

Superordinate Identity in *Zainichi* Koreans (Koreans Living in Japan)

JungHui Lee
Kanagawa Dental University, Japan

Tomoko Tanaka
Okayama University, Japan

Abstract

In this study, we elucidated the mechanism leading to “freedom”, which represents superordinate identity in *Zainichi* Koreans; that is, they are not constrained by a fixed ethnic or host identity. For instance, freedom was represented by labels such as “citizen of Earth” or “individual”, rather than predetermined group categories. During adolescence, many *Zainichi* Koreans experience an identity crisis, whereby they identify themselves as both Korean and Japanese, or neither Korean nor Japanese. These individuals develop an alternative identity involving freedom, which favors neither the ethnicity nor the host. We conducted a questionnaire survey involving 184 *Zainichi* Koreans. The results of the path and correlation analysis showed that younger age, greater conflict, and lower levels of discrimination were directly associated with freedom. Discrimination exerted a significant effect on conflict ($\beta = .31, p < .001$), and conflict significantly enhanced freedom ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). These findings indicate that respondents who reported greater perceived discrimination experienced more conflict and, therefore, greater freedom. Freedom was not correlated with positive or negative aspects of mental health, but conflict was correlated with depression. In addition, if this conflict continues, individuals could become prone to depression. These results suggest that as a superordinate identity, freedom maybe used as a strategy to overcome conflicts resulting from identity-related confusion between predetermined ethnic categories in immigrants living in a majority host society.

Keywords: conflict, discrimination, identity, immigrant, Japan, mental health, *Zainichi* Koreans

A new concept of freedom as a superordinate identity – such as those in which one is considered a human being or a citizen of earth, which involves an independent lifestyle distinct from those bound to a Korean or Japanese identity – has recently attracted the attention of *Zainichi* Koreans (Korean immigrants in Japan). However, the mechanisms underlying freedom and its relationship with mental health remain unclear.

Fukuoka (1993) reported that large numbers of people from the Korean Peninsula were conscripted into the Japanese army during the Japanese colonial period between 1910 and 1945, and approximately 2,300,000 Koreans lived in Japan at the end of World War II. In 1991, Japan granted legal status as *Tokubetsu Eijusha* (special permanent residents) to Korean and Taiwanese people (and their descendants), who had settled in Japan before the end of World War II and lost their Japanese nationality because of the San Francisco Peace Treaty (Kim & Yun, 2005). Of these individuals, 99 percent were from the Korean Peninsula (Ministry of Justice, 2010). *Tokubetsu Eijusha* differ from the general *Eijusha* (general permanent residents), and the residential status of *Tokubetsu Eijusha* in Japan represents a colony of immigrants. Although individuals who have residential status as *Tokubetsu Eijusha* of Koreans are called *Zainichi* South/North Koreans, this group is referred to as *Zainichi* Koreans (including both South and North Koreans) in the current study.

Perceived Discrimination, Conflict, and Freedom as an Alternative Identity in *Zainichi* Koreans

Fukuoka (1993) posited that many young *Zainichi* Koreans perceived discrimination or prejudice from Japanese people and experienced identity-related confusion (e.g. “I cannot decide whether I should live as a Korean or Japanese person”), and the distinct social category, *Zainichi* Korean, involved unavoidable inner conflict. Similarly, Mori (2002) found that *Zainichi* Koreans felt torn between the two national boundaries, as the Japanese society discriminated against the *Zainichi* Korean identity. *Zainichi* Koreans’ conflict between the two identities maybe considered to occur because the *Zainichi* Korean social category was created via discriminative attitudes in the host Japanese society, which formed the foundation of Hypothesis 1.

In the current study, the term conflict was used to describe the feeling of identity-related confusion between two cultures or groups. *Zainichi* Koreans’ uncertain position, which occurred because they are of both Korean and Japanese or neither Korean nor Japanese ethnicity, could have created an alternative identity that extends their identities as Korean or Japanese individuals. For instance, *Zainichi* Koreans perceive themselves as individuals (Fukuoka, 1993) or “global citizens” (Fukuoka, 1993) rather than Korean or Japanese people. Tsujimoto et al. (1994) posited that Koreans of the second or later generations constituted a new species, and the Young People Association of Korean Residents in Japan (2012) reported that narratives of *Zainichi* Koreans included, we *Zainichi* Koreans are neither Korean nor Japanese, but rather, we have something above them. In addition, Harajiri (1989) found that rather than relinquishing their Korean nationality, *Zainichi* Koreans who acquired Japanese citizenship experienced doubt regarding who they were; accordingly, they began to use the terms “cosmopolitan” and “free person” in describing their identities. From this perspective, we may conclude that an alternative identity that is not constrained by fixed ethnic categories may emerge in *Zainichi* Koreans. However, the process underlying the alternative identity remains unclear.

Therefore, the current study sought to determine whether individuals who overcame conflicts between the two social groups ultimately obtained freedom in an alternative identity, which formed the foundation of Hypothesis 2. We labeled this phenomenon as freedom, which was defined as a superordinate identity that was not bound to a fixed ethnic or host identity, whereby individuals perceive themselves as individuals or residents of Earth, without national boundaries.

Goals and Hypotheses

The purpose of the study was to elucidate the mechanism underlying freedom as a superordinate identity in *Zainichi* Koreans, and examine its relationship with mental health. The study hypotheses were as follows:

- (H1) Discrimination will exert a positive effect on conflict.
- (H2) Conflict will exert a positive effect on freedom.
- (H3) Discrimination will exert a positive effect on freedom (the rationale for this hypothesis was that previous studies indicated that people with “individual orientation” seek freedom from discrimination in the host society and tend to migrate to other countries; Im, 2001).
- (H4) Young age will have a positive effect on freedom (the rationale for this was that the younger generation of *Zainichi* Koreans attaches a greater value to individuality relative to the older generation; Lee, 2011).
- (H5) Age will be positively associated with discrimination (based on a previous research; Fukuoka, 1993).
- (H6) Freedom will be positively related to mental health (as the concept of freedom implies liberation from predetermined ethnic categories).

Methods

Sample and Data Collection

Participants included 184 *Zainichi* Koreans (93 men and 91 women) aged between 20 and 83 ($M = 47.6$, $SD = 16.9$) years. Most participants (92.4 percent) were of second or later generations, and their ancestors had a voluntary or compulsory immigration history related to Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula.

It was very difficult to recruit *Zainichi* Koreans living in Japan for participation in the study. The reason for this difficulty could have been that *Zainichi* Koreans from the Korean Peninsula concealed their Korean ethnicity and used Japanese, rather than Korean, names to avoid discrimination in Japanese society (Song, 2001). Fortunately, recruitment of *Zainichi* Korean participants for the present study was possible with the help of a South Korea-oriented association known as *Mindan* in Japan, as the primary investigator taught the Korean language there and was familiar with the staff at the *Mindan* in Okayama, a western area of Japan.

We recruited our sample ($N = 184$) from two sources. Some participants were recruited with the assistance of the Okayama *Mindan*, which holds an event on August 15 each year to memorialize and celebrate Japan’s release of the colonization of the Korean Peninsula (1910–1945). The principal investigator visited this event and distributed 200 questionnaires; of these, 107 (54 percent) were returned.

Data were collected with the assistance of the *Mindan* in Osaka, another western area of Japan, through a referral provided by the Okayama *Mindan* staff. Questionnaires and prepaid return

envelopes were distributed via mail. The Osaka region was selected in order to recruit approximately 200 participants at the Okayama event, as it is an occasion in which numerous Koreans gather at a single location, but only 107 surveys were returned. In addition, the Osaka region contains the highest number of *Zainichi* Koreans, relative to those in other areas, and as it is geographically close to Okayama, the two *Mindan* leaders were familiar with each other. Therefore, it was easy to obtain a referral from the Okayama community. Of the 200 questionnaires sent to the Osaka *Mindan*, 77 (39 percent) were returned. Participants were provided with a document that described the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality of their personal information and responses. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary. The questionnaire was administered in Japanese.

Measures

All of the items were measured using Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The measurement tools are described below.

Freedom. Five items were used to measure freedom as a superordinate identity. The choice of items was based on the results of previous sociological studies (Fukuoka, 1993; Kim, 1999), and Lee and Tanaka's (2010) psychological study involving *Zainichi* Koreans. The items measured the extent to which respondents understood their self-concepts or values beyond fixed national and cultural boundaries (e.g. "I am no one but me. Nationality is of secondary importance").

Conflict. The extent to which the participants experienced identity-related confusion between the Korean and Japanese ethnicities was measured using five items. Three items were taken from a study conducted by Lee and Tanaka (2017), and two were created specifically for the study (e.g. "I do not feel that I can completely identify with either Korean or Japanese ethnicity").

Perceived Discrimination. Based on the results of Berry and Sabatier's (2010) study, we used two items to examine individual-level and group-level discrimination. These items measured the degree to which the participants perceived discrimination from the majority of people or wider society (i.e. "Japanese people discriminate against me because I am *Zainichi* Korean" was used to measure individual-level discrimination; and "Japanese society discriminates against the *Zainichi* Korean ethnic community" was used to measure group-level discrimination).

Mental health. Although many previous studies have focused on the negative factors and measured depression, loneliness, and mental disorder as the indicators of mental health, the current study measured both positive and negative aspects of mental health to examine it from a broader perspective.

Depression. Depression was measured using seven items from the Depressive Tendencies scale developed by Sam and Berry (1995). Cronbach's α for the scale was .90 in the current study.

Happiness. Happiness was measured using 12 items from the Subjective Well-Being Scale developed by Ito, Sagara, Ikeda, and Kawaura (2003). Cronbach's α for the scale was .85 in the current study.

Data Analysis

SPSS was used to perform descriptive analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and correlation analysis, to confirm the underlying assumptions for path analysis. Path analysis was then performed using AMOS to examine the relationships between the variables included in the proposed model and clarify the dynamic mechanisms underlying freedom.

Results

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample. The proportions of men (51 percent) and women (49 percent) were similar. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 83 years, and their mean age was 47.6 years ($SD = 16.9$ years). The number of middle-aged people (aged 40–59 years) was higher relative to those of younger (aged 20–39 years) and elderly (aged 60–80 years) people. Most participants were of second or later generations (93 percent) and Korean nationality (93 percent). More than two-thirds of participants were married (64.7 percent), and approximately one-third (32.9 percent) had been educated to college level or higher.

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Sex	Male	93	50.5
	Female	91	49.5
Age (years)	20–29	39	21.2
	30–39	31	16.8
	40–49	23	12.5
	50–59	38	20.7
	60–69	35	19.0
	70–85	18	9.8
Generation	First	8	4.3
	Second	85	46.2
	Third	80	43.5
	Fourth	5	2.7
	Data missing	6	3.3
Marital status	Married	61	64.7
	Unmarried	119	33.2
	Data missing	4	2.2
Nationality	Korean	8	93.5
	Japanese	172	4.3
	Data missing	4	2.2
Education	High school level or lower	101	55.8
	Some college	76	30.7
	College level or higher	4	2.2
	Data missing	3	1.6

Table 1: Participants' demographic characteristics.

Factor Analysis Results

As freedom could be related to conflict in *Zainichi* Koreans, 10 items from the two subscales were entered into the exploratory factor analysis simultaneously. In the final factor analysis, nine of the 10 initial items were retained, and two factors were generated (Table 2). Five items

that were loaded onto Factor 1 reflected a sense of self that extended beyond Korea or Japan, providing a global sense of values. Therefore, we labeled this factor “freedom”, which was defined as a superordinate identity that was not constrained by predetermined ethnic categories (Korean or Japanese) and represented resistance to such categories, indicating a desire for alternatives. Cronbach’s α for the scale was .70, and the model explained 22.6 percent of the variance in freedom. Four items were loaded onto factor 2. We labeled this factor “conflict”, which was defined as the experience of feeling torn psychologically between two cultures or groups. Cronbach’s α for the scale was .64, and the model explained 33.7 percent of the variance in conflict. The coefficient of the interfactor correlation between freedom and conflict was .34.

No.	Item	Factor 1 ($\alpha = .70$)	Factor 2 ($\alpha = .64$)
1	I want to pursue a global sense of values that lies beyond Japan or Korea.	.64	-.12
2	I feel that I am a resident of the earth rather than a Japanese or Korean.	.63	.05
3	I am no one but me. Nationality is of secondary importance.	.61	.09
4	I want others to simply see me as an individual rather than as a <i>Zainichi</i> Korean.	.56	-.10
5	I have a faint awareness of being Korean, but it does not mean that I have a strong awareness of being Japanese.	.34	.17
6	I do not feel that I can completely identify with either Korean or Japanese ethnicity.	.04	.72
7	I hesitate to do things when the Japanese and Korean ways of doing them differ.	-.04	.63
8	I feel that I cannot settle down in Japan or Korea.	-.04	.53
9	I cannot decide whether to live a fully Japanese, Korean, or <i>Zainichi</i> Korean life.	.00	.40
	Factor correlation F1		.34
	F2		
	Contribution rate (%)	22.6	33.7

Table 2: Results of the exploratory factor analysis of superordinate identity (following promax rotation).

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Variables

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables are shown in Table 3. Pearson’s correlation analysis showed that freedom was significantly correlated with being single, younger, experiencing greater conflict, and lower levels of perceived individual-level discrimination. Depression was moderately correlated with experiencing greater conflict, being single, and higher levels of perceived individual-level discrimination. In addition, only individual-level discrimination was related to freedom.

	Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Sex			-.07	-.12	-.06	.10	.02	-.08	-.17*	.02	.01
2	Marital status			-	-.17*	.71**	-.23**	-.14	.01	.11	.19*	-.20**
3	Education				-	-.42**	.11	-.04	.07	-.11	.15	-.11
4	Age	47.6	16.9			-	-.27**	.03	.13	.21**	.02	-.02
5	Freedom	3.16	0.84				-	.25**	-.05	-.17*	.03	.06
6	Conflict	2.41	0.84					-	.15*	.32**	-.16*	.34**
7	Group discrimination	3.47	1.04						-	.25**	-.10	.09
8	Individual discrimination	1.87	0.92							-	-.17*	.20**
9	Happiness	3.63	0.61								-	-.58**
10	Depression	2.01	0.84									-

Table 3: Means, standard deviations, and correlation analysis results

Note: Sex coding: male = 1, female = 2; Marital status coding: single = 1, married = 2

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Path Analysis Results for Freedom

Figure 1 shows the hypothesized path model, in which individual-level discrimination (hereafter referred to as discrimination) was assumed to precede conflict and expected to be associated with freedom, based on the Hypotheses 1 and 2, and discrimination was expected to exert a direct positive effect on freedom, based on Hypothesis 3. Some demographic characteristics were considered in the model. In addition, age was expected to exert a direct negative effect on freedom, and age was expected to exert a positive effect on discrimination, based on Hypotheses 4 and 5. Based on the correlation results, we expected a negative association between sex and discrimination and a negative association between marriage and freedom. The marriage variable was inserted into the initial model and later removed due to its' non-significant effect on freedom.

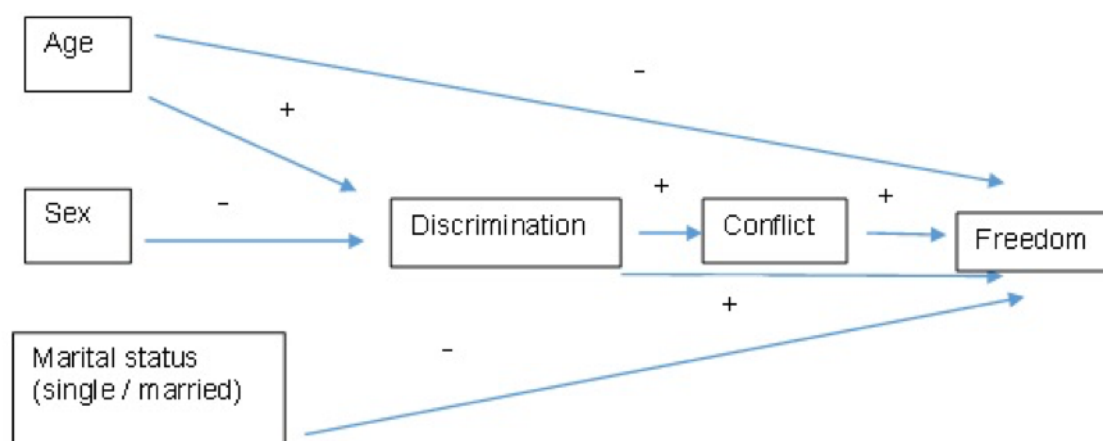


Figure 1: Hypothesized model of the process underlying freedom. Correlations between the background variables are not represented in the figure.

Figure 2 shows the final empirical model, which contained only significant paths and demonstrated a very good fit to the data. The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 3.83, df = 4, p = .43$) and additional fit indices demonstrated that the model fit the data adequately (goodness of fit index = .99; adjusted goodness of fit index = .97; root mean error of approximation = .00). The model explained 7 percent, 10 percent, and 17 percent of the variance in discrimination, conflict, and freedom, respectively.

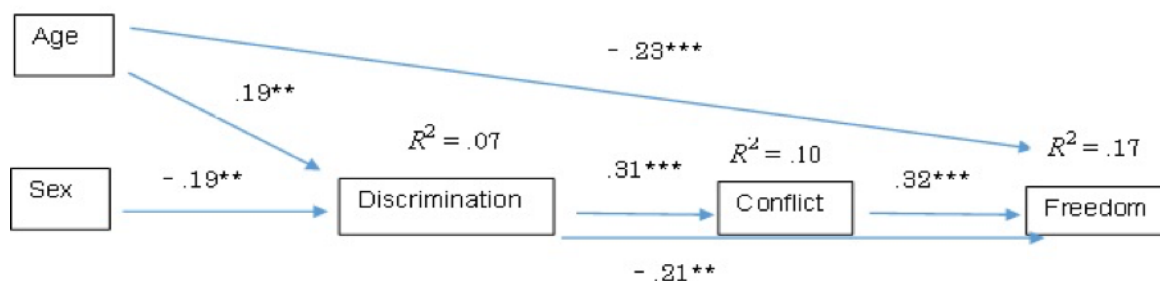


Figure 2: Empirical model of the process underlying freedom. All paths are significant and standardized; ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In addition, younger age, greater conflict, and lower discrimination levels were directly associated with greater freedom. Discrimination had a significant effect on conflict ($\beta = .31, p < .001$), and conflict enhanced freedom significantly ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). These findings indicate that respondents who reported greater perceived discrimination experienced more conflict, and therefore, greater freedom. Of the participants' demographic characteristics, age exerted a significantly positive effect on discrimination ($\beta = .19, p < .01$), and male sex was associated with greater perceived discrimination ($\beta = -.19, p < .01$). Overall, conflict ($\beta = .32, p < .001$) and age ($\beta = -.23, p < .001$) were significant explanatory factors for freedom.

Discussion

The current study clarified the mechanisms underlying freedom as a superordinate identity (lifestyle) that was not constrained by traditional predetermined ethnic categories (Korean or

Japanese) and was represented by labels such as citizen of earth or individual. In addition, the definition of freedom in the study bore some resemblance to concepts in Western research. Wagner et al. (2010) suggested the concept of hybrid identity formation, in which different essences, blood, or genes are combined within a hybrid, which is left without an identity or belongingness, as the essences, blood, or genes are incompatible and therefore destroyed. Freedom in the present study is similar to this hybrid identity, in that they both involve the creation of a new alternative identity to replace the two identities that are very different in nature to allow their integration.

Relationships Between Discrimination, Conflict, and Freedom

The current study demonstrated that the conflict between the Korean and Japanese identities was an important explanatory factor for freedom. As conflict was positively correlated with depression, the conflict between the Korean and Japanese identities exerted a detrimental effect on mental health. However, the findings also provided a novel meaning for conflict. Based on the result demonstrating a positive path from conflict to freedom, the conflict could be deemed as a necessary gateway to freedom. Watzlawik's (2012) findings supported this view, as hybrid identity formation was suggested as a defense against conflict. Therefore, these findings indicate that identity-related conflict does not always have negative outcomes and can be part of the process of establishing a new identity.

Considering the speed of globalization, this type of conflict could increase, as individuals of dual or multiple cultures could possess multicultural identities (Choi, 2016). Bhatia (2001) posited that people with multicultural identities experienced both internal and external conflict between their different identities. Based on the present results, if individuals experience identity-related conflict between their original ethnicity and that of their host nation, freedom, as a superordinate identity, could provide a means to overcome this conflict. However, if the conflict continues, it could develop into depression, as the conflict was positively associated with depression ($r = .34, p < .01$).

The results indicated that discrimination exerted a significantly positive effect on conflict, and conflict exerted a positive effect on freedom, which supported the Hypotheses 1 and 2. They also elucidated the mechanisms underlying freedom, which highlighted conflict as the most important explanatory factor for freedom. However, it should be noted that conflict played a functional role as a necessary process leading to freedom, which was separate from the common negative definition of conflict.

Contrary to the expectations in Hypothesis 3, discrimination exerted a direct negative effect on freedom. Albarello and Rubini (2012) posited that human identity was the most effective strategy for defense against ignorant attitudes toward Black people. From this perspective, greater freedom, as a superordinate identity, was associated with lower levels of perceived discrimination in the current study.

Hypothesis 4, in which, younger age was expected to exert a positive effect on freedom, was supported. This result confirmed the findings of previous research showing a difference between the first generation of *Zainichi* Koreans, who value their ethnic originality, and later generations, who do not wish to adhere to the predetermined framework of ethnic Korean or Japanese culture, which is mentioned in much of the sociological literature (e.g. Harajiri, 1989).

Hypothesis 5, in which age was expected to be positively correlated with discrimination, was supported. This confirmed the findings of a number of previous sociological reviews (e.g.

Fukuoka, 1993).

Hypothesis 6, in which, freedom was expected to be positively correlated with mental health, was not supported. That is, even though people adopted freedom as an identity that was not constrained by traditional ethnic or host categories, their mental health did not necessarily improve.

A limitation of the current study is that although freedom was the principle factor measured in the study, the Cronbach's α for the scale was low. Therefore, the number of items included in the scale should be increased in future research, to improve its internal reliability. As a recommendation to develop the present study, the model should be used to examine underlying freedom in permanent residents in the general population, to verify the generalizability of the model.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of the study implied that freedom could be used as a strategy to overcome psychological distress resulting from an identity-related conflict between Korean and Japanese ethnicities at an individual level. The reason for this finding could be that freedom was defined as a superordinate identity that was not bound by predetermined ethnic categories. In extending these results to the intergroup relationships, we could infer that freedom, as a superordinate identity, could aid in the establishment of harmonious intergroup relationships between ethnic minority and host majority groups. Intergroup conflict tends to be caused by group-based inequality (Sugiura, Sakata, & Shimizu, 2014). If people develop a commonly shared awareness as members of the global human group, the intergroup hierarchy could weaken, which could increase the likelihood of harmonious intergroup relationships.

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Corresponding author: Jung Hui Lee

Email: aamee17@yahoo.co.jp