even so, if other members of the community were in a worse situation, the ones who were better off would share the little they had, no matter if the relationship between people was tensed or if the person in need was a mere stranger. The main character of the book, the Mother, was once coming from the mill with a barrel of flour on her head. A stranger riding a bike saw her and offered to help her by carrying the barrel on his bike, promising to deposit it in her village, near the convenience store. As the barrel was quite heavy, the woman consented to have her burden transported by the stranger, but much to her disappointment, he fled with the flour. Desperate that she would not be able to feed her five children, the woman searched for the wrongdoer and eventually found him in a terrible situation: with a blind mother, a famished three-year-old child, and a wife in child-labour. Instead of scolding the man, the Mother tried to help the ones in need:

I'd come to retrieve the basin you'd stolen. Instead, I grabbed a pot off the wall in the dark and narrow kitchen. I heated water in it. I pushed you aside, since you did not know what to do [...] and I held your wife's hand [...]. I delivered the baby and scooped some flour from my basin and made dough

for dough-flake soup and laddled it into a few bowls and put some broth into the room where the baby's mother was. (Shin 2012, 221)

When her own children grew to be independent and left the family house to move into the city, the Mother started sharing her food with the children of a poor family in her village, so that these little souls came to treat her as their grandmother:

"They must be so hungry to do that. It's not like before, when things were difficult for us... It's nice to have them around, it's not as lonely."

After the girls started to come for meals, your wife would, even in the morning, cook an eggplant dish and steam mackerel. When your children visited from Seoul with fruit and cake, she saved the treats until the girls poked their heads through the gate, around four in the afternoon. (Shin 2012, 158; ellipsis in the original)

Nowadays, the sharing of food may still be encountered at various official gatherings, but not so much among strangers. This is due to the fact that families have been torn apart by the development of the country: many people from the countryside, who had been encouraged by their parents to study, left for big cities and, after graduation, they never returned home, choosing instead a life among strangers. Due to the extremely long hours of work, the members of the new Korean generation keep postponing having a family of their own, many of them living alone. Also for the same reason, they do not have the opportunity of visiting family members and sharing with them food or affection. So in this respect, we sense a slight change along the collectivism-individualism scale, Korea moving towards its latter extreme.

The collective culture of Korea was and is still driven by the notion of *embarrassment* or *shame*. Koreans feel profound shame for any failings. A fragment from Shin's novel which highlights this feature is related to the Parents' Day, celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May. On this day children usually offer their parents a carnation which they pin onto their chests. But as the life of the adult children has become more and more strenuous in present-day Korea, many of them frequently forget about this celebration, as it is also the case of the five children in the novel under consideration:

On Parents' Day in May, years ago, none of the children called. Your wife went to the stationery store in town and bought two carnation buds, each tied to a ribbon that said: "Thank you for giving me life and raising me." She found you standing by the new road and urged you to come home. You followed her home. She persuaded you to come inside and lock the door, then



pinned a carnation to the front of your jacket. “What would people say if we went around without a flower pinned to our clothes, when everyone knows how many children we have? That’s why I bought these.” (Shin 2012, 136–137)

The fragment above illustrates not only the hidden pain of the Mother for not being remembered by her children on such a special occasion, but it also highlights that if the other members of the community perceived that you did not meet their expectations, this could be grounds for deep shame. This may well have been valid for the parents in Shin’s novel, who had been brought up in a time when trespassing led to shame and loss of face for self, but not for their adult children, who due to their busy schedule, are incapable of performing the expected duties. This change of attitude is also reflected in the fact that the younger daughter of the family, who is a well-known writer, lives with a man without being married to him. In her parents’ youth, this would have shamed the family, as in a community that treasures family bonds, living together ‘in sin’ was very much disapproved of. As more and more young Koreans choose not to marry, people have become more tolerant with such couples.

Collectivism in South Korea may also translate into a form of “herd mentality” which is reflected in the way parents encourage and support their children in receiving the best education possible and in getting them involved in a sport that brought Korea in top ranks, namely golf. Nam mentions the fact that “after Park Seri won a golf tournament in 1998, many parents started to teach golf to their children. And in 2013, five of the top golfers on the American LPGA were Korean women” (2014, 168).

Education and golf are strongly related to another cultural dimension, namely *power distance*. In Korea, just like anywhere in the world, golf is quite an expensive sport and it is basically the rich that practice it. In *Please Look After Mom*, the eldest child, Hyeong-chold, who became the marketing director of an estate agent, had to “spend Sundays accompanying CEOs or other directors to the golf courses in Sokcho or Hoengsong” (Shin 2013, 58). But how did the society come to be divided into rich and poor? After the Korean war, the “South Korean society was surprisingly level [...], almost no one had any money or major social advantage over the rest” (Tudor 2012, 206). But in the 1980s and 1990s the gap between the classes widened, so that today there are many poor people and also a lot of ‘nouveau riches.’ The latter, like in many parts of the world, set a bad example for the rest of the society in that they started showing off. Hong recounts that “these vulgar nouveau riches rose up from among us and started showing up at the fish market in mink coats” (2014, 23). At the same time, company executives are laughed out if, when they come to a restaurant to meet their colleagues, they show up in cars they drive themselves, rather than by a chauffeur. So, having a chauffeur, nowadays, seems to have become a professional necessity.



In an attempt to help their children get rich and happy, parents would encourage them to study, not sparing anything for fulfilling this aim. This trend began in the 1960s, when people realized the importance of education in one's life, which led to the world's greatest education fever. The Mother in Shin's novel managed to send all her children to school, herself having received no education whatsoever. She would sacrifice everything so that her children should not experience the feeling of shame and uselessness she felt due to the fact that she did not have the chance to study. Thus, she sold the only piece of jewelry she had in order to get the money for the school fee of her children, as illustrated in the fragment below: "Around the time the fee for middle school was due, the gold ring that used to be on Mom's left middle finger, her sole piece of jewelry, disappeared from her hand. Only the groove on her finger, etched by many years of wearing the band, was left behind" (Shin 2012, 43). The Mother even tried to help her youngest brother-in-law, Kyun, a diligent and motivated pupil, to continue his education, only to encounter the resistance of her husband and of her sister-in-law. Just like for her own children, she would have sold anything they were left with, such as the garden, so that her brother-in-law could pursue his dream. But this idea made her sister-in-law reproach to her "You are going to ruin this family!" (Shin 2012, 126) and triggered the rage of her husband who sent her back to her home village.<sup>5</sup> Her failure in doing this made her experience a feeling of shame and guilt until the end of her life. Harmony in Confucianism meant that "all members of society must play their proper role and fulfill the duties that came with that role" (Tudor 2012, 220). Only that the main character in the novel failed to see that the role she assumed for herself at a certain moment in her life (that of a benefactor) was in contradiction with that attributed to her by her husband and her sister-in-law (a prodigal aiming to destroy the harmony in the family).

Sometimes the Koreans' unforgiveness of failure may lead to suicidal acts. Having been denied the chance to continue his education by his own siblings, Kyun left the village to try to find a job in another place, not to be a burden for his brother's family and to save their face. But after four years, he returned to the village, defeated and ashamed of the fact that he had failed in his attempts and committed suicide. Nowadays, the rate of suicide among young people has increased tremendously due to the fact that many fail to adapt to the education system and decide to drop out of school, which casts shame on their families (Nam 2014).

All the struggle for education is due to the fact that it means entry into prestige class, and, implicitly, social advancement. Moreover, in Korea, education plays an important role not only in an individual's face, but also in one's family's face.

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5 In Korea, when a woman marries, she becomes part of her husband's family and has to obey the orders of her in-laws. Until the 1990s, Korean women were not permitted to take decisions on behalf of the family. In case of a divorce, the wife was not entitled to the division of the family's property, while the children were granted to the father's custody (Hong 2014). Things changed within two decades: in 2012, South Korea elected its first female president, Park Geun-hye.

Power distance in the family is also reflected in the fact that parents teach children obedience, while children have to treat their parents with respect. But education in present-day Korea seems to have counter-effects, in that the young generation tends to have less respect for parents. An illustration of this attitude was provided above, in connection with the Parents' Day; another example is the dialogue below between Mother and her youngest daughter, the writer, who out of the five children of the family seems to be the non-conformist one:

"You weren't like this before, but you've become cold. If your mother hangs up like that, you're supposed to call her back. How could you dig in your heels?" It wasn't that you had been stubborn; you hadn't had time to think about it for that long. [...] "*Are all educated people like this?*" (Shin 2012, 54–55, emphasis mine)

In what concerns the *masculinity* dimension in South Korea, this is also related to Confucianism. The original idea of this philosophy was that the man and the woman each had a certain role, "but their relationship was not supposed to be top-down; originally they were on equal footing" (Hong 2014, 69–70). Until the fifteenth century, Korean women enjoyed equal rights with men in that they could be head of the households. But later on, Korea turned Confucianism into some kind of political tool and, thus, women seemed to have been attributed an inferior status: while women were very young, the parents decided on everything, when they got married, it was their husbands who decided on everything. This was still the state of affairs in the 1950s or 1960s.

In the second half of the previous century, the Korean culture was classified by Hofstede as a feminine one: people were traditionally characterized as being supportive, caring and relationship oriented. They still cared for the relationship with the community they lived in and even for the relationship with their deceased. The latter was due to Confucianism, too, according to which ancestors had to be worshipped at least twice a year (i.e. at Chuseok, the Korean equivalent of the American Thanksgiving, and at Seollal, the lunar new year). This implies families visiting gravesites and conducting rituals (like burning incense and bowing in front of the tombs, women having to bow twice as many times as men), after which they would lay out food and eat in front of the tombs, acting as if the dead were eating with them. While the Father in the novel, a man who left the family without a word, would return home for the ancestral rites, "as if this was printed in his genetic code" (Shin 2012, 102), his adult children nowadays, instead of paying respect to the ancestors at the gravesite, prefer to take advantage of the free days granted by the government on such occasions and spend them with their own family members (i.e. the nuclear family) either at home or, in most of the cases, travelling, as illustrated by the fragment below:

The Full Moon Harvest holiday is several days long. The media reports every time that this year more people were going abroad during the holiday than ever before. Until a couple of years ago, people criticized those who went abroad during the holiday, but now people blatantly say, "Ancestors, I'll be back," and go to the airport. When people started to hold ancestral rites in time-share vacation condos, they worried whether the ancestral spirits would be able to find them, but now people just hop on planes. (Shin 2012, 107)

Nowadays Korea seems more a masculine culture, whose dominant values are material success, competition, and progress. There is no wonder that people of this country strive for a better and more prosperous life considering the nation's poverty some fifty years ago. This determined a competitive edge among people, starting from school, continuing through university education, workplace and family. The outcome of this competition is that present-day Koreans are more ego-oriented, trying to outperform their opponents. This goes hand in hand with their tendency of becoming more individualistic. The novel under consideration provides an example in this respect in connection with the eldest son, Hyong-Chol, who in his capacity of marketing director of an estate agent's had to place a large number of apartments. In his endeavour he makes use of promotional presents that touched a sensitive spot of his customers, in contradiction with a fellow employee, who was less successful:

His co-worker, Kim, who was usually respectful and polite, made a subtle dig after a few drinks, pronouncing him 'clever'. At work, Hyong-chol was in charge of the sale of the apartments near Songdo, in Incheon, and Kim oversaw the sale of the apartments near Yongin. Kim's remark referred to Hyong-chol's idea of giving out concert tickets as promotional gifts for the people coming to the model home. [...] Everybody liked his suggestion of a cultural gift [...]. His apartments in Songdo had almost all sold, whereas the occupancy rate of Kim's Yongin apartments stood at only 60 percent. (Shin 2012, 92–93)

Another feature that makes Korea more a masculine rather than a feminine culture is people's tendency to *live in order to work*. I do not think there is another country in the world where people spend so much time in the office or school than in Korea.

Today's South Koreans live busy lives. They work the longest hours in the OECD, and most women – who were expected to stay at home until perhaps one generation ago – are now part of the work force. Competition makes adults toil away in offices all day long and forces their children to study

around the clock. Most people simply lack the time to visit relatives often. (Tudor, 2012, 260)

This idea is also revealed in the novel in connection with three of the Mother's children, the eldest son (the manager of an estate agent's), her eldest daughter (a pharmacist who runs her own chemist shop and looks after her family of four), and her youngest daughter (a famous writer, who is invited to various professional events not only in her country, but also abroad). Women in present-day Korea are not simply satisfied with being housewives (*jubu*), but strive to be equal to men in many respects, even if this places a heavier burden on their shoulders. On the other hand, if thirty-forty years ago, men simply wanted to marry a housewife, nowadays they want to marry someone "with a strong educational background and a decent career" (Tudor 2012, 197). So, along this dimension, Korea has changed from a feminine into a more masculine culture.

With respect to the fourth dimension, *uncertainty avoidance*, South Korea's index score (87) shows that its people feel threatened or uncomfortable in ambiguous situations. In these circumstances, they may sometimes be impulsive and impatient. An illustration of the behaviour of Koreans in uncertain situations is the behaviour of two of the Mother's children (the eldest son's and the youngest daughter's) when they realize that they may never see their beloved mother again. In an argument he has with his wife, Kyong-chol somehow blames her for not being more involved in the search for his mother and for not sharing his feeling of loss:

"Do we all just stop doing what we do because Mother isn't here?"

"She is missing, not 'is not here.'"

"So what do you want me to do? You yourself go to work!"

"What?" He picks up a golf club from the corner and is about to hurl it across the room.

"Hyong-chol!" Father is standing at the open door. (Shin 2012, 128)

The same impulsive attitude characterizes the Mother's youngest daughter, Chi-hon, who is intrigued by her eldest brother's apparent lack of consideration for their missing mother, in that he goes to play golf. She started shouting at him, blaming him that he had given up the hope of finding Mother. "You saw your brother get out of the car with his golf clubs and screamed, 'You asshole!' [...] You grabbed his clubs and threw them on the ground" (Shin 2012, 263–264).

Impulsiveness and impatience, but also activeness are contained in the Korean expression 'palli, palli.' The *palli, palli* culture is related to the Korean's ambition to have an accomplished life, which, in the long run, would also enable a rapid economic growth of the country. Despite the fact that the *palli, palli* culture is the driving force behind Korea's development, there are also disadvantages related

to it, in that people do not find the patience to listen to the others' problems, sorrows or achievements as they seem to be in a rat race without end.

## 5. Conclusions

As the analysis revealed, the Korean culture, just like most of the cultures of the world, has been influenced by globalization. Shin (2006) stressed the fact that "the paradox of globalization in South Korea is the existence of two (seemingly) contradictory trends: the co-existence between a 'nationalist appropriation of globalization' and an 'intensification of ethnic/national identity' in reaction to globalization" (quoted in Marinescu 2014, 2). All aspects of life have undergone changes starting with the family, moving on to the educational system and the society as a whole.

Out of the four dimensions that have been investigated, the one that has been most affected by the passing of time is collectivism. The people of current Korea, who have busy schedules and who live in "cookie-cutter apartments" (Tudor 2012, 189), do not even know their next-door neighbours. This shows they feel less inclined to provide mutual support to each other. This may also be due to the fact that the wealth they so much desire destroys their relationships. At the same time, the culture of *jeong* seems to be weakening. Older Koreans, especially the ones living in Seoul, would say that the younger generation is cold and individualistic, or even Westernized (this was reflected in the loose relationships between the adult children and the old parents of the novel, especially of those of the youngest daughter, who travelled abroad extensively). Individualism is also triggered by the heightened competition between individuals, by the Koreans' need to outdo others, starting at school, then in professional exams, and later at the workplace, becoming thus ego-oriented rather than collectivity-oriented. Also affected is the masculine-feminine dimension, Korea becoming little by little a masculine culture, in which women tend to have jobs that used to be done by men, and, as such, have less time to interact with their extended families. The least affected of the four dimensions seems to be uncertainty avoidance; the reason for it could be the fact that this was the driving power that propelled Korea among the top advanced countries in the world.

With respect to the third research question, related to the Koreans' attitude towards the changes, I would dare say that many of them disapprove of the tendency of the young generation to be less respectful towards the elder people and also lament the decline of the large family and its replacement with the nuclear one, made up of two parents and one or two children. "It is a development they see as part of the general decline of social unity and *jeong* in today's urban South Korea. Old people arguably lost the most from the rise of

the nuclear family: between 1975 and 1996, the percentage of the elderly living in an ‘elderly-only household’ rose from 7 percent to 53 percent, according to government statistics” (Tudor 2012, 261). These changes had, nevertheless, some advantages, especially for young women. In the past, apart from being responsible for the house-chores and the raising of children, Korean wives had to comply with the demands of their in-laws (as was the case of the Mother and her sister-in-law). They were also the ones to organize the rituals for the ancestors. Nowadays, as at Chuseaok and Seollal most Koreans choose to travel abroad, women do not have to do that any longer.

As Tudor nicely puts it, “a fundamental fact about this country is that it has an immense capacity for change. Because of this, a statement about life in Korea that is true at a particular moment may become completely false far sooner than can be predicted” (2012, 266).

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