CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION
IN THE DISCOURSE OF EDUCATION AND MOTHERHOOD:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF
A KOREAN INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT MOTHER
IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the cross-cultural adaption experience of myself as a Korean graduate student woman coming from a Confucian-heritage culture. The study focuses on the multiple roles I played as an Asian graduate student mother in the host cultural environment and the way I have undergone throughout the process of my adaptation.

As a research method, this study adopted autoethnographic way of writing while using cartoons as a way of representing main themes. Drawing upon discourse and ideologies about Confucian values and gender roles, this dissertation aims to investigate how those discourses and ideologies impact on my life living as a marginalized figure. The main research questions explored in this study were as follows: (1) What does it mean for a Korean graduate student mother to have a cross-cultural adaptation experience and how did I deal with some challenges and conflicts?, (2) How does my cross-cultural mothering experience contribute to the general understanding of feminism in the context of a diverse society?, and (3) How does my cross-cultural adaptation experience contribute to the general understanding on expatriates in the context of a diverse society?

As an international student coming from a Confucian-heritage culture, I found myself feeling uncomfortable with the non-power distance cultural aspects represented in American university; I made adaptive changes in attitudes during class, in addition to different student-faculty interactions, which seemed to require less obedience from the students and more active communication. My status as an international student was also a crucial factor influencing my decision about the timing of motherhood. Studying and becoming a mother in a foreign country would mean a double burden of childcare and study while living far away from home without possible familial support available. Thus,
I could not help but worry about becoming a mother while in graduate school in the host culture.

As a mother coming from a different culture, I had frequent chances to experience new cultural differences in pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing. With the deep-rooted Confucian values both I and my family (including my in-laws) have internalized, however, I experienced a huge Confucian influence on my daily life in gender role expectations and parenthood style.

With every year, the population of the United States becomes increasingly ethnically diverse, and the number of female graduate students has been increasing as well. And yet, there has been little research on student mothers from different cultures or school policies to accommodate student-parents’ needs. Thus, I hope my story offers policy makers, local community members, and other student mothers an insight into the particularities of a student mother of color’s lived experiences and a push for changing the culture and climate toward diversity, while also suggest that women themselves need to keep trying to abolish the traditional Confucian patriarchal conceptions of society by transforming their own ways of thinking. Just having a policy is not sufficient to change the climate on campus as well as student mothers’ experiences. Rather, mothers of color should try to have agency in their own life and not disconnect from larger social realities.
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PROLOGUE

Confucianism and Education in a Korean Context

Starting with the thoughts of Confucius (551 BCE-479 BCE) in ancient China, the Confucian tradition has influenced many Asian countries, including Korea. Being adapted by the Choson dynasty (1392-1910) in ancient Korea, Confucianism became the dominant ideology for both social organization and family member roles throughout history (Lee, 2006; Lee, Um, & Kim, 2004). Although the doctrine of Confucian influence is becoming less visible in contemporary South Korea, it still underlies social and individual interactions to a great extent (Windle, 2000).

In general, the core Confucian philosophy is described in four principles, which include hierarchy between superiors and subordinates, long-term oriented education, collectivism, and filial piety (Chuang, 2007). Emphasizing the stability of society, Confucianism values hierarchical relationships between father-son, husband-wife, teacher-student, and elders-the younger (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Kennedy, 2002), and it requires subordinates to give respect and obedience to their superiors and the superiors to be a role model to their subordinates. Considering learning as a continually developing process throughout one’s life, the Confucian philosophy of education emphasizes cognitive intelligence and thus aims to cultivate the individual (Chuang, 2007; Granrose, 2001). To maintain harmony among family and society, people from Confucian-heritage cultures are expected to respect and save face of both themselves and others (Filipczak, 1997). For example, Wu’s (2004) study on Taiwanese-owned firms showed that the firms are not willing to provide feedback to workers because they want to maintain a face-
saving relationship with them. Finally, the Confucian notion emphasizes virtuous behaviors called filial piety. Performing filial piety includes being respectful to parents and elders, continuing the family tree, and worshiping the ancestors (Bockover, 2003; Granrose, 2001). With these principles, the authority of subordinates, including boss, teacher, father, parent, husband, and elders, is absolute in Confucian society.

Consequently, there is no doubt that the Confucian philosophy had a huge impact on education. Previous studies argued that “everything in education relates to culture (Erickson, 2004, p.31-32)”, and different social and educational environments affect students’ learning approaches (Renshaw & Volet, 1995; Riding & Sadler-Smith, 1997; Vermunt, 1996). Confucian values are applied to educational environments in Confucian-heritage cultures, and it is obvious that the students from the cultures have accustomed to the Confucian influence on their learning approach or style, which values silence, face-saving, and group harmony, for example.

Sifianou (1997) stated that silence is interpreted in a different way between American and Asian cultures. While Asian people consider that silence is an appropriate form of showing respect for elders or superiors and also expressing they are listening attentively, English-speaking people consider talk a more desirable way to show these aspects. Face-saving is also desirable among students from Confucian-heritage cultures, which results in the students’ reluctance to participate in class so as to avoid making mistakes in order to preserve group harmony (Liu, 2001).

Confucianism has also had a huge impact on East Asian educational success because of its emphasis on strong family-oriented structure and a high valuation of education (Sorensen, 1994, p. 11). In particular, college entrance exams limit the type and
quantity of education, because acquiring a high level of education is the first step to bring students both educational and socioeconomic success; the students who have a high score enter the most prestigious universities in Korea and are guaranteed to have better jobs, better pay, more opportunities to make a good business connections, better equity on the marriage market, and higher social recognition (Sorensen, 1994, p. 22). Desiring upward mobility, consequently, Korean students are under pressure to receive high scores on the examinations and thus are influenced by these cultural aspects. Scollon and Scollon (2001) studied the student-teacher relationships among Chinese culture and findings revealed that a strong hierarchy exists between them. According to the hierarchy in Confucian cultures, teachers and professors are usually considered as having high status and authority. As a result, a lot of students from the cultures believe that they should show high respect to their teachers and obey them.

These traditional values are considered negative attitudes in American classrooms, and thus students affected by a Confucian-heritage culture to a great extent might be described as shy, passive, reluctant to speak up, and unwilling to actively participate in class (Nataatmadja, Sixsmith & Dyson, 2007, p. 75). Agreeing with Tierney’s (1992) statement, which considers university reflecting the culture of dominant society, Dunphy (1998) argued that American universities are full of their own visible and invisible conventions, such as student attitudes, rules for faculty-student interaction, and rules for class presentations, which may be unknown to foreign students. Thus, international students from Confucian-heritage cultures bringing different assumptions and expectations might feel more challenged than their European counterparts due to their different cultural values.
Confucianism and Feminism in a Korean Context

Family, school, and society in Korea have gone through drastic changes since the 1970s in South Korea, with the rapid growth in the national economy. Although the feminism movement has tried to improve women’s status in Korea with the rapid economic growth and women’s increased opportunity of education and social participation, powerful Confucian values are still pervasive in contemporary South Korean society, resulting conflicts between traditional patriarchal gender roles and modern social changes and accompanying values (Kong, 1997, p. 8).

Considering the family as the basic social unit, Confucianism has emphasized the distinct gender role difference between men and women and consequently resulted in lower status of women within both family and society. According to Confucian traditions, a woman should be virtuous by obeying three men in her life; a woman would obey her father as a filial daughter, obey her husband as a virtuous wife, and obey her son as a wise mother in her old age. In addition, marriage contributed to women maintaining a traditional patriarchal gender role, regarding them as an outsider from their biological family after the marriage and also an outsider from her in-laws until having a son (Kong, 1997, p. 7). Without a right to self-determination given, a Confucian woman was required to play a passive role in family, and the family-centered ideology required women to take subordinate positions.

Although industrialization provided women with more opportunities to participate in social activities and higher education, rapid progress in the economy and subsequent changes in the social and family structure have not changed the traditional Confucian ethics. Rather, Kong (1997) argued that gender inequality was inevitable to achieve the
economic growth in the East Asian countries, confining women to supporting or
subordinate labor sources, which considered the core value of Confucianism (Kong,
1997, p.1). From the research findings by the World Economic Forum in 2005, revealing
that Korea ranked 54th among 58 countries for the empowerment of women while other
Asian countries ranked higher (China in 33rd, Japan in 38th place, and Malaysia in 40th
place), it seems clear that traditional Confucian values still have a huge influence on
Korean society and gender ideology.

In her study “Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian
Patriarchy in South Korea,” Cho (1996) argued that there existed the “extreme
suppression of women on the one hand and extreme idealization of motherhood and the
encouragement of the mother’s accomplishment on the other hand (as cited in Kong,
1997, p. 9)” in a Korean Confucian context. That is, instead of excluding women from
the public domain, Confucian patriarchy institutionalized mother power, which ostensibly
aimed for women to be independent from their husbands by encouraging women to
establish their identity as autonomous human beings, but was actually intended for
bringing women down to men under the premise that mother power and independence
were only derived from their sons. Hogarth (2009) argued that giving birth to a son
changed a woman’s life in traditional Confucian society (p. 108), and as a result, a high
level preference for having a son still exists among Korean women (Kim & Han, 1996.
p. 167). By having a son and carrying on the family line, a considerable number of
contemporary Korean women still find themselves finally fulfilling filial duties as a wife
and daughter-in-law and acquiring the privilege and authority in the family.
With the strong Confucian patriarchal ethics continued in Korea, eventually, women themselves unconsciously tried to maintain their gender role expectations—represented as obedience, sympathy, dependence, vulnerability and love-orientation—while males were encouraged to be goal-oriented, pursuing independence and authority (Kim, Y. H., 1990), and those with a lack of agency in their life would find themselves hard to adjust to the ever-changing modern society (Kim & Han, 1996, p. 152). Therefore, whether they are working mothers or stay-at-home mothers, Korean women are not free from traditional gender roles such as child-rearing, housework, child education, and doing filial duty for their in-laws, while their husbands are rarely involved with them (Jang, 1999) due to the higher level of stress of the men living in the era of intensified competition that results in spending less time with their family. As a result, most working mothers in South Korea struggle against work-life balance and describe their everyday life as a war (Won & Pascall, 2004). They believe that they should exhibit masculine traits in order to achieve success in their profession. That is, women or mothers recognized demands of family life are incompatible with the demands of work life and thus are encouraged to give up their career or motherhood. If they refuse to give up both, they should try to reduce motherhood while feeling guilty and perform masculine traits such as achievement-orientation in order to gain significant roles in male-dominated society.

Given the research findings on gender inequality in South Korea, it seems clear that the traditional gender ideology keeps discriminating against women and makes it hard to live independent lives compared to their male counterparts (Kim & Han, 1996, p. 169). Although some common aspects between Asian and Western gender ideologies
exist, different cultural values should be considered when understanding Korean women’s perception on gender roles (Won & Pascall, 2004, p. 272). These cultural values include the traditional Confucian ethics, and they will play a significant role in the autoethnography I author in this thesis.

**Cross-cultural Adaptation Theory**

With a continuous influx of people from different cultures, there has been a growing academic attention to their cross-cultural adaptation in the United States. According to Berry (1990), cross-cultural adaptation refers to individuals’ possible responses to the new cultural context, no matter whether they choose to assimilate (with a strong orientation toward the host culture), separate (with a strong allegiance to the culture of origin and detachment from the host culture), integrate (with the combination of the culture of origin and the host culture), or marginalize (with the rejection of both cultures).

Lewthwaite (1996) explained four streams of thought in cross-cultural literature. The most dominant has been the culture shock model, which Lysgaard suggested in 1955. This model sees the entry point for strangers as being on a honeymoon high, followed by a bottoming out resulting from cultural maladjustment, and finally a climb up and out to cultural acceptance and adaptation. With an extension of this model, Adler (1975) viewed culture shock as a necessary impetus for sojourners to be integrated into the host culture.

The second stream views cross-cultural adaptation as essentially a learning process. For successful adaptation, the sojourners must acquire the sociocultural skills. That is, to adapt to a culture, sojourners should learn both the rules for interpreting their environment and the rules for comforting themselves within it (Anderson, 1994).
The third approach, as Bennett (1986) put it, considers cross-cultural adaptation as a journey of learning and recovery. According to Bennett, for short-term sojourners and long-term immigrants, this model views the adaptation process as a step-by-step journey from the periphery of a culture to the center, from a state of ignorance to a position of understanding and empathy.

The final model sees cross-cultural adaptation as a dynamic process of tension reduction until equilibrium is reached (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1987). Although other models are still emerging, none of the models can completely explain the complex process of cross-cultural adaptation. However, it is obvious from these diverse models that cross-cultural adaptation theory views the adaptation process as a dynamic interaction between an individual’s internal systems and the new cultural challenges from their environment. Given that the cross-cultural adaptation process is defined as a dynamic interaction which individuals undergo in new cultural environments (Berry, 1997; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003), most adaptation researches have assumed that they are highly likely to undergo a variety of challenges to make adjustments in their changed circumstances. As temporary sojourners, immigrants, and refugees, some of them might make the transition successfully with little challenge, of course, but traditional studies of cross-cultural adaptation have assumed that numerous people moved across cultural boundaries undergo some common challenges trying to make the adaptation successful. Central to this successful adaptation is host communication competence, which includes one’s knowledge in language proficiency and norms of the host culture, and the active engagement in the host environment. In particular, lack of language competence very often presents a real problem for immigrants, as it may be seen as failure to assimilate
(Fina & King, 2011, p. 165) with language-based evaluations of individuals as “smart” or “lazy” (Collins & Slembrouck, 2005). Largely taking the problematic nature of the adaptation process, most studies of cultural adaptation have assumed that individuals from different culture desired to assimilate into the host culture, and thus investigated variables encouraging or discouraging the adaptation process in helping to facilitate the individuals’ assimilation into the new environment. However, the assimilationist view searching for generalizable patterns of adaptive change has been questioned since the 1970s when “pluralism” paid more attention to the ethnicity maintenance (Billing, Condon, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, & Radley, 1988; Diesing, 1991; Lim, 2001; Novak, 1973; Thornton, 1996; Teske & Nelson, 1974). The pluralist view of cross-cultural adaptation has argued against cultural assimilation and further contended that adaptation is not a matter of unavoidable necessity to survive in a changed circumstance but more of a matter of choice depending on individuals’ sense of ethnic identity (Berry, 1980, 1990; Berry, Kim, & Boski, 1988; Berry & Sam, 1997; Kim, Y. Y., 2001). In addition, with the development of technology, more individuals living far away from their culture of origin have come to remain strongly connected with their country of origin, which is referred to as transnationalism (Brettell, 2000; Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, 1999; Lewellen, 2002; Pries, 1999).

Regardless of different views on cross-cultural adaptation, however, many existing studies demonstrate that individuals from a different culture undergo some degree of adaptive change over time. Since I write about the past, I can speak from experience that I went through challenges and desired to assimilate into the host culture. In unfolding my cross-cultural experiences, I took Lysgaard’s culture shock model,
because I have gone through the steps he stated upon the arrival to the United States.

Taking Lysgaard’s culture shock model in exploring my cross-cultural adjustment experience, my autoethnographic research aims to investigate a realistic understanding of my adaptation experience in detail, rather than examining more abstractly whether I underwent challenges or was successfully acculturated.

**Autoethnography as a Research Method**

*Where is the flesh and blood scholar in the work? Where is the lived experience of individuals in the research? Where is context, place, and situation? Where are the actual voices of the researcher and the researched? (Burnier, 2006, p. 412)*

While personal stories have gained a legitimized place in the literary field, stories as data or method were considered too subjective to be articulated in the field of research. Much of traditional mainstream research was oriented toward the modernist paradigm. They believed that the existence of unified foundations of truth, and that knowledge should be proven by a rational, objective method (Hollinger, 1994). Therefore, traditional research studies have considered personal experience unpredictable and emotional, and consequently doubted its validity as primary source of data. Researchers feared that any display of subjectivity would somehow infect the quality of their work, and they tried to keep their voices out of the texts they produce (Muncey, 2010, p. 2), being “not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts” or “not dependent on the mind for existence” (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003, as cited in Hegelund, 2005, p. 648).

Postmodernism rejected this tradition and tried to seek universal truth with its critical questioning of generalization of knowledge claims (Anderson, 2006). According
to postmodernism, the world is not accurately described by one universal or complete knowledge, and social science cannot be spoken in a singular universal knowledge (Lyotard, 1984). Postmodernism has also questioned “how people, places, and practices come to be “represented” in qualitative research texts (Burnier, 2006)”, and in the 1970s and 1980s, a “crisis of representation” was created, which argued that it is impossible to separate one’s own experience from what one is studying, because research is an extension of the researchers’ lives (Ngunjiri, 2010). According to Muncey (2010), we are participants of our own experiences and cannot really filter our own experience even if we wanted to. Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015) also argued that social life is uncertain and emotional, and research should “represent” the real world as it is. The crisis of representation directed researchers toward new ways of representing social worlds, placing great emphasis on the ways in which researchers interact with the culture being researched (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). During the 1900s, ethnographers focused on the study of “primitive” people, and tried to describe their lives from the “native” point of view. However, the ethnographers still remained as an “outsider” observing and often participating in the research setting, writing fieldnotes, and then leaving the vulnerable others, which they later came to consider as unethical (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). Even when the situation allowed the researcher to gain an insider’s perspective, ethnographers still tried to exclude their voice from the research even though their fieldnotes contained personal accounts.

Many of us “do” ethnography but “write” in the conservative voice of science....

As ethnographers we experience life but we write science. (Sparkes, 2000)
Gradually, researchers began to consider emotions, value multiple viewpoints, concentrate on their personal voice in doing and understanding research, and consequently many of them turned to autoethnography.

In the past few years, autoethnography has become an important and legitimate method in many disciplines and research contexts. (Adams et al., 2015, p.18)

Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography is a genre of writing, research, self-narrative, and method that connects the autobiographical and personal interpretation (graphy) to the cultural, placing the self (auto) within a social or political context (ethno) (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Spry, 2001).

Autoethnography is distinguished from other narrative texts in that it is “consciously planned, developed and described as research” (Pace, 2012, p. 5). Using self-narrative as a main source of data, autoethnography is more than telling a story. Since an autoethnographer uses tenets of both ethnography and autobiography in research by moving back and forth, inward and outward, autoethnography shows multiple layers of interpretation.

Although autoethnography follows the tradition of ethnographic research in that it explores phenomena occurring in a natural setting and shows how researchers make sense of the world, what makes autoethnography different from ethnography is that in an autoethnography, researchers do not try to be an insider because autoethnographers are already insiders in the focus situation, and the context is his or her own. Thus, the aim of the work is not to present a record of the world they studied but to connect the personal to the cultural, and finally to offer a deeper understanding not only of the world being studied, but of the researcher as well.
Then how an autoethnography is written? Compared to traditional forms of scholarly writing, an autoethnography seeks to erase the false dichotomy between the personal and the scholarly. As Adams et al. (2015) noted, writing is a process of understanding an experience and thus, it is impossible to separate doing autoethnography from writing autoethnography.

*Autoethnographic writing is both personal and scholarly ... and it is both descriptive and theoretical. (Burnier, 2006, p. 414)*

Like ethnographers, autoethnographers should take notes, especially when events excite, shock, anger them, or cause feelings of isolation and alienation (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). When autoethnographers write their personal stories, their work can be therapeutic for themselves as well as readers, but it should not merely revisit the events feeling struggled again.

**Art-based Research and Drawings**

*Art-based research can be used as a method, a form of analysis, a subject, or all of the above, within qualitative research. (Huss & Cwikel, 2005, p. 2)*

While my autoethnography was settling into shape, representing seven years of experience was not an easy process. Since it was a story of myself, interviews as a standard research method for data collection were not available. Primarily relying on my memory, I found that not all of my experiences were easily described in words, so I tried to include non-linguistic dimensions in my work, which I expected would facilitate my reflexivity and generate different ways of representing my thinking and experience.

Given that an autoethnography allows a various forms of representation (Ellis, 2004; Smith 2005) and drawing is often complemented by verbal research methods
(Guillemin, 2004), I thought it would be useful to draw myself into the research (Mitchell, Theron, Smith, & Stuart, 2011). As one of the art-based research methods, drawings have been used by psychologists (Knowles & Cole, 2008) to facilitate the rich investigation of participants’ reflections, feelings, actions, perceptions, and views on issues that are not easily expressed in words (Backett-Millburn & McKie, 1999; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Furth, 1988; Guillemin, 2004; MacGregor, Currie, & Wetton, 1998; Mullen, 2003; McNiff, 2007). In their study of women from a different culture, Huss and Cwikel (2005) also argued that art-based research can help the researcher understand participants in more effective ways than the traditional methods of interviewing or questionnaire answering in that it uses emotional ways of knowing, connects abstract concerns to concrete situations, and thus helps represent different aspects of personal experiences and the social.

Drawings, in particular, are more effective than writings to reflect about the issues being explored (Gauntlett, 2007), providing new insights through the drawing process. Mitchell, Theron, Smith, and Stuart (2011) enumerated the benefits of drawings as method, such as their simplicity, tangibility, concreteness, immediacy and their potential to move audiences (p. 2). Recognizing the benefits, I took out a pen and paper and first drew the timeline of my life. It was a poor drawing, but I did not matter because what is important was not how well I drew.

I chose my timeline as my first drawing was because a timeline allows participants to reflect on the different temporal dimensions of past, present and future in their lives. In my work, I drew a timeline starting from 1980, the year when I was born, and going up to the current year, 2015, trying to indicate important events and changes
that happened in my life. This method helped me choose some important biographical events that I should take into account in my research.

*Figure 1. My timeline*
In my timeline, the events have been chosen from an international graduate student mother’s point of view. The image of spending most of my life in Korea reflects a possible struggle against acculturation in the United States. A frequent appearance of the image of pursuing degrees in higher education, such as standing next to graduate school, wearing a cap and gown at graduation, working with computers, and giving lectures shows my personal background and the choice of career. A frequent appearance of the image of family, such as starting a family, being pregnant, giving childbirth, raising children, and supporting a husband to graduation shows my struggles as a student mother whose husband was also a graduate student. Through the image of moving back and forth several times between the United States and my home country, I tried to represent my struggles with cross-cultural adaptation and motherhood.

By continually drawing, I became aware that a drawing as a research method functioned as “a mirror to view my perception of myself” (Derry, 2005, p. 39), helping me promote self-reflexivity by looking at my personal experience in detail and from a different point of view. With the increased self-awareness, I consequently developed a symbolic drawing of myself as a Cinderella mommy (in chapter 5), who straddled two big worlds such as academia and motherhood, as well as the Eastern and the Western worlds, which turned out to be a visible representation of my research findings. Called the self-portrait, this arts-based technique enhanced my reflexivity and provided me with the change to think holistically about my multi-identities and cross-cultural life. Bagnoli (2009) studied young people and their identities and used this self-portrait technique during the interview by asking them to draw the moment that considered important in their lives. Combining the method with interviews made possible for the participants to
go beyond a verbal mode of thinking (Bagnoli, 2009, p. 565), and this provided her with an insight on their associations and meaning, and thus helped her develop a deeper analysis.

In addition, I also benefited from the act of drawing for its own sake; it was therapeutic for me with the use of my drawing skill which had no opportunity for it to come out and play since childhood; and I did not need to worry about reading in too much. Last but not least, the use of drawing into my work contributed to the triangulation of my story; I showed and my husband and daughter the drawings of certain events that we experienced together and asked them to review, which consequently enabled me to understand multiple ways of seeing the drawings. As such, the use of drawing strategies in autoethnography helps autoethnographers reconnect with their experience in a more vivid way than writing had (Derry, 2005), and access the elusive aspects of their personal experience that might otherwise remain forgotten, unrecognized, or overlooked (Derry, 2005; Richards, 1998; Tidwell & Manke, 2009; Weber, 2008).

Although cartoons have been mostly considered a visual mode of communication offering mere reflection of certain issues while functioning for entertainment purpose, some scholars address the effectiveness of cartoons as a way to offer “deep reflection” on social issues (Abraham, 2009; Everette, 1974; Vinson, 1967). According to Abraham (2009), cartoons are one of the efficient ways to transform complicated social issues into visually palpable depictions that facilitate understanding of the nature of social events as well as providing an entertainment function, a symbolic avenue for the public, a sense of the salient social issues, and a framing function which requires cartoons to encompass complex social issues by implication (p. 119).
When pictures are viewed from a cultural perspective, they are powerful tools to understand the social construction of reality in that pictures influence readers’ perception of themselves and the environment in which they are situated (Goldberg, 1991). Thus, cartoons are considered an important medium for both shaping and reflecting public discourses by some scholars (Caswell, 2004; Everette, 1974; Vinson, 1967). In contemporary culture, visual modes of communication have become so pervasive that they often dominate verbal communication (Abraham, 2009, p. 124). Therefore, more scholars have begun to pay attention to its use in research, but there still exists the perception that cartoons lack a deep reflection on social issues, having an analytical deficiency of visual modes of communication (Abraham, 2009, p. 127). To facilitate its effective use in research, the cartoon should also function analytically in addition to offering descriptive meanings, and Abraham (2009) addresses its potential for offering analytical communication with using multisensory signs such as symbolic forms (p. 155). The cartoon may be deemed purely visual in nature, but its visual representation may facilitate the public’s understanding of social issues and this have a powerful impact on society.

**Rationale and Research Questions**

Female students in higher education outnumber males in higher education in the United States (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa, 2015; Hepburn & Simon, 2006; Jacobs, 1996; Sax, 2008). While the changing gender shift in enrollment patterns in higher education is a welcome improvement, researchers also have noted that women are still underrepresented, considered “non-traditional” students on campus (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa, 2015; Tight, 2012). Contemporary postgraduate female students, in particular,
who are highly likely to have children (Kuperberg, 2009) because of their biological
clock, are often marginalized and “leak” out of the occupational pipeline because study
coincides with childbearing years (Kuperberg, 2009).

Considering that student mothers have multiple responsibilities in addition to their role as a student, such as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law, it is important to understand their experiences. However, their experiences in higher education have received little attention (Bosch, 2013; Ricco, Sabet, & Clough, 2009) and research examining the experiences of postgraduate student mothers is also limited (Bosch, 2013). Studies on student mothers mainly explored the stressors and barriers this cohort of students has encountered, such as a lack of family support, lack of suitable childcare options, general overload, financial difficulties, and health problems (Burns, Scott, Cooney, & Gleeson, 1988; Bosch, 2013; Scott et al., 1996).

Compared to male students who have kids, student mothers face higher demands of family and school responsibilities and thus feel guilty about both the demands of study and parenting (Scott et al., 1996, p. 250). While the possible solution would be the improvement of support services or policies, such as maternity leave, childcare, or financial support, Bosch (2013) argued that this solution is too simplistic in that it implies student mothers are a deficient group of students and need special treatment (p. 27). Rather, a body of literature on student mothers pays more attention to the cultural ideals and expectations (Bosch, 2013; Hays, 1996; Estes, 2011), which create ideological conflict between the roles that student mothers play.

Having a desire for being both good students and good parents, student mothers play the dual role, both of which require large emotional and time commitments.
According to Estes (2011), student mothers tried to resolve the conflict by constructing a new identity as the good student-parent. Her research findings revealed that student mothers tried to resolve their identity dilemmas by considering their status as a student would be beneficial to their children, viewing childcare service would be beneficial to their children, and considering parenting would be beneficial to education; the parents in her research explained that their status is beneficial to their children because of their academic knowledge, better jobs and opportunities, flexible schedule for quality time, and the opportunity to be a good role model for their children; the parents also considered childcare beneficial to their children in that it provided their children with exposure to various environments, people, social interaction with the help of professional child care providers; finally, the parents viewed parenting as beneficial to education because their motivation increased after becoming parents.

While the research reports that the student mothers attempt to resolve their identity conflict, it also reveals that those mothers tried to fit themselves into both parent and student ideals and ended up reinforcing the ideologies of intensive mothering that marginalize them (Estes, 2011; Lynch, 2008). Compared to the study that notes student mothers attempt to blend their identities, some research on postgraduate mothers documents that these women are reluctant to present their status as mothers to academe. When interviewing for jobs, in particular, the student mothers pretended to have no children in order to avoid any possible disadvantages or stereotypes they would receive (Lewis, 2013). In summary, the research findings show that there are many more negative aspects of studying while raising children as seen from the student mothers’ dilemmas experienced from their daily lives. To make a deeper understanding of their experiences,
therefore, it is important to understand the wider cultural assumptions about motherhood, and this study aims to contribute to understanding what student mothers experience by exploring my lived experience as a student mother.

While I have been juggling family and study, I also had to deal with the cultural difference as an international student coming from a Confucian-heritage culture. It has been seven years since I came here, and I have been living in the exact same house. Back then, it was only my husband, and I felt so unfamiliar with this town and the university. The more I have been exposed to the host culture, the more I recognized the cultural differences in study, family, language, cultural adjustment, and relationship with others. Being expected to get everything done well in a timely manner with many specific achievements, graduate students have gone through some type of barriers in their academic pursuits. Each student makes adjustments when entering a new school or program, but students who study abroad deal not only with academic challenges, but with additional stressors in various ideological domains including languages, social life, lifestyles, foods, and much more. Thus, they are highly likely to make adaptive changes in their way of learning and communication (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Coming from a Confucian-heritage culture, I made adaptive changes in attitudes during class, the way I compose writing, in addition to different student-faculty interactions, which seemed to require less obedience from the students and more active communication. Growing up in a family embedded with deep-rooted Confucian values and receiving public education in South Korea—a high power distance country (Hofstede, 1984, 2001)—I found myself feeling uncomfortable with the non-power distance cultural aspects represented in the American university. There is an instance in my story showing the different attitudes
toward the professors. As the old Asian saying goes: “Out of reverence for one’s teacher, one should not even step on his or her shadow.” Asian traditional values consider a teacher not merely as an instructor but someone far greater, requiring obedience and respect from the pupil, so that students always address their teacher by his or her honorific title and are not encouraged to ask provocative questions which might not corroborate the teacher’s dominant social status. My status as an international student was also a crucial factor influencing my decision about timing of motherhood. Studying and becoming a mother in a foreign country would mean a double burden of childcare and study while living far away from home without possible familial support available and thus I could not help but worry about becoming a mother while in graduate school in the host culture.

Being expected to be a good mother, student mothers must have struggled to balance between graduate school and family. Being expected to adjust themselves to a new cultural environment, international student mothers may find it more difficult than others in their academic pursuits. As a mother living in a foreign country, I had frequent chances to experience new cultural differences, from the atmosphere of OB/GYN clinics, recommended meal plan, to views toward the fetus. Friendly atmosphere and care providers’ positive attitude toward Asian beliefs helped my smooth adaptation to motherhood that took place in the host culture. While I made adaptive changes on almost all of the different beliefs and practices including food or hospital system, I kept some of the traditional Asian beliefs maintained, for example, the fetus education called Taegyo, to accommodate both me and my baby’s well-being. A process of childbirth was also a new experience, which brought me conflicting beliefs to negotiate to some extent. There
are instances in my story describing different postpartum practice and food for new mothers. As I always did, however, I went through the challenges without a hitch. As my children grew, I had to consider how to raise bicultural children. As international graduate students, both my husband and I were “in limbo,” not sure if we will remain in the host country or return home permanently. In order to help my children embrace both cultures and cultivate their bicultural identity, I applied the research findings from the studies on international students’ positive adaptation to parenting strategies, which emphasized the extent of exposure to U.S. culture, including knowledge about American culture, and social contact with people from the host country as well as con-national, as the most important factors to facilitate positive and better adaptation (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Perrucci & Hu (1995), in particular, stated that international students with more availability of these social resources have greater satisfaction with their social and academic adaptation in the United States. Thus, I have actively engaged in events held by my kids’ school and local communities while also introducing my kids to nursery rhymes in two languages and sending them to a Korean heritage school. Raising bicultural children meant balancing two cultural values in terms of language, food, norms, and more and as a mother with Confucian values internalized, I sometimes felt conflicts between the two different values in parenthood, such as child discipline, and thus tried to find the optimal way for my child who was born in America and has been spending considerable time at school throughout the day. As a Korean-born mother who feels more comfortable with Korean heritage cultures, it was not so easy to raise American-born children who feel more familiar with Western cultures. Although we
were not going through the same thing, both my children and I have tried to make it through a rough time together.

Becoming a student mother in a foreign country also meant that the fairly equal division of housework and childrearing is required to balance school and family life. Myers-Wall, Frias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu (2011) found that there were conflicts and disagreements between student husbands and non-student wives due to their different roles and positions. As graduate students in the same field, my husband and I had little difficulty in understanding each other’s demanding work, but as a student mother from a Confucian-heritage culture, I shared a lot in common with Korean non-student wives around me; whether they are student or non-student mothers, most Korean women who have kids have undergone challenges in making adaptations to the host culture because of the existence of traditional Confucian values and its patriarchal aspects that imposes more domestic responsibilities on women. In addition to the domestic responsibilities including childrearing, I also had to perform my academic duties. Balancing study and family was so demanding that I often found myself unequal to the task. I felt that both of them should be done in a conscientious manner, but I ended up feeling I had not done either of them. When my children were sick, in particular, it was not even possible to consider family and school balance because both my mind and body were completely occupied by my children, while my husband was comparatively less responsible for taking care of them as a father is not considered a main care provider in traditional Confucian cultures. In Confucian-heritage cultures, a father is supposed to earn a living while a mother raises the children. With the rapid modernization and the subsequent social change happening in South Korea, household work and childrearing are done mostly by females even
among double-income couples, and the same applied to my husband and me. While most of the household work was imposed upon me, I also had to fulfill the role of a supportive wife to get my husband to concentrate on his study. Confucian-heritage cultures consider the husband owes much of his success to his wife and thus encourages the wife to prove a loyal help to her husband. Trying to be a better mother, wife, and student, I mostly felt that the situation was beyond my ability, but I also found myself putting up with that, being fettered by the traditional Confucian values. On the whole, there was the imbalance between family and school life, and traditional Confucian gender role differences had a huge influence on the imbalance, requiring me as a woman to play highly demanding roles all at once.

Sharing those experiences and feelings with my husband, faculty members, and friends helped me understand and cope with the differences, but the key aspect in my adjusting process was my effort and desire for negotiating those differences in order to make the smooth adaptation. Sometimes I have experiences with conflicts between traditional Confucian values I am accustomed to and the unfamiliar Western values that are dominant where I have been living. Rather than trying to assimilate to the host culture, I have tried to adjust both cultures and find the optimal ways to deal with the challenges I faced. There have been some difficulties which I felt were beyond my control and capacity, such as single parenting with two kids while writing my dissertation, and I actively looked for help, which I could find myself to be transformed with the demanding situation. At one point, the challenges I experienced have not come from the cultural differences but also from the demanding situations I have encountered as a woman juggling family and school. Consequently, the more identities I have acquired, the more
challenges I have encountered, and I found myself transforming myself from a passive fragile Confucian woman to an active strong mother. I still do not feel fully adjusted myself to the cross-cultural living—and I doubt if I ever could—but at least my seven years of living in the host culture helped me to develop myself.

Through this autoethnography, I seek to evoke empathy and provide encouragement to other student mothers. It seeks to understand what the barriers were, how I went through in spite of barriers, and what it meant to balance graduate school and family life for the student mother with those barriers in effect. There is a large and growing body of literature in higher education that speaks to the status of women and minority faculty (Aguirre, 2000; Aguirre, Martinez, & Hernandez, 1993; Antonio, 2002; Baez, 2000; Thompson & Louque, 2005). These various studies, based on research at large public institutions and as well at smaller private colleges, indicate that overall, when compared with their majority peers, minority and women faculty are less satisfied within their institutions and feel they neither “fit” nor are welcomed within their departments. The attention to them led the institutions to improve policies for the marginalized faculty. However, there still has been little research on student mothers from different cultures. Compared to their majority peers who are males or came from Western cultures, the student mothers who came from different cultures are faced with more challenges because of the conflicts between different existing ideologies in addition to the need to make adjustment in various areas. As a woman from South Korea where Confucian traditions pervade, in particular, I have an inner conflict concerning deep-rooted Confucian values and patriarchal beliefs, such as the intensive motherhood, and distinct hierarchy between superiors and subordinates.
When it comes to the aspect of cultural adaptation, there are differences between families and individuals (Sakamoto, 2006) with task-sharing among family members for example, being an important factor to make the adaptation successful. Sakamoto also found that compared to what is experienced by individuals, adaptation in families also requires family members to adapt to each other’s goals. The key aspect of my experience is that there exists power imbalance in the distribution of responsibilities and through the goal-negotiation process between Asian husbands and wives. From my autoethnographic account as well as the findings from Sakamoto’s (2006) study of Japanese international students and scholars, Asian women generally follow their male partners’ decisions in the goal-negotiation process while husbands were directed toward their own goals, and I assumed that it is based on the Confucian values across Asian culture. Facing multiple marginalities, most student mothers from different cultures lack support in maintaining balance in family life and school responsibilities in addition to their cultural adaptation.

There is an instance in this autoethnography that shows the lack of school policy regarding parental leave for student parents. When student parents are international students, there is little help to be expected from the school. Given that every year the population of the United States becomes increasingly ethnically diverse and the number of female graduate students has been increasing, the decision makers at institutions of higher education should pay equal attention to all students and offer appropriate policies and accommodations.

While I hope my story offers them an insight into the particularities of a student mother of color’s lived experiences, so that they can understand how and why certain problems occurred and push for changing the culture and climate on campus toward
diversity, I also argue that it is important for women themselves to keep trying to abolish the traditional Confucian patriarchal conceptions of society by transforming their own ways of thinking. While living and studying away from home would provide more opportunity to have equal division of housework and childrearing because of flexible time and lack of familial support, not only me but also some other Korean mothers could not free ourselves of the patriarchal thought and consequently feel a compulsive need to be supportive wives and mothers. Recently, there has been some change in gender role attitude among married couples in South Korea, as evidenced in newspapers, magazines, and TV shows. In addition to the public evidence, real life experiences heard from my friends who are wives and mothers in South Korea also show the change. Although more young couples in contemporary South Korea tend to share the housework and childrearing almost equally, I feel as if I was in year one being stuck in old-fashioned attitudes about gender roles. Merely having a policy will change neither the climate on campus nor student mothers’ experiences. Rather, mothers of color should try to have agency in their own life and not disconnect from larger social realities.

Since expatriates refer to individuals who live outside their home country for a certain period of time, living away from home and family can be transformational and sometimes challenging for expatriates (Benson & Pattie, 2008) because of different values and norms in a foreign country. When arriving in the host country, therefore, most expatriates are expected to adjust themselves to new social and cultural settings as well as to physical environments (Myers-Wall, Frias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu, 2011). Among expatriates, international students, in particular, should deal not only with new customs,
languages, food, living arrangements, social life, but with academic challenges as well that non-student expatriates do not have.

In this autoethnography, I bear witness on the effect of family and Korean culture of origin on cross-cultural adaptation from an expatriate’s view. Coming from the Asian culture, which shares few similarities with Western values, I have been dealing with challenges related to the different values and practices as an expatriate. My adaptation experience has the dual focus on my heritage cultural values and my new dominant culture as same as the normal immigrants experience (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). As a woman whose life has been strongly influenced by the Confucian ideologies, I have encountered both personal and educational challenges. Living as an expatriate living far away from home, however, also provided me with opportunities to find places for myself in two cultures by exploring what both cultures meant to me and how it affected my life experiences. Considering Fonseca’s (1995) study investigating parenting stressors experienced by international student families, which included depressive mood, limited English language fluency, financial difficulty, and cultural misfit, the biggest stressors for me were the cultural misfit or cultural differences.

From my experience as well as from the findings from other studies, language difficulties clearly affect one’s adjustment in the host culture. However, I found from my autoethnography that what made some Korean people’s adjustment even harder was their lack of knowledge in how to cope with unfamiliar contexts or situations. That is, people from different cultures find themselves being challenged when they do not have enough understanding of the host culture. Writing emails would be one of the examples that clearly show the impact of cultural knowledge in one’s adaptation. When I compose an
email to my professors, my children’s teachers, the townhouse manager, and my friends, I recognize the form of writing should be different and always check and am worried if the letter is written properly. When it comes to the proper writing, I considered a proper subject line, a polite address, a greeting, an explanation of myself, a clear explanation of the inquiry, a proper ending, and no spelling errors. It took longer for me to write emails than it did in Korean. It was not because of the language difficulty but more due to the cultural unfamiliarity.

Living as an expatriate in the host culture also meant that I should also make parenting and daily living adjustments. I frequently felt difficulty in parenting without any support network from home and family, and I felt isolated and desperate when I could not attend some critical events at home, such as death or surgery in my families, due to the time and financial costs of going home as well as due to my status as a graduate student. The separation from home and family also made me feel isolated whenever my aging parents could only see my children via video call. The feeling was deepened being accompanied by feeling of guilt when they said, “We are happy that we could see our great children’s face even far away. I really wish I could hug them but this is enough for now.” My aging parents both were retired and I remember them saying, “Seeing your children via video call bring us a lot of joy.” In Confucian cultures, adult children (usually sons) are supposed to take care of their aging parents in return for their devoted love and effort they gave, but as a daughter who is still a student, being away from them made me feel guilty.

Although living as an expatriate woman juggling study with kids includes intermingled aspects of life, there is a lack of research attention to the cultural adaptation
of international graduate students as they perform multiple roles as students, parents, and non-natives in new cultural environments. No matter what kind of acculturation strategies they choose to adopt, most expatriates may strive to adjust well to the host culture to eventually have positive outcomes and experiences in their lives. While the cultural boundaries are becoming blurred with the globalization of societies, cultural understanding for variety still remains difficult (Lineberry, 2012). Thus, the variety needs to be understood by as many people as possible around the world where expatriates live and will eventually improve the experience of expatriate life as Lineberry suggested (p. 90).

The main theme throughout my autoethnography is the complex social, cultural, and educational adaptation process I went through while playing dual roles as a mother and an international graduate student. Drawing upon discourses and ideologies about motherhood and cross-cultural adaptation, I aim to investigate how these discourses and ideologies impact on my life living as an expatriate. To help understanding my story, I raised the following research questions:

Q1. What does it mean for a Korean graduate student mother to have a cross-cultural adaptation experience?

Q1.1. As an international student, what cultural differences have I encountered and how did I cope with them?

Q1.2. As an Asian mother, what cultural differences have I encountered and how did I cope with them?

Q1.3. How do I balance family and school and what were the stressors?
Q2. How does my cross-cultural mothering experience contribute to the general understanding of feminism in the context of a diverse society?

Q3. How does my cross-cultural adaptation experience contribute to the general understanding on expatriates in the context of a diverse society?

My autoethnography that follows explores these questions through the presentation of my lived experiences.
CHAPTER 1
A MARRIED INTERNATIONAL STUDENT WOMAN

Luckily, I found my life partner who was in a doctoral program in the United States, and I married him in 2008. In the same year, I received an acceptance for admission to the graduate school my husband was attending, and I came to State College, Pennsylvania in August 2008 with him. I was excited, because everything was new and unfamiliar; a new house in an unfamiliar town in an unfamiliar country, which required me to make a cultural transition. In addition to the cultural adaptation, however, I was also expecting to adapt myself to my updated status as a “married” “international” graduate student.

The fall semester began at the end of August and I was having the jitters about going to the new school in a new area in this unfamiliar country. As soon as my husband dropped me on campus, I found myself standing on the corner gawking, with no idea which way to go in such a huge campus with all the buildings and buses and people. “Is it because of the sizzling summer heat or first-day jitters or something else?” I had no idea where the sudden fit of dizziness came from.

“What if I am late for class on the first day of school?” The labyrinthine corridors of the building I was in made me more nervous. When I finally found the right classroom, I looked inside at the door and found the air was alive with chatter and laughter, which made me feel out of my element here somehow. “It comes from the fact that I know so little about this school, this area, and everything about this country”; in such a short moment I learned the reason for my discomfort and uneasiness.
Since culture influences one’s cognition, emotion, and behaviors (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), expatriates are often likely to act based on their own cultural assumptions, which might bring two different results. While this may facilitate adaptation because of the desire for more exposure to the unfamiliar culture, it may also disrupt adaptation with conflicting values (Adair, Okumura, & Brett, 2001; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). Although I really hoped that my experience will fall under the former, being relocated to a different country with a different culture, language, value, and education system made me nervous with the feeling of being teleported from Korea to here and suddenly being assigned to face different challenges I have never had before. It was a different feeling from what I had upon arrival in this new town. On the first day of
school, I suddenly realized that I was 15 hours of flying time away from my home country, family, and friends. I felt like I was here alone, and I was that nervous; I felt I was not ready to have a full understanding of the situation and the place I was in; I did not feel like I could fit in here ever; I felt like the people who could help and encourage me had disappeared; I was feeling the loss of my sense of control. Even before the beginning of the first semester, I was feeling marginalized and alienated.

“Just be myself. Today is the day I start my new life and everything will turn out fine.” To throw off my worries, I took a deep breath and walked briskly into the classroom. The first thing I noticed was the seating arrangement in the classroom. Clustering into small groups reminded me of the English conversation class I took from my previous university in Korea, which aimed to encourage discussions, group work, and participation during the class. Many teachers back then in Korea—even now, for some—had teacher-centered learning in the classroom and therefore rows were the typical arrangement, which allowed students to face the front of the class and talk less during the teacher-directed lecture.

“Where should I sit?” I chose the table in the back, which I considered a safety zone for the extreme introvert who did not like to be noticed. Sitting opposite each other in a group did not seem to bother anyone but me, and I felt as if I was a complete stranger to this place.

The seating arrangement of the classroom relates to the nature of the class, the extent of student participation desired, and the nature of the academic task during the class (McCorsky & McVetta, 1978; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Therefore, when a student walks into the classroom, the physical seating arrangement allows them to make
assumption about the class, which is mainly based on their previous experiences with
classrooms. As a student coming from a Confucian-heritage culture, I was more used to
the straight-row arrangement, which is considered typical and traditional in educational
settings in South Korea. Since the teacher was considered the primary focus in the large
classroom with over 50 students in each class, the straight-row arrangement was
predominate.

On the other hand, there are various seating arrangement options in the United
States. Where both student-student and student-teacher interaction is important, the
horse-shoe arrangement is suggested to facilitate the interaction during class. Considering
the existence of a number of ways of arranging a classroom, previous research found that
the student’s seating preference relates to their level of participation and academic
achievement. That is, the researchers identified that students occupying the closer seats
were actively participated in the interaction and obtained higher test scores than those
seated in the back (Adams & Biddle, 1970; Daum, 1974; Sommer, 1969). Thus, from the
research findings of sitting arrangements and students’ preference, one could infer a
causal relationship between seat and students’ interaction level (Thompson, 1973).

When the class started, I was even more overwhelmed by the class climate; the
students were asking so many questions of the professor during class, and the questions
sometime provoked a spirited discussion; a lot of students were sitting in a comfortable
position, such as having their legs crossed or their arms crossed; some of them were
having a snack during class. While sitting in an uncomfortable position, I was also
bewildered by the atmosphere of the classroom; nobody seemed to be bothered by it.
There were other Asian students in the classroom but I felt as if I was the only one who
felt bothered. I remained speechless during the class for a number of reasons; the flow of discussion went so fast and I missed the timing fearing of making linguistic mistake or losing face when negative feedback received. Coming from the culture which values group harmony, I was also worried if I gave imperfect contributions to the class by asking a low level of questions.

By the end of the class, I was exhausted and began to worry about the rest of the semester. Clearly, I could feel the honeymoon stage of Lysgaard’s (1955) U-Curve model has passed.

As an international student coming from a high power distance culture (Hofstede, 1984), I was embarrassed to see other students’ classroom behaviors, all of which are strongly discouraged in class in Korean schools where Confucian ideas permeated. Considering a teacher not merely as an instructor but someone far greater, Confucianism strongly encourages students to show great respect to the teacher requiring the student to obey the teacher, to address the teacher by his or her honorific title, not to interrupt the teacher, and not to talk back.
As a result, these Confucian values have strengthened the hierarchy between the teacher and the student, and have contributed to the deficit view of Asian international students as shy, quiet, and passive in Western educational contexts, where a discourse of independence, and autonomy in learning is privileged (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Goode, 2007; Kaputin, 1988; Phillips, 1990; Samuelowicz, 1987).

While the Confucian values affected my learning behaviors—such as maintaining a polite posture, feeling comfortable with a didactic lecture, trying to obey higher authority, and paying more attention to the product of learning than the process of learning—I was also facing “second language anxiety” (Nakane, 2006), which was common among international students. The anxiety was expressed as seating in the back,
passive or little interaction with students or the professor, and hesitations in asking questions. Against the deficit model that indicates a negative view of Asian students as passive learners from Western perspectives, a number of studies have criticized both the model’s emphasis on the students’ verbal output and the binary distinction of learning style between Asian and Western group of students. Rather, they have begun to pay more attention to the cultural aspects of their learning style. A body of literature argued that culture affects education, and there may be mismatches in assumptions and expectations that teachers and students from various cultures bring to the classroom (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Kato, 2001; Mack, 2004; Yates, 2003).

International students have already established their culture of learning in their home country or somewhere else and they bring this with them to the American classroom where there may not be many similarities; they may not be fully aware of how their own way of learning will impact the classroom interaction (Yates & Trang, 2012). When concerning Asian students’ learning behavior, therefore, more research should take the various cultures of learning into consideration (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Kato, 2001; Yates, 2003).

That evening on the way back home, I became so depressed that I did not recognize myself looking vacantly out of the car window with my chin resting on my hand. It was not until then I recognized my husband trying to cheer me up while driving home from school:

“Let me guess what you are thinking now. Probably think the class seems to be unfamiliar only for you and you are not gonna make it, right? You must feel small and miss your family and all the things that felt familiar and comfortable when
you were in Korea. If it’s any comfort, you are not the only one who feels that way because I have been there too. I also took the class on the first day in my first semester here and was overwhelmed by the class. I did not understand most of the lecture in the beginning but was getting better in the end. It is perfectly normal for you to feel that and I’m sure you are gonna be fine. Don’t forget I’m next to you as your husband and your senior. I will help you in every way I can.”

I was not paying due attention to his words at first, but the more I listened to him, the more I found his words were a great consolation to me. At first, I felt as if he was reading my mind but soon I came to understand the reason; we shared the same challenges as an international students coming from the same culture.

For international students to make better adaptation to the new school, friends, colleagues, romantic partners, and family members (Cole, 2010; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; O’Meara, Knudsen & Jones, 2013; Reis & Sprecher, 2009) are the most influential factors and thankfully, my husband has played multiple roles in helping my adaptation; as the only family staying next to me, my neighbor back home, my soulmate, my senior in the same disciplines, and a Korean international student who was more knowledgeable in Western culture than me, he comforted me so much when I felt small as I was meeting my desired academic goals. He helped me deal with homesickness talking about our home and neighborhood-related memories together, and he informed me of overall context as well as the school system.

In concordance with Perrucci and Hu’s (1995) findings, the help of faculty and staff also reduced my level of anxiety about my new setting and thereby facilitated my adaptation (p. 492). My academic advisor, who was also my husband’s advisor, has
provided me with professional advice and even emotional support (Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013); his way of making students feel comfortable really facilitated my cultural adaptation to the school. I remember flying to Texas to attend a conference during my first semester and having to have dinner with my advisor, husband, and a few of my colleagues at a casual restaurant. Preparing myself for the dinner in a hotel room, I was beginning to wonder what it would be like to have an informal meeting with professors outside of the classroom in the States.

While I had a chance to have dinner with Korean professors and other students and knew how to behave properly at a dinner; I would take extra care in getting dressed; I would arrive before the professor to welcome him or her; I would set chopsticks and the spoons on the table; I would start to eat only after my professor had started eating; I would replenish his or her cup with coffee or water; and I would not speak as much with authority. However, I had known little about the appropriate behaviors when having a casual meeting with the professor outside the classroom.

To make a long story short, I received a lasting impression of the casual atmosphere of the meeting; my advisor preferred to be addressed by his first name; some of them joined later; we all wore casual clothes, utensils were already set on the table by the server and everyone helped themselves without ceremony; we all exchanged good-natured banter with each other; and meanwhile, I found the students observing proper decorum to their professor, and the professor offered both academic advice and knowledge in an unforced way. Considering that the positive graduate school experience is significantly influenced by advisor support and a sense of belonging (Curtin et al.,
I found that the academic advisor was also one of the most key sources of support in international students’ adjustment process.

The adjustment and adaptation took time and effort as an ongoing process, but I was not coping alone; receiving support from both my husband and advisor, I came to feel less uprooted and lonely in this new world.

It was the middle of my first semester and my adaptation in multiple domains seemed to be going smoothly. I was still struggling with extensive readings, reflection papers, group discussions, and presentations, but I was learning a lot about the new academic setting from my colleagues coming from different cultures as well as from the lesson, through observation and participation. Although cross-cultural adaptation was an ongoing process, I was gradually feeling like it has reached a plateau. It was then I began to feel bothered by my parents asking me about having children. “So, dear are you pregnant yet? Your almost 90-year-old grandmother-in-law must be looking forward to be a great-grandmother. You are already almost 30 years old and it would be better to have your kids younger.” My husband and I had been discussing growing a family, but both of us agreed that it was not time yet. Especially as a woman, the timing of parenthood was not a matter of simple decisions, as many women who have found themselves in similar situations would understand (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013, p. 183).

As an international student woman, there were a couple of factors influencing my decision about timing of motherhood. First I had to consider my biological clock:

“I am a 29-year-old graduate student woman who is about to finish the first semester. If I postpone childbearing until I complete the doctorate, the chances of having children will be considerably diminished. But if I decide to
have children during graduate school when I am more fertile, achieving a work-life balance would be challenging. Maybe I should stay in school for a few more years.”

As a graduate student, I then had to consider my future career plans. According to Castañeda and Isgro (2013), women in academia are more likely to remain single, far less likely to become parents than other professional women, and have fewer children than women in all the other professional fields. Mason, Wolfinger, & Goulden (2002) also found that women with babies were less likely than women without babies to enter into tenure-track positions (p. 5). Wolf-Wendel and Ward’s (2006) study of mothers of young children who are on the tenure track shows that women faculty members with children are often encouraged to pursue their careers at lower-tier institutions. It seemed that to maintain a work-family balance will be particularly challenging for women. It seemed that it would be difficult to pursue my graduate education while pregnant and later, as a mother. It seemed that I should not allow my children’s well-being to be threatened because I am a student mother, who is less likely to provide for my children as easily as a parent with a career or a steady income (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013, p. 183). However, I soon felt that I could not bear to give up either my career or parenthood; I felt like families should be welcome at any time, and thus I decided to show the assumption—the dual roles of scholar and mother are incompatible—could be wrong.
Figure 4. Issues for timing parenthood

My status as a new international student also made me hesitate in having a baby. I was already feeling overloaded with the cross-cultural adaptation within educational and sociocultural domains and thus was not sure if I could handle another new world, the world of parenthood, and possible conflicts with cultural values in childrearing. Even though I was away from my home, family, and friends, I was still under their influence and influenced by the traditional ethics in Korea. Therefore, my aged grandmother-in-law and her strong desire for having great-grandchildren was also one of my considerations. Considering the norm of filial piety, one of the major principles of Confucian ethics that still remains at the core of all ethics in Korea (Kim, 1994; Kim, Kim, & Hurh, 1991), I could not be free from the filial responsibilities, such as showing respect to elderly people, deferring to them, and bringing them the joy of having (great) grandchildren.
Taking all these issues into consideration, I was compelled to go through with it, no matter what it is. To confirm our decision, we sought advice on when having a child might be “too soon” or “too late” (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013, p. 85). My husband and I asked advice from professors in our discipline. Some of them were young faculty with young children, while some of them were in their 40s or 50s with grown children. Most of them strongly encouraged us to have a baby while in graduate school. I can recall a male professor’s words when we asked him the right time to have a baby: “There is no right time to have a baby,” he seemed to put it bluntly. However, there was something in what he said, and his words were strongly impressed on my memory:

“You may think none of you are ready yet to become parents. But do you think there will be a day when you think you are ready? You may think times are really tough right now as graduate students. But life would not always easy and you will become even busier after graduation. If you want to become parents, now is a good time to have a baby. As graduate students, both of you have a more flexible schedule and much more time available than other parents who are a bit older with a career. By the time when you start your career, your kids will be grown up enough so it will be a lot easier for you to take care of them as well as to focus on your work. Parenting young child(ren) is hard work and when you are young is the best time to face the demanding job.”

While my husband and I decided to follow the advice, the timing was poignant for us as a graduate student couple. We decided to plan the pregnancy for an early summer birth, if possible, because a summer birth would not disrupt classes and also enable me to focus on motherhood. Wilson (1999) concurred that “it has become an unwritten rule in
academe that female professors give birth between May and August, when students are not around”, and the rule also seemed to apply to us. Although not every woman can time her pregnancy, my husband and I decided to try so that I can give birth during summer vacation. Since we planned the pregnancy, however, it seemed not work out as well as we thought, and I began to feel distressed. It was nearly the end of the first semester and I was at my lowest point for preparing for the final papers while trying for months to get pregnant. It was then I received a call from my grandmother-in-law. I was always nervous about the sound of the telephone ringing at night because it was highly likely to be a call from my family or friends in South Korea. Living far away from them, I was concerned for them and was always worried that I was going to hear some bad news about them. It turned out not to be the bad news, but I could recognize that her voices felt a little different. “Are you expecting a baby?,” she asked me in a voice filled with anticipation. I felt a little odd because she had been very careful all this while not to ask me about it. Although my answer seemed to make her feel disappointed, she continued to explain about the dream she had recently: “I had a precognitive dream about the birth of a child. I saw a golden pig in a room and I was sure it is conception dream of my great-grandchild. If you are not, then maybe it is for someone else in our family.”

It is not uncommon for married Korean woman to hear such comments usually from her mother or other family member because Asian cultures have believed that either pregnant women themselves or other close family member will have a prophetic birth dream of an unborn child. Although a conception dream is not scientifically proven, her dream did not hurt me at all. Rather, I felt sorry to have her looking forward a baby long. Curiously, it was not much later I found out I was expecting my first baby. Family
members called and congratulate me, and I felt as if I made a great achievement. While Western considers motherhood as a personal choice (Leizerowitz, 2003; Lieblich, 1993) and thus views parenting as an individual accomplishment (Lieblich, 1993), motherhood in Confucian cultures, where family is foremost values, is viewed more as a socialized expectation of women (Signad & Eisikovits, 2008).
CHAPTER 2
PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH EXPERIENCES

“There is only one way to find out how women actually experience motherhood, and that is by listening to what they have to say.” (Oakley, 1997, cited in Horn, Corr, and Earle, 2005, p.2)

Entering the world of motherhood required me to experience changes in my body and emotions that I had never experienced before. The first hurdle of motherhood was morning sickness. Starting from the very next day after I confirmed my pregnancy, the morning sickness made me undergo harsh hazing as an expectant mother; it was so painful that I could barely eat, smell, or cook.

When vomiting was becoming one of my regular activities, my first prenatal doctor visit took place. It was my first time visiting the doctor in the United States, and I was slightly anxious and nervous about it. Because it was my first pregnancy, I could not compare differences between Korean OB/GYN clinics and American ones, but one thing I recognized was the different atmosphere; I remembered the negative experiences visiting an OB/GYN clinic in Korea for my regular examination; as soon as I arrived at the reception desk, I spoke to the receptionist in the crowded reception area to explain why I was there. Then the receptionist asked for all my symptoms and some private questions in front of countless visitors there. While waiting for my turn in the waiting room, I felt the inquisitive gaze from people around me, and one of them even asked me what brought me there. The shaming experiences continued even after treatment started because of doctors’ embarrassing questions which were too private and the treatment environment which was not patient-friendly at all.
The Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs conducted a survey of 1314 unmarried women in Korea (Lee et al., 2014) and found that half of them (708 women) never visited OB/GYN clinics. The reasons for their negative perceptions toward OB/GYN visits are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

*The distribution of perceptions toward OB/GYN clinics among unmarried women in Korea (Translated from the original study)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
<th>Non-visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of cases</td>
<td>1314</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OB/GYN clinic is for pregnancy and delivery only.</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OB/GYN clinic is the place to go for women with sexual experience.</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The high cost of visiting the OB/GYN clinics</td>
<td>81.1%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking too many questions about one’s private life</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being more reluctant to go compared with other general clinics</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried women will visit OB/GYN clinic only in exceptional cases.</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People would think I am at fault.</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results confirmed the endurance of public stereotypes largely coming from Confucian values. Confucianism considered sexuality as taboo and especially required the woman to keep her virginity before marriage as a way of proving herself as a subordinate to her husband (Gao et al., 2012). Considering that human sexual behaviors are influenced by environmental factors, such as modernization, industrialization, and
globalization, women’s elevated status with higher education attained and careers made a change in dealing with the traditional Confucian ideals (Gao et al., p. s13). In Korea, however, the Confucianism is still the core societal value, and thus people tend to be reluctant to discuss sexual issues in public. Women, in particular, are still encouraged to remain quite sexually conservative (Hong, Yamamoto, & Chang, 1993; Kim et al., 2008). For all those reasons, women would be highly likely to feel uncomfortable with visiting OB/GYN clinics.

Having no idea what actually happens in the first visit, I entered the OB/GYN clinic with my husband and walked to the receptionist to explain the reason for my visit. “I have scheduled my appointment at 10:30 a.m.,” I spoke in a nervous voice. She next confirmed all my information including my name, address, and insurance, and then asked me to do some paperwork. ‘This is it? I do not need to explain why I am here?’ I felt as though all the worrying I had done so far was in vain. While filling out the form sitting in the chair in the waiting room, I found that a lady nearby was smiling at us. “It must be your first time having a baby. Congratulations. I can tell how excited you are.” She really made my day and helped me feel comfortable with this new place I have never been in the United States. Soon I could hear my name being called by the nurse, and did my first prenatal check-up without feeling ashamed or humiliated. Nurses and doctors congratulated me for my first pregnancy and explained the reasons for performing all necessary exams and tests. Understanding some medical jargon in English was a challenge but the doctor and nurse soon explained it in plain words. My husband arranged his schedule so he could accompany me to the visit, which made me feel more comfortable with being in the new place. Seeing him asking questions of the doctor and
being informed about anticipated changes in my body as well as our domestic routine kept me from feeling left out. As I was walking out of the clinic, I could feel more connected with the baby, my husband, and the host community. Since the first visit, I have always felt comfortable and well treated by the clinic, which contributed to my positive perceptions toward both the OB/GYN clinic and the host culture.

The number of immigrant women living in the United States has continued to grow rapidly; out of 161 million immigrant women in the United States in 2014, 9 million were Asian-born women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Despite of the rapid increase, however, Asian immigrant women are still underutilizing U.S. health care services (Dallo, Borrell, & Williams, 2008; Kramer, Ivey, & Ying, 1999). To eliminate the disparity, a growing number of hospitals are taking these issues into consideration and trying to meet their needs with the system development (Wilson-Stronks & Galvez, 2007). Their efforts came from their growing perceptions toward cultural differences in health beliefs and practices. According to the research findings on the barriers to immigrant women’s use of U.S. health care service, immigrant women encounter challenges in accessing culturally appropriate maternity care services (Tseng, Chang, & Nishizono, 2005) in addition to dealing with language barriers, low socioeconomic status (Liang, Yuan, Mandelblatt, & Pasick, 2004), and different policy and practices (Higginbottom, Vallianatos, Forgeron, Gibbons, Mamede, & Barolia, 2014; Uba, 1992). A body of literature found that culture influences health beliefs (Jin, Slomka, & Blixen, 2002; McLaughlin & Braun, 1998; Uba, 1992) arguing that (1) immigrants’ unfamiliarity with Western medical system and practices can make appropriate health care services inaccessible, and (2) healthcare providers’ ignorance of different cultural beliefs can
result in miscommunication with the patients. Therefore, health care providers have attempted to be aware of different cultural beliefs and perspectives that immigrant women bring to the health care centers.

Maintaining my status as an international graduate student guaranteed health insurance coverage for me with the basic socioeconomic status and fewer communication problems made it possible for me to have a highly positive visit to the U.S. health care services. Living in an area where Asians comprise 10% of the borough’s population also contributed to my positive experiences in receiving health care services. I was told by my care providers that they have seen a lot of Asian patients and recognized cultural differences in some of health practices and beliefs. For example, one of the nurses told me from the first visit that she used to give ice water to the Asian woman who just gave birth, having no idea that Asian culture recommends the mother to keep away from anything cold. While I was gladly explaining her the reason for the different beliefs and practice, I could recognized that she was trying to show her respect for various health beliefs across cultures and her effort to understand those differences, from her listening my words attentively.

As I started my second trimester, fortunately, the pain of morning sickness died away. The smell from almost everything gradually went away and my appetite grew causing food cravings. Although the doctor informed me that women could experience food cravings during the pregnancy—which sometimes includes weird cravings such as non-edible items or weird eating habits such as eating pickles with ice cream—my craving for Korean traditional food embarrassed me.
While I was facing multiple stressors in the unfamiliar educational and sociocultural context, I used to have little difficulty in adjusting to the culinary and dietary habits of the host country, because my husband and I had previous exposure to American-style diet in Korea and even had a preference for it over Korean food. Before we moved to America, my husband and I always had an American-style breakfast, which was usually bacon with eggs and toast, while many Koreans have rice and soup for breakfast. Although some food items were not familiar upon arrival, my eating habit had not changed a lot. I have seen most Korean students around me struggling with the different dietary habits, and it was not surprising that many of them found our preference for American food surprising. A friend of my husband’s one day asked me with curiosity, “Where do you go for grocery shopping if you do not go to Korean market? What do you usually eat at every meal if you do not eat traditional Korean soup, white sticky rice, and side dishes?”

“We do eat Korean-style dishes but are open to eating many different dishes,” I replied with a smile, seeing his genuine curiosity. Most Korean international students around me seemed to be really curious about our eating habits and never understood that there were a lot of ingredients and food items available at local markets, which could satisfy palates of different cultures.

Called dietary acculturation, the adaptation to different dietary habits has been one of the possible stressors that makes it difficult for international students or immigrants to adjust to the host country (Lee 2008; Pierce, Austin, Crane, Retzlaff, & Hutter, 2007; Satia-Abouta, 2003). Similar to Berry’s (1990) acculturation strategies, there are three main dietary categories in dietary acculturation strategies: (1) maintain
their traditional dietary habits; (2) entirely adopt food choices of the host country; (3) selectively adopt eating patterns of host country while maintaining their traditional dietary habits (Patterson et al., 2002; Satia-Aboua, 2003). Considering our eating habits, I felt like my husband and I were in between the second and the third one. With a lot of changes in their lives, many expatriates might want to maintain a native diet to fall back on (Almohanna, 2010) that results in the slowest change they would make in the acculturation process (Kittler & Sucher, 2008; Vanegas, 2007). In reality, however, most of them found it difficult to maintain a native diet for various reasons; the higher price of the ethnic food, poor quality or unaffordability of ethnic foods (Pan, 1999). In addition to their financial load and lack of time, therefore, international students are likely to make undesirable changes in their diet (Pan, Dixon, Humburg, & Huffman, 1999).

Compared to other Korean international students around us, luckily, my husband and I did not need to make any undesirable changes in our diet, which helped us experience less stress than others in cross-cultural adaptation and also kept us from overspending on groceries. This time, however, it was different. I had been craving a lot of traditional Korean food; I could not make any, and it was not available in this small town. I reluctantly gave up trying to satisfy my mouth, and decided to satisfy my eyes instead. I searched the Internet to see pictures of Korean dishes sold in Korea, and licked my lips at the sight of the dishes. “I am so pathetic,” I mumbled to myself. My tired body and mind flooded me with self-pity. I was homesick for family, friends, food, and everything I left behind and finally could feel why other Korean students around me craved Korean food.
Feeling bad for his poor pregnant wife, my husband drove into New York one day and took me to the Korean restaurant in Korea town, where I could find almost anything I wanted to eat from Korean barbeque to Korean red-bean sherbet. I enjoyed a pregnant woman’s prerogative to eat any amount of what I want without worrying about putting on weight. However, it was not long before I was deprived of that privilege. Glucose tolerance test done in the fifth month of pregnancy confirmed that I had gestational diabetes. At the following meeting with the dietitian, I was given a glucose meter and a guideline for a diabetic meal plan. The meal plan was designed to eat well-balanced diet to maintain a stable blood sugar level as well as to provide all the nutrition the fetus needed. According to the meal plan, I needed to eat carbohydrate choices, protein, vegetable or fat in every meal, which sounded all healthy but also meant I should change my diet according to the food items recommended in the meal plan.
With a tight control of diabetes after that, I finally got what I deserved. I successfully maintained stable blood sugar while keeping my fetus with a normal size. The OB/GYN and the dietitian were complimentary about my enormous effort and strict self-discipline, and I was satisfied to do my duty as an expectant mother. I was adapting to the world of motherhood over time but also had a lot more adjusting to do as a first-year graduate student in the host country.

Every day my belly grew, and I continued to do coursework as a first-year doctoral student. By the second semester, a graduate student was required to pass the candidacy examination as a way of proving himself or herself having sufficient skill to continue doctoral study. Not wanting to delay my academic advancement, I worked on my paper during my second semester in my second trimester. As my belly grew, my body shape had changed, which was hard to accept for a woman who had always had a lean frame, but I could not afford to let myself to get sentimental. Having adapted to the school climate, I came to enjoy classes, leaning a lot from enthusiastic professors as well as from my colleagues, and my research interest in intercultural education grew. Various research topics flashed through my mind, and I translated them into writing for my candidacy exam. Battling with gestational diabetes and with sitting on a chair for a long time with my growing belly, I kept pushing myself through it all. That way, I scheduled my candidacy exam on May 8, 2009, which turned out to be a symbolic date for me; the prenatal check-up was scheduled in the morning, the candidacy examination was scheduled in the afternoon, and the end-of-term party was scheduled in the evening with 15 people invited to my house. The night before, I was up all night reading and rereading my paper with ever-growing anxiety for the exam while preparing food for the party.
ahead of time. Considering the people invited included my academic advisor and his wife, a few Korean friends, a few American friends who were vegetarian or had a lot of interest in Korean food, organizing the menu was another challenge for me; It felt important to take every individual’s background into consideration, including their culture-specific dietary habits as well as their individual preference for certain food; at the same time, I also felt the need to provide my Korean friends with soothing food as well as to introduce Korean food to my American friends. After spending long hours sitting in front of the laptop searching for popular Korean dishes in America, I ended up compromising between American-style foods and Korean ones, such as deep-fried shrimp, fried dumplings, Korean-style pancakes with two choices loaded with vegetable or Kimchi, Korean-style beef stew, salmon roll with tartar sauce on top, Korean-style chicken wings, and Korean mixed rice with meat and assorted vegetables. Although most of the dishes looked like simple finger foods, there were several considerations for my choice; food ingredients should not be too unfamiliar to all the guests while serving common Korean dishes; dishes should maintain the taste while adjusting the exotic spices in the recipe; ingredients of Korean mixed rice should be served in the divided plate so that guests can choose what they like; and pieces of food should be easily picked up from dishes for the guests who feel uncomfortable with chopsticks. Not too authentic but not too uprooted; now that I think about it, I found that the dishes reflected my status as being caught between two cultures as well as my attitude toward the cross-cultural adaptation.
Preparing the party food, I recognized my concern for various cultural backgrounds my guests have and found that one’s food habits and choices are shaped by cultural, social, and individual influences. As a key component of culture, therefore, food serves as more than an essential source of nutrients; rather, food introduces expatriates to possibilities of change or resistance to new environment and the cultural norms embedded in it. In the case of newly arrived expatriates who face with the burden of adaptation to the new culture, their dietary pattern would be closely associated with their potential for smooth settlement (Capella, 1993; Koc & Welsh, 2002). That is, moving between the cultural and geographical space made expatriates establish the fluid nature of identity (Hannerz, 1987; Pieterse, 1995), and therefore, food may offer them a feeling of belonging or inclusion to the host society or vice versa. Consequently, the food choices
expatriates made reflect the complexity of cross-cultural experience. In addition, individuals’ food choices have also provided me with the opportunity to learn what other people from different cultures eat, how they eat, when they eat (Koc & Welsh, 2002, p. 1), and eventually made me to learn who I am. In this respect, my experiences of dietary acculturation and hosting a party as an expatriate show that individual food choices relates to my tendency for cultural adaptation.

Passing the exam was certainly a weight off my mind but I was facing an agonizing three-month wait for my first childbirth. In some sense, I was preparing another exam I should successfully pass.

“How is your Taegyo doing?” One day my mother-in-law asked me over the phone. “I feel the need but have no idea how to do it. How was yours?”, I said. She replied:

“I experienced the influence of it upon my two children. I wished my first baby to be good looking, such as a face with regular features and when I first met him he was exactly the way I imagined. However, I did not do any Taegyo concerning his height or personality and the outcome was as what you see. When I was expecting my second one, I did Taegyo hoping her to be strong-minded because my first one was too soft-hearted. When I gave birth to her, I realized that I should have done Taegyo concerning her appearance.”

(We both laughed)

“I am telling you what I experienced. I do not know Taegyo has any scientific evidence but I do not think there is anything wrong with having positive and
healthy behaviors while pregnant. It will also be better for your health as well as for your baby.”

After this delightful conversation with my mother-in-law, I hung up and asked myself whether I should perform Taegyo or not. Although I was intrigued by her experience related to Taegyo, I was still having a vague idea. All I knew about it was the old saying in Korea; *the effects of ten years of education after birth are less than those of the ten months during pregnancy* (Translated by Chang, 2004, originally written by Joseon era scholar Sajudang Lee in a guidebook of folk Taegyo called *Taegyo Shingi*, published in 1800 in Korea).

Since ancient times in Korea, there has been a strong belief among Korean people that expectant mothers’ thoughts and actions have great influence on the development of their unborn child (Chang et al., 2004; Kim 2011). The ideology of motherhood created the notion of Taegyo, consisting of a set of prenatal routines and behaviors, and encouraging expectant mothers from their early months of pregnancy to control their mind to be peaceful, to select foods with high quality, and to maintain a good and nurturing environment so that their baby would be a well-rounded human being. These practices reflect the Confucian view that an embryo is already a fully-fledged human being but pure and uncorrupted, who is thus sensitive to and strongly influenced by the behavior of the people around.

As a traditional belief and practice taking a psychological approach in fetal development, Taegyo has been giving way to Western values emphasizing scientific certainty and baby’s physical development (Cho, 1987). However, Taegyo has been regaining its power with recent scientific evidence to support it: expectant mothers
having emotional distress are more likely to have low birth weight infants (Nordstrom, Dallas, Morton, & Patel, 1988), verbal and sound stimulation have been found to facilitate fetal maturation and development (Fifer & Moon, 1994; Park et al., 1999), and maintaining a secure environment has been reported to promote fetal brain development (Devlin, Daniel, & Roeder, 1997). Thus, Taegyo has started to be considered as having a great influence on fetal psychological development as well as physiological development. Furthermore, as parents tend to have a few children these days (Chang et al., 2004; Kim 2011; Lee et al., 2005), the practice of Taegyo has been growing among Korean expectant mothers with a strong desire for their babies’ optimal health.

While practicing Taegyo has largely been seen as a positive custom for both mothers and babies, there have also been studies taking negative view on it. From the viewpoint of sociology and feminism, Taegyo has been seen as an example of intensive mothering, which strengthens a biological difference between men and women as well as a culturally defined difference (Hong, 2008; Kim, 2001). As a result, these differences impose too much responsibility upon women concerning child education and thus require intensive self-restraint as a way of performing good mothering even before they give birth.

From the Confucian view on motherhood, therefore, Taegyo has been considered as the first duty of mother, who is supposed to devote herself to her baby. Growing up in a family with deep rooted Confucianism, I have also watched my mother being devoted to my brother and me, and therefore I felt like my enculturated Confucian values were compelled to do Taegyo. My spouse’s family also practices Confucian norms on a daily basis, such as doing filial duty to the elder in the family, worshipping the ancestors, and
having a hierarchy between men and women; I also felt to do my filial duty as a
daughter-in-law by performing *Taegyo*. Concerning the Confucian society values group
harmony both inside and outside of family, my decision to do *Taegyo* was not a matter of
personal concern. In the end, I considered its positive aspects for both my baby and me,
the elders’ expectations toward me, my duty as a filial daughter-in-law. I decided to do
*Teagyo* during pregnancy.

Although I decided to do *Taegyo*, I had only a vague idea of how to do it.
Generally, these instructions were transmitted from the aged women in their family
including their testimony to the effects of *Taegyo* upon their children. Thus, I asked my
mother-in-law and grand mother-in-law and was informed about the instructions; I was
encouraged to visualize my baby (what I want her to look like), to see pictures of good-
looking babies, and to avoid eating unusually shaped fruits and vegetables so that the
baby will be good-looking with no deformity; aiming at fetal personality development. I
was encouraged not to kill any living creatures, to have positive thinking, and to give
words of blessing to my baby. I was also encouraged to spend a lot of time studying for
fetal intellectual development, which I thought was already working hard on.

Instructions about *Taegyo* have also been transmitted through texts, including the
book *Taegyo Shingi* written in 1801 during the Chosun era by an upper class woman and
a modern publication written by doctors and experienced mothers (Choi, 2008; Kang,
2002). With the growth of the Internet, the instructions began to be shared and
transmitted through online forums, communities, and web sites.
Both with the oral and written information on *Taegyo*, I came to work hard at practicing it. Although it was a traditional Confucian practice, there had little chance to conflict with the Western ideology because of its personal and private aspect; it was my own business, and no one in here would not know if I did it or not; there was no essential Korean food or items required to practice the traditional Confucian values; none of the instruction of practices interfered my life habits in the United States. It gave me a feeling of connection with my baby while facilitating me in making a healthier lifestyle and positive thinking.
Figure 8. Recommended Taegyo books available in Korea (Retrieved from Korean online shopping malls www.gsshops.com)

“The moment a child is born, the mother is also born. She never existed before.

The woman existed, but the mother, never. A mother is something absolutely new.”

(a quote from Rajneesh, an Indian spiritual leader from 1931-1990)

“Your cervix dilates only 1.4 centimeters. You are now in 38 weeks of pregnancy and are expected to wait until 40 weeks or even more under the present progress.” The OB/GYN predicted my expected week of delivery from internal exam done during the check-up. It had been almost 10 months since I have experienced changes in body and emotion, but I could never seem to make myself adapt to my new self. Although I was so terrified of childbirth itself, I was also eager to have it over with because of all the pain I went through. As if by magic, my burning desire became a reality sooner than I expected;
on the very next day following the 38 week checkup, I was in the delivery room with my husband. It was 4:30 p.m., and the journey to the unknown was going to start soon. While my husband went to use the phone to notify families in Korea that I started labor, I was lying on the bed alone in the delivery room, and I was asked by a visitor from the next delivery room to borrow one of the chairs in my room. Hearing the sound of voices in the next room, I was all choked up with emotion. I did not want to be alone when this happened to me. I was frightened at the prospect of giving birth and really missed my mother; I wanted to be around people who wish for a safe delivery.

While most women undergo depression after delivery with a new identity and responsibility given (Park & Moon, 2011), I already felt depressed being away from home. Immigrant women usually become pregnant even before they are accustomed to the host culture, many of them having no basic knowledge about childbirth or support from family (Lim, 2009; Park & Moon, 2011). Considering that physical and emotional support from family helps women not only overcome difficulties related to birth but also facilitate a successful adaptation to a mothering role, giving birth away from home made me feel embarrassed and depressed.

With the help of enthusiastic medical staff and husband, however, I stood both the emotional and physical pain and finally met my daughter and the new me after eight hours of labor. Before I had enough time to adapt to my new identity and my baby, however, I had to encounter unexpected cultural conflicts between the postpartum beliefs of Korean culture and those of the United States.

“Would you get me a cup of water?” The long labor made me thirsty and I asked one of the nurses for water. Soon I was given a cup of water with ice, which made me
wait until it is lukewarm. When the water became lukewarm just about right, the nurse immediately replaced it with ice water. Furthermore, the nurse kept recommending me to take a shower in the hospital. Although I was tempted to follow the Western postpartum practices, I also felt the need to observe Asian practices as an Asian woman. In the traditional non-Western view, the new mother is expected to keep warm and avoid anything cold, because they had lost hot blood during childbirth and their bones are still open. To restore the humoral balance, therefore, the new mother should not bathe, wash her hair, touch or drink cold water right after giving birth, and new mothers are encouraged to keep the room and their body warm (Davis, 2001; Lang & Elkin, 1997; Nahas, Hillege, & Amshen, 1999). The recovery room I stayed felt cold with the air conditioner full on, and I asked the nurse for extra blankets.

Another conflict was food. As an Asian woman, I was supposed to eat the hot seaweed soup called *Miyuk-kuk*, which is served to the new mother in Korea. In both a medical and a cultural sense, the seaweed soup has been known as having a marvelous efficacy in recovery from childbirth. It is high in iron, which is an important element for making blood, and hence helps hemostasis. It is a good source of calcium, which mothers might have a deficiency in, resulting from breastfeeding. Iodine in seaweed helps not only dissolving blood clots resulting from childbirth but also losing weight, and other nutrients in it help uterine contractions after childbirth, clean the blood, relieve constipation, and help making better breast milk (Park, Ro, & Lee, 2013). However, the soup was not available in the hospital and I was served with oatmeal, beefsteak, dinner roll, ice cream and coffee. Having experienced little difficulty in dietary adaptation, I did not miss the Korean style seaweed soup, but was embarrassed by ice cream and coffee.
served, considering the Korean belief that new mothers should avoid cold food and caffeine. With various food choices available, however, I came to enjoy the alternative ethnic food in the following meals.

During the stay at the hospital, I was generally satisfied with the care and treatment given by medical professionals, but as an expatriate, I felt a certain degree of conflict between the two different postpartum practices and found myself feeling embarrassed. In addition to the cultural conflict, I also dealt with the demands of intensive mothering that nobody had told me before. From the experience, I found that breastfeeding was one of the crucial components of the ideology of intensive mothering (Bartlett, 2010; Knaak, 2009; Lambert, 2014) and has been romanticized too much with the ideology embodied and a positive view of breastfeeding emphasized. Back then I did not realize that I was coping with the dominant ideology of mothering that breastfeeding is best and good mothering should be intensive (Hays, 1996). Growing up in a society where this ideology brainwashed women into intensive mothering, I was enduring the negative aspects of breastfeeding; I felt discomfort at the breasts engorged and heavy, cracked and bleeding nipples, a sudden uncontrollable letdown of milk, ruined figure, the misperception that I was not producing enough milk, being on call 24/7 with zero breaks, continuous pumping to maintain enough milk produced, increased depression resulting from increased levels of lactation hormones, being careful of taking medications, maintaining uncomfortable same posture for at least 30 minutes every hour and a half, and not being able to focus on my own recovery. In this respect, breastfeeding was not only a standard for infant feeding decision but was also a core mothering belief (Mercer, 1995; Knaak, 2009).
Considering intensive mothering practices including breastfeeding are pervasive in both Asian and Western ideology of motherhood, I could not apply my integration strategy to the practices. There were more similarities than differences between the two cultures in performing intensive mothering and acceptance of the values was inevitable.

I had my firstborn a week before the beginning of fall semester. It indicated that my original plan to have a May baby had failed, and that I should be back to school in a week. However, that was too much to ask of me. With an infant to take care of, a husband who did not finish his coursework, and no help from others, I could not attend classes. In addition, I was an Asian woman, who had less muscle than western women, meaning that it should take longer for the stretched, weakened pelvic floor muscles after delivery to recover (Kim-Godwin, 2003). In addition, new mothers from non-Western cultures are encouraged to follow some of the traditional postpartum beliefs and practices. Being called *Sam-chil-il* in Korea, which literally means 21 days, the postpartum recovery ritual aims to help the new mother get the rest she needs to ensure her body is recovered from giving birth so that she can be ready for caring for her baby (Kim-Godwin, 2003; Park et al., 2013).
"Your request has been denied since you had a normal birth with any medical issues considered. In addition, you should maintain a full time status as an international student and we do not have policies for student parents.” It was a short answer from the university when I asked for a short maternity leave.

The number of international students in the United States has been increasing; by the academic year 2013-14, a total of 886,052 international students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities (Institute for International Education [IIE], 2014). Data from the report by IIE also showed that almost half of them were in graduate school, one fifth were married (IIE, 2006a, 2006b cited from Myers-Walls, 2011; IIE, 2014), Pennsylvania was among the top host states where international students were living and studying, and 65% of international students had personal or family funds to pay for their studies. Despite the growing number of (international) student parents in the United States, however, there has been little progress in accommodating their life.
Gladly, recent studies have argued the need for parental leave and accommodation policy for student parents. Cuomo et al. (2014) compiled a family leave report considering the Pennsylvania State University graduate students and postdoctoral scholars and found that most universities, including Penn State, do not have childbirth accommodation policies for graduate students (Wilson, 2006). From among the 1,567 people including graduate students and postdoctoral scholars who participated in the survey, 26.5% identified as parents and 51.2% of them became parents while at Penn State. Considering the number of student parents has been increasing, the report argued that equal support for graduate students should be guaranteed.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduate Students</th>
<th>Postdoctoral Scholars/Fellows</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>before 2010</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>5</td>
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Retrieved from a research finding by Cuomo et al. (2014).

The report also stated a lack of additional concerns for international student parents; international student parents, in particular, are subject to additional requirements related to study visas; they are required to maintain full-time status or a stipulated number of credits while on leave with the same amount of full tuition paid; when they are self-funded, university does not provide for parental leave although their financial and physical burden increases; when parents of a baby are international graduate students, the burden becomes even heavier, but the reality is that they are still not eligible for parental
leave with no policies in existence for them. Findings from the report showed policies addressing family leave should consider various populations when providing appropriate accommodations.

Although cross-cultural experiences of international students include challenges that vary among individuals (Church, 1982; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Myers-Walls, 2011), a body of research found that most international students experience common stressors including language difficulties, homesickness, financial problems, adjusting to a new academic system, as well as new social customs (Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986; Church, 1982; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Ying & Liese, 1991). More institutions in the United States have increasing resources, services, and policies available for international students, but at the time I gave birth, I felt marginalized without any support from family or systemic help from school, and I felt homesickness with unexpected difficulties faced as an expatriate.

As our first child grew, so did the desire to expand our family. Thoughts of a second child had crossed my mind but this time again, timing of baby mattered. I had not taken a comprehensive exam yet, which meant I needed to pay attention to my study with the full amount of tuition paid. Ideally, I should have waited until I passed the exam; my tuition would decreased by one-third with my status as an ABD (All But Dissertation); I would feel like having accomplished another important task before having a second child, and I could fully focus on my second child feeling relieved.

However, I had felt rushed into having a second child; from my first experience of pregnancy and childbirth, getting pregnant was harder and took longer than I thought, and I was already in my mid-thirties; my three-year old badly wanted to be a big sister, and I
did not want my children so far apart in age; my grandmother-in-law wished to have her great-grandson to carry on the family line; and I could not tell when I would going to be ready for the exam. In other words, as an Asian student mother studying and parenting abroad, I had so many things to take into consideration: issues on the female biological clock, the optimal child spacing, financial and physical support from extended family, the preference for male babies in Korean society, and the balance between parenthood and academia. Better or not, I found out I was pregnant with my second child and repeated the performance including morning sickness and glucose control.

Time passed, and I was halfway through my pregnancy. “I hope it will be a boy this time.” The night before the screening ultrasound appointment, I was so nervous that I was unable to sleep. Early the next morning, I entered the ultrasound room with my husband and daughter, and the technician began to check my baby’s overall development including gender. I was too nervous to look at the monitor, which must have shown my baby’s body, fingers, toes, and even face. “I am 99 percent sure it is a boy. Can you see it? It is obvious,” in the way examination, the technician said plainly, pointing to a certain place in the monitor. Only then I could look at the monitor.

When I called my grandmother-in-law and my mother-in-law to tell the gender of baby, I could hear they were absolutely thrilled by the news. My grandmother-in-law became tearful as she kept saying “thank you, you’ve done a great work for our family. It is so great that you have a boy.” Later, I heard from my husband that she called her relatives to boast of having a great-grandson. The two women were so delighted beyond expectation that my father-in-law and my husband felt bad for me. Both women must have experienced that same feeling when they gave birth to their sons.
After five months I was lying on the same bed at the same room in the same hospital to give birth and gave birth to my son just hours after labor. Compared to my first childbirth, I have received much support from my family-in-law. My mother-in-law came to help us, and my father-in-law bought me a car. When I gave birth to my first child, I received many congratulations because she was the first child. When I gave birth to my second one, I could recognize that the birth of a son made them especially happy.

From the festive mood of my whole family, I experienced that the birth of a son would make everyone especially happy. Despite rapid urbanization and industrialization, son preference still remains common in South Korea (Hesketh, 2011), because it is deep rooted in Confucian beliefs in East Asia. In Confucian heritage cultures, the (eldest) son is highly valued as the one who carries on his family name, leading family rituals, living with aging parents, and providing financial support for them. If no sons were born, people viewed the family line as discontinued and the family died. Therefore, the birth of a son was the chief means for enhancing the woman’s status in family (Hewes & Kim, 1950) while it ensured continuity of the family line. A study on son preference in South Korea reported that women who have a son were less likely to have another child while a first girl became a sibling (Larsen, Chung, & Gupta, 1998). Eventually, the finding showed that Confucian patriarchy was still a strong predictor of son preference.

Although living away from my home country and family kin, I was having a duty for filial piety under the great influence of Confucian values, and it was not an issue on which I could compromise to make it all about me. Sohier (<year>) argued that even when one moves to the new dominant culture, the practices do not easily change to those
of the host culture, and my experience of pregnancy and childbirth also revealed that many aspects of Confucian beliefs and practices continued in the host culture.
CHAPTER 3
CROSS-CULTURAL PARENTING

It was 7:00 a.m. and my daughter was poking my eyes out with her fingers. I wanted to get more sleep but soon raised myself into a sitting position. While my husband was still asleep, I walked out of the room into the kitchen to pack her lunch while giving her a quick breakfast. It took only five minutes to get her day care center, but I was in a hurry because I had a class today. As soon as I walked out of the daycare room, I heard my child crying. I felt guilty for leaving her behind but did not have any choice when both my husband and I had class on the same day.

As soon as I got home, I prepared breakfast for my husband while I almost skipped mine and tried to finish required readings for class. Breakfast had been put on the table, and my husband was not stirring yet. “I almost forgot to order extra name stickers for my child’s daycare and I also need to do the laundry, schedule my child’s well-being checkup, write a reflection paper for class, call my grand mother-in-law to see how she is doing.” Many thought are in my head, but I go to my plow.

It was 11:30 a.m. and my husband and I were ready to go to school. Just then, I received a call from the day care. The staff told me to pick my daughter up due to her fever. She was home sick, and I sent email to my professor to notify my absence from today’s class. The professor empathized with my situation, but I felt bad. My husband went to school alone and I remained home caring for my child. I wished I could be in class.

Becoming a student parent in a country far from home meant I should play multiple roles with high demands. In addition to the common stressors that international
students might undergo during cross-cultural adaptation process, there are extra stressors and issues for student parents to cope with living as a family unit in the host culture, including multiple roles to play, marital stress and power imbalance, overwhelming parenting practices, and lack of child care options available (Sakamoto, 2006; Myers-Walls et al., 2011).

Sakamoto (2006) investigated acculturative stressors among Japanese international student families and found that task-sharing among family members was a significant feature making their adaptation successful. The crucial point to note is that there existed power imbalance between husbands and wives based on gender roles; in the distribution of duties within families, husbands stayed school during the day or performed the external task while wives stayed in the home caring for the domestic duties and children; when negotiating for life goals, wives followed their husbands’ decisions while husbands were self-directed having the say on how they deal with family matters.

With the shared tradition of East Asian Confucian ideology, there has been a rigid difference in role between husbands and wives, which considered the husband as the head of the family while the wife was the subordinate to the husband (Kim, H., 2001) and thus resulted in an unequal division of household labor between them. With the findings from the studies on Asian families, I assumed that the gender role differences came from the Asian Confucian ideology and also that could not be found in Western culture. However, a body of Western literature has confirmed that the existence of stereotypical gender roles and the power imbalance (Hawke, 2007; Leeder, 2004; Lockhart, 2000; Newman, 1994; Rubin, 1994; Zinn & Eitzen, 2005). At the same time, cultural ideology surrounding motherhood, called “intensive mothering” (Crittenden, 2002; Douglas & Michaels, 2004;
Hays, 1996) also contributed the unequal division of domestic labor giving a heavy strain upon women to achieve perfect motherhood (Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

Although it has been called different terms, gender inequalities in child rearing and domestic housework seem to have existed across cultures and time (Knodel, Loi, & Huy, 2004); Shelton and John pointed out (1996) that wives did the majority of housework whether they are working mothers or stay home mother; a body of literature found out that the unequal division of domestic labor persists even if both the husband and the wife work the same amount of time in the labor market (Chen, Yi, & Lu, 2000; Hawke, 2007; Rodman, 1967; Teerawichitchainan, Knodel, Loi & Huy, 2010).

As an international graduate student couple having the same academic advisors, we had a similar pattern of daily life, and I had expected a fair division of housework and childrearing. However, I ended up spending much more time on family tasks than my husband, under the influence of intensive motherhood which was predominant values in both Asian and Western cultures (Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

When my daughter was an infant, her excessive crying during the night was hard to manage in the first months. As a novice mother, I did not know what to do but cradling her in my arms. Whenever I heard her fussing, I woke up right ahead and tried to soothe my crying child. It caused me to feel tired the next whole day and my husband started worrying about me.

“But I cannot live her like that,” I said to him and continued to go. “I am insecure about my performance as a mother and this feels like the best I can do to her. I feel achy all over my body after cradling her but I can take any degree of physical pain if our baby could stay well.”
He waited a moment and replied, “Go easy on yourself. I think there is no need to go that far. Our baby will be okay without you holding her all day. Just wait for a few minutes and see if she could come down and go back to sleep. If you think you cannot, just stay by her side and pat her on the back. I think it is full enough and the rest is not your business. Otherwise, she will become so dependent on you that both of you will find it hard to manage. No one can live her life for her, not even you. You can only be there to pick up the pieces when things go wrong. Think childrearing as a marathon and pace yourself.”

The point of him saying seemed plausible but mine did seem so, either. Since my husband and I became parents while in graduate school in the host culture, we were concerned how our status as student parents in a culture different from our own will impact our children. Although both my husband and I were categorized as expatriates, we brought with ourselves different beliefs and assumptions to parenting. Being born in South Korea but growing up in the United States, my husband was aware of Western beliefs and norms by his previous experiences of engaging in behaviors that must have been normative in Western culture. On the other hand, I grew up in South Korea, and was more aware of Asian beliefs.

As a result, having engaged in different cultures in different proportions led us to shape culture-specific patterns of childrearing (Bornstein, 2012, p. 213). As can be seen in the dialogue above, I brought with me Confucian values toward childrearing behavior; I considered infants as dependent; I wanted to become a devoted mother and tried to help my children with unconditional support. Having engaged in the individualistic American culture, on the other hand, my husband preferred to act as a facilitator for our children to
act as an independent individual. That is, while both of us shared culture-common
cognition of parenting, which includes the universal goal of parenting such as wishing
children to maintain physical and emotional health, academic achievement, and social
adjustment (Bornstein, 2012; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986), culture-specific parenting beliefs
influenced on our parenting style when it comes to making decisions about how we
should interact with our children and which aspects of culture we should adopt or
promote in raising our bicultural children (Bornstein, 1991; Whiting, 1963).

Considering culture perpetuates itself through parenting (Bornstein, 2012),
Bornstein emphasized a comprehensive understanding of diverse parenting behaviors
across cultures by raising a set of questions about the notions of normative parenting
(Bornstein, 2001, p. 213-214); “What is normative parenting and to what extent does it
vary culture? How does culture embed into parenting cognitions and practices and
manifest and maintain itself through parenting?”. As a primary caregiver, but not being
fully aware of the host culture and its embedded norms and beliefs, I was seeking an
answer for raising bicultural children in the host culture.

With a desire for my child to maintain Korean heritage culture while living in the
United States, I put effort into introducing her to Korean culture. As a parent, I felt
obliged to help our children keep grounded in their heritage culture (Mata, 2013. p.70),
and Korean cultural involvement included Korean language skills. My husband and I
used to teach her the Korean alphabet at home, but when she became a school-aged child,
her level of fluency in the two languages, English and Korean, was widening. After
considerable discussion, we decided to send her to a Korean heritage language school.
One of the local Korean churches runs after-school program, which was designed to
enhance or maintain bicultural kids’ Korean language proficiency. Despite of my effort to help her develop and embrace two cultural values, however, I had to accept my school-aged daughter’s Westernization to some extent. When she became a school-aged child, I recognized that she felt more comfortable, confident, and eloquent in her English skills than her Korean language abilities. Being situated in an American mainstream school, she has engaged more with Western context and must have been expected to follow the predominant Western values or norms while experiencing the lack of resources or access of Korean culture. Understanding her situation, I considered her Westernization inevitable and normal (Clayton, 2011). I used to allow her to speak Korean only within the home, but at some point I removed the rule so that she can express her feelings and thoughts in either language, which was frequently spoken as a great mix of two languages. Rather than persisting Confucian parenting style which upheld parent-child hierarchy, I have also applied my integrative strategy of cross-cultural adaptation model to my parenting strategies; I ended up being less authoritarian with my children to encourage my children to be more communicative and to negotiate her choice (Tang, 1998). Growing up in a family that only emphasized Asian values, I found it difficult to support my bicultural children in the host culture when I put so much emphasis on maintaining Korean language. According to Clayton (2011), parents who accommodated both Asian and Western cultural norms were more culturally flexible in their parenting strategies mainly due to their previous negative childhood experiences (p.18). Recognizing and understanding my daughter’s difficulties of being Korean-American in the United States, I decided to incorporate both cultural values within the home.
The decision also applied to my strategy to her dietary acculturation. Unsure of whether we would stay in the United States or return to our home country in near future, I felt the need to introduce her to both Korean and Western food. I have tried to make a balance when preparing her meals, but some type of American food does not agree with her, such as deli turkey sandwiches, pulled pork BBQ sandwiches, and sloppy Joe sandwiches, and some type of Korean food, such as Kimchi (fermented side dish made out of napa cabbage with seasonings), Japchae (sautéed vegetables with potato noodles), Tteokbokki (stir-fried rice cake), and more.

In fact, her taste is betwixt and between—neither fully Americanized nor Koreanized—partly because certain Korean dishes require difficult to obtain ingredients in the United States, and partly because the unique smell of Korean food might offend other people at her school. I can recall the day she brought Korean curry over rice for her preschool lunch. Because of its distinctive, foreign scent and color, I discouraged her from bringing the food to her classroom. She did not listen, and I was anxious lest she should be hurt at school. When she was home, her sullen look told me everything.

(In the following conversation, the initial “IK” refers to me speaking in Korean, and “DK” refers to my daughter speaking in Korean.)

IK: How was your lunch, my dear?

DK: It was awful. When I opened my lunchbox, friends around me said ‘yuck’, ‘gross’, or ‘ewwwwww’, holding their noses. So I put the lid back and skipped lunch. I will never bring curry to school again.

Not only was that not surprising, I would be amazed if her classmates showed positive reaction to the dish. Since then, she has been reluctant to bring any Korean food
to school and her regular packed lunch has been American kids-friendly dishes and kids’ favorite such as mac and cheese, chicken nuggets, and pizza. To introduce her Korean food, her dinner at home has been more Koreanized than before. This strategy was my negotiation to incorporating both cultures in raising my children, and it suggested that I tried not to be acculturated parent who holds onto her traditional values in the host culture (Tang, 1998).

Concerning her name, I also tried to help her being familiar with both names. When my child was born, she was given two names: an English name as first name and her Korean name became her middle name. Yet it remained far from certain whether my child would live either in America or Korea all her life, my husband and I thought she should be given an English name. Since my husband and I had the same academic advisor, we asked him to name our first baby feeling highly honored by his support. As a Korean, of course, my child should be given a Korean name too. In Korean culture, babies’ grandparents name their newly born grandchildren, and we asked our baby’s grandparents to name their granddaughter. Her English name became her first name and her Korean name became her middle name. While we, as parents, had become used to her English name with some paperwork done, our first child did not have a chance because we had Korean-only rule at home.

It was Spring 2011 when she and I came back to the States. I resumed my study and had to send her to a daycare center in order to attend classes. When it came to send her to a daycare center, I had to drill her daily; I called her by her English name numerous times a day until she responded.
“Mommy, why do I have two names?” My daughter asked me one day when she was three. (In the following conversation, initial MK refers to me speaking in Korean while DK to my daughter speaking in Korean.)

MK: Because you are a Korean who was born in America. That means you have a Korean name and English name. Having two names is very rare and special. Mommy wishes to have two names but you already do. I’m really jealous of you, dear.

DK: But you have two names, too- Kate and Yunjeong.

MK: I’m afraid I have only one name, dear. The other one is just like my nickname.

DK: What does a nickname mean?

MK: It means it is not a real name.

DK: But it does sound like a real name.

MK: It really does. But the nickname can’t be appear on mommy’s passport or other papers.

DK: Why?

MK: Because mommy is a Korean.

DK: I’m a Korean too and why do I have two names then?

MK: Because you are a Korean who was born in America. Mommy was born in Korea and didn’t need an English name.

DK: Ahhhh….now I get it.

No, she did not seem to get it. Three years old may be too young to understand the dual identity but at least she seemed to like having dual passports.
As a mother feeling comfortable with a Korean culture, I felt cross-cultural parenting just seemed one thing after another. It was not only my child who needed to get adjusted to the bicultural context. Since I sent my child to a daycare center, I had been exposed to a great deal of new cultural environments. My first and most memorable experience is the first Valentine’s Day party my daughter enjoyed at preschool in 2011. Kids were asked to give a Valentine card or small gift to each other in the class and I remember being quite shocked by it. The Korean Valentine’s Day has become commercialized with chocolates and gifts exchanged between adult couples only, and I never thought Valentine’s Day was a lot of fun for kids. A few weeks before Valentine’s Day, my daughter brought a short letter from school. It informed me that they would have a party on Valentine’s Day during school hours. She was looking forward to it, and I brushed aside her excitement. On the morning of the party, however, I was bewildered at the sight of small brown paper bags put up in the classroom. Written in each kids’ names on it, the bags were decorated with drawings and paintings done by themselves. Parents were dropping off their kids carrying a huge basket or a plastic bag full of small gifts for other kids. Imagine my embarrassment upon standing in the classroom empty-handed. Nobody from school imposed gifts on us or gave us a strange look, but I could not put my face up burning with shame. That evening, my child was excited about opening her brown bag. The bag was filled with literally small gifts: a pencil, a tattoo sticker, an animal-shaped eraser, a candy, and a small card with a lollipop sticking in. I was shocked not by the size of the gifts but by the culture that children and adults could enjoy. Since then, I had fully prepared for the day as well as for other seasonal celebrations but my face still burns with embarrassment every time I think of my ignorance that day.
Since experiencing the embarrassing moment of not being aware of cultural difference, I have been living a few more years in the same town and I became more aware of the U.S. education system and felt more comfortable interacting with my child’s teacher or engaging the school events. I felt more acculturated than before.
CHAPTER 4

SINGLE PARENTING

Figure 11. A drawing of my typical day until 3:00 p.m.
7:50 a.m.: The alarm rings and my typical day starts as I immerse myself in parenting mode. I turn off the alarm and wake my daughter in a groggy voice. Giving her time to sit up in bed, yawn, and stretch, I wash my face and brush my teeth in a hurry. Washing my face with cold water in winter does not help me to wake up. While she washes her face and changes her clothes in the room, I go to the kitchen with lagging feet, still half asleep.

8:24 a.m.: I got my daughter ready to go to school. Double-checking her backpack and her outfit, I rush her. We quicken our step, and the school bus comes right on time at the designated school bus stop near our neighborhood. I stand waving my hands until the bus disappears from sight as it rounds a corner.

8:30 a.m.: Home alone. It is evening in Korean time and my husband or parents call me using Skype or FaceTime. As I hang up the phone until 10:00 a.m. by the latest, I look around the house from the table. Too messy. The living room is always messy with my daughter’s toys, books, coloring pens, and even some empty bags of snacks; the bedroom is always messy with my daughter’s plush dolls, clothes, books and even more; and there is a pile of laundry to do as well as another pile of laundry done in the dryer. I do not know when I am going to clean up the mess, do the laundry, and fold clothes, but I do not think now is the right time. The school bus driver lets my daughter off at 3:07 p.m., and now I am given only a few hours. Letting the housework go undone until then, I need to open the door to the world of academia before it is too late. Taking in a deep breath, I finally open my Dissertation.doc file on my laptop.
Figure 12. A drawing of my typical day after 3:00 p.m.
3:00 p.m.: It is now my regular motherwork hour. My ongoing unfinished work is saved on my laptop and I rush out to pick up my daughter, just like Cinderella left one of her glass slippers on the steps of the palace in her haste. My daughter comes home, and I prepare myself to drop her to the afterschool activity.

6:00 p.m.: Back home. Quick hand wash to get ready for dinner of white rice, a fried egg, Korean soybean paste stew with tofu, Korean grilled pork belly, and fruit. Main dishes vary from day to day with the ingredients I have in the refrigerator.

Compared to her well-balanced substantial meal, mine is a light supper- a cup of fruits and vegetables with a hot cup of tea. Part of it has to do with my chronic indigestion, but the biggest reason is I am too tired to have any appetite. I am ready to drop with fatigue but I am not done with half of the job.

7:00 p.m.: Time to give my full attention to my daughter, but after clearing the tabletop and doing the dishes, my entire body is drained of energy. After helping her do the homework assigned by her Korean language schoolteacher, I lay down on the sofa with my eyes closed, with the intention of taking a short break.

“Mom, can you pay attention to me? Would you play with me, please?” Her words break my heart. I open my eyes and see her sitting next to me with a desperate craving to be attended to. It makes my heart ache to see her face. She asks for my full attention, and that is what she most wants. I promised to hang out with her after dinner but my promise always turns out to be just hot air. As a graduate student mother, I feel guilty over inadequate time with her feeling tension between the dual roles.

8:00 p.m.: Time to put her to bed. Double check if she brushed her teeth for at least two minutes, I switch off all the lights in our house.
DK: Wait, mommy, I left my plush doll in the living room.

IK: Bring it back, then.

DK: I’m scared of the dark. Would you come with me, please?

IK: Just switch on the light and you will be fine.

DK: I won’t. A monster is going to eat me.

She is so afraid that she did not dare to go through the living room to bring her bedtime companion back to bed.

(Continued)

IK: There is no such thing as a monster. I would defeat it if it really exists.

DK: You wouldn’t because a monster is way bigger and stronger than you.

Only daddy would defeat it.

IK: You don’t trust me? I bet I can knock down the monster at a stroke, like this!

DK: Mommy, you’re silly. …… I miss my dad.

IK: I miss him too.

DK: When is dad coming back? And my younger brother?

I would like to live in a house together as we used to.

IK: The time may soon come. I guarantee it is going to be within a year.

Not sure where we would live either in Korea or in the States, though.

Soon enough, she falls asleep next to me. I hope my promise not always turns out to be just hot air.

9:00 p.m.: She is sleeping like a log, but I am still lying next to her. I am supposed to slip out of the room quietly so she does not catch on, but she will wake up crying in the middle of the night when she realizes she was sleeping alone.
She used to sleep alone in her own bed when four of us lived together in this house. However, she has been afraid of sleeping alone since last fall, when only she and I came back to this house from South Korea leaving her father and younger brother behind.

I assure her, even though I could tell I am also scared. I do not feel safe, even though the door and the window of our house have been made as secure as possible. Although the house has been the same as before, my daughter and I both have been through a lot during this period of our lives.

Sitting next to my sleeping daughter on the bed, I open the unfinished Dissertation.doc file on my laptop in the dark. The door to the world of academia re-opens, but this time my enchanted evening does not end when the spell is to be broken at midnight. I have no stepmother squeezing extra work out of me, no stepsisters interfering with my work, no charming prince bailing me out, and no fairy godmother helping me. Rather, I have a student visa expiring soon and thus screwing extra work out of me, have children delaying my graduation, have a charming husband living apart, and have my family living too far away from me to help.

I feel exhausted with my current daily routine but it is manageable. I keep working on in silence, hoping for a better future. My home office hours are 7:50 a.m. to late at night, and my bedside alarm clock will ring at 7:50 a.m. tomorrow morning as usual.

My husband defended his dissertation on April 2014 and went back to Korea upon his graduation. His graduation also involved a transnational family separation, and I ended up remaining with my daughter in the same town while my husband and son stayed in Korea. Since then, both my daughter and I had to adjust ourselves to this new
life in the same house where we once all lived. She went through a lot during this period of her life—emotional and physical adjustments to a 14-hour time difference between the eastern United States and Korea, her new school, her father and younger brother’s absence from home, and her Korean friends’ return to Korea with their parents’ graduation. Among others, adjustment to kindergarten was the hardest for both of us. Her first semester already began in the last week of August 2014, when we were still staying in Korea due to some family matters. She and I came back to Pennsylvania on September 2, and due to the absence from the orientation, I had known little about the school. I was overwhelmed by a long list of unfamiliar school supplies she should bring to school, for example.

My situation was not that much different from hers, and my husband’s absence from home, in particular, made my daily life more challenging than I thought. Above all thing, I had to adjust myself to bringing up our daughter single-handedly. Single parenting required me to perform dual roles of authoritative figure and affective figure (Chao, 1995). According to Confucian gender roles, which considered husband as superior and wife as subordinate, my husband as a father stood as an authoritative figure who was in charge of parental discipline while I exchanged warmth and affection with our children. However, in single parenting, I should not only perform parental strictness but also promote responsiveness (Chao, 2000), which was difficult for me to perform.

Single parenting and leaving my son behind in Korea also made me feel sorry for my children. I felt sorry for my daughter because of her father’s absence. For the months after her father was gone, she became quiet. From the teacher-parent conference, I was told by her teacher that she is very shy and not active. She occasionally cried, saying that
she missed her father and brother. Although I felt it would be good for a family to live together, it seemed like it was not possible at this time.

I felt guilty for my son, too. My body is at ease being away from intensive performances of mothering, but I am disturbed by this transnational family separation. Some studies noted that individual’s background, such as gender and education level, and length of stay in the host culture affected the level of involvement in the transnational activities (Foner, 2001; Clifford, 1997; Horst, 2006; Parrenas, 2005). For example, Parrenas (2005) found that migrant mothers were actively involved in transnational activities to maintain intimacy with their children back home, and Hiebert and Ley (2006) pointed out that immigrants with higher levels of education were more likely to be involved in transnational activities. I was not an exception as a mother who is pursuing higher education. Modern communication technology created new forms of international contact such as instant messenger services, e-mails, FaceTime or Skype, a blogging site, a photo album sharing function on iPhone, and SMS, and I used them to maintain connection with my husband and son. Frequent involvement in transnational activities with the extensive use of available communication technologies has helped our family feel still connected to each other (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004; Schiller, 1999; Fong, Cao, & Chan, 2010).

Single parenting and living away from them also had some positive aspects. First, I found that motherhood and parenting filled the gap I had experienced with the loss of my home and family (Sigad, 2008, p. 67). By spending quality time with my daughter, I could gain a sense of family that I thought I had left in my home country. Second, single parenthood worked as a strong motivation for me to graduate. While my pursuit of higher
education made me feel guilty toward my children, I could draw strength from my children thinking that I should buck up for my children’s better life. Single parenthood also enhanced my cross-cultural adaptation. Attending my daughter’s school events and managing her afterschool activities alone was a highly demanding task for me, but at the same time, I felt that becoming a mother itself was a link to the host culture; as a mother with a school-aged child, I had ample opportunities to engage in American culture and social connection in the course of engagement gave me a feeling of being a part of a social grouping as parents. If my husband were here, I would expect him to take much of the tasks because of his full awareness of the American culture, and it would make me remain marginalized.

On an early warm March morning, I was talking to my husband on the videophone. It has been part of our daily routine since we lived far apart from each other. Considering current development of communication technology made possible to make a free international phone call as daily life here and back in Korea (Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam, 2001, p.585), we were fortunate to live in an age of high technology.

From our children to dinner menus, it seemed like our conversation would never end. In addition to catching up each other’s lives over the phone, talking to him over the phone gave me time to draw comfort and strength from him and to have a sense of staying connected (Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam, 2001, p. 573). As usual, our focus was the children.

“By the way, I got something I want to show you”, I began, “our daughter drew a picture of us and I think it is really touching”. I was holding a drawing of our daughter up close to the laptop screen so that he could take a closer look at it. (In the following
conversation, the initial ‘HK’ refers to my husband speaking in Korean while ‘IK’ to me speaking in Korean.)

HK: Let me see… The left-hand side of the rainbow is you and our daughter, and the right-hand side of it must be our son and me.

IK: Yes, and the rainbow full of love is the link that holds us together, according to her. I almost cried when she showed me this drawing because it clearly showed me her belief in the strong family bond we have. Although we are physically separated by large distance, we are emotionally connected by a beautiful rainbow bridge full of love.

Figure 13. My daughter’s picture of family done March 2015
HK: I am glad she seems to accept the situation and adapt herself to it. Her drawing really motivates me to work harder as a father and a breadwinner to ensure the safety and well-being of our children. I am proud of all of us who have accepted new and continually changing situations and adapted well to them. We made a tough choice of living apart but it was inevitable in order to get our daughter more exposed to English when she was at an age where she can absorb all sorts of knowledge like a sponge. It was also an inevitable choice in order to guarantee your room to focus on your dissertation while our son is in Korea with my parents and me.

I feel sorry for giving you such a hard time. Just a little bit longer, and you will be rewarded. I’ll be famous, make more money and we could live comfortably.

This dialogue shows the influence of Confucian values on our transnational family practice. First, it shows my husband’s gender role internalization as the head of the household (Tang and Tang, 2001). While Confucian patriarchal ideology yields power and authority to him as the male, it also assumes that men to be the main breadwinner for family and thus imposes heavy responsibility of supporting family upon him. While double income families are becoming popular in modern South Korea and women shoulder the double burden of full-time work and family work, men still shoulder heavier weight of family obligations than women with the influence of Confucian gender role expectations (Tang and Tang, 2001, p. 181).

Second, the dialogue with my husband and me reflects our value of scholarship. According to Confucius, scholars are considered the highest class among four types of
occupation, which include farmers, workers, and businessmen (Park & Chesla, 2007), and modern Korean society still retains the idea that scholarship is associated with high social class (Huang & Gove, 2012, p. 10) and in reality, one’s educational success are highly likely to guarantee his or her better life, including better job opportunities, higher social status, better marriage options, and more financial stability (Cheon, 2006; Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray, & Hines, 2008; Huang & Gove, 2012; Louie, 2004). Thus, earning a doctoral degree for both my husband and me has been a primary concern among all of our family members, which contributed to this transnational arrangement. Although family reunification was our ultimate goal, we also aimed to promote social mobility for all family members (Olwig, 2002) and thus assumed that this transnational arrangement would be part of a strategy for it.

This Confucian value of education and social class also influenced our attitude towards our children’s education. Believing parents’ role and passion for their children’s education would greatly influence their children’s academic success (Huang & Gove, 2012, p.11), we took a risk of family separation so that our school-aged daughter could have better educational opportunities (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011, p. 705), including her more bilingual language exposure (Kovelman, Baker, and Petitto, 2008) and less-competitive atmosphere in early childhood education in the United States (Kwon, 2002, p. 154). When it comes to the Confucian values, which prioritize collectivism and thus considers family as a core social and economic unit in Korean society, transnational family form is not conceived as a proper way to strengthen family ties. However, we put the possible future benefit of a temporary physical separation before our family
reunification while dealing with parental loss that each our children must have been
experiencing by trying to stay more connected.

The more the length of transnational living extended, the better I became
understand that the much of Confucian values are embedded in our decision of adopting
transnational living arrangement, and coping with the separation and associated
difficulties was not a matter only for me but for us all.
EPILOGUE

Childbirth was an amazing experience with a feeling and a pain I never had before, and my life has changed drastically since then. My cross-cultural life has been so imbued with motherhood that I decided to research my own experience as an expatriate mother and graduate student negotiating multiple cultural positions. My initial research questions will frame the discussion of my research conclusions.

Q1. What does it mean for a Korean graduate student mother to have a cross-cultural adaptation experience?

As an international student coming from a Confucian heritage culture to the American university, I brought with myself a different cultural and linguistic background, learning strategies, prior educational experiences, and different assumptions and expectations to the classroom, which made me encounter difficulties in adjusting myself to the new educational context in the host culture. Compared to the domestic graduate students, I often found myself struggling with additional challenges such as academic language in English, different writing strategies, different way of interaction between instructors and students, and different way of logical thinking. These extra challenges were not always positively understood by Western eyes, and often categorized as passive rote learning. Asian international students bring different learning strategies and styles that are commonly stereotyped as a deficit. Researchers who criticized the deficit model found that the students’ learning behaviors and strategies are highly influenced by the traditional Confucian values that emphasize group harmony, hierarchy between teachers and students, and goal-orientation education (Gatfield & Gatfield, 1994; Ramburuth &
McCormic, 2001; Tang, 1996). However, I have observed that not all the Asian students in the classroom represented themselves as passive learners, and started to wonder what other possible factors made me as a stereotypical Asian student. I found part of the reasons from my personal background; growing up under Confucian parents, especially with my father who was a Confucian historian, I have internalized to a greater degree the Confucian values. In addition, people often have judged me as a demure female by my appearance and have expected me to behave in the way they assumed; and my lack of previous learning experience in White dominated educational setting also influenced the character formation of myself as a passive quiet Asian woman. Although this autoethnography tells my personal story and thus would be hard to generalize about all Asian female students’ adaptation experiences, I feel at the same time that other Asian female students would have similar feelings and experience. Eventually, my experience of living as an Asian international student revealed that the binary distinction of students as passive Eastern and active Western is not appropriate and emphasized the importance of taking other possible factors into consideration when trying to understand Asian students’ learning strategies and behaviors.

For an Asian woman who internalized the traditional Confucian values, becoming a mother in a foreign land gave me to access to the new world. When my first child was an infant, I had few opportunities or sources to expose myself to the Western way of mothering and thus followed either the elder women’s advice in my family and handbooks for new parents published both in Korean and the United States. However, either advice was hard to apply to my mothering practices and attitudes because of the changing times and its associated changes in parenting behaviors and ideologies,
differences of culture and circumstances between the two countries, and the reality of mothering practice which did not always coincide with what the book says. As my first child reached school age and my second child was born, however, I have had many opportunities to participate in school events or local family events and meet other parents and observe Western parenting attitudes. Observing them trying to help their children to be more autonomous human beings, I have been negotiating my Asian parenting styles with the Western ones. For example, I used to prioritize Korean language over English at home to develop her Korean proficiency but at some point, I accepted her Westernization of her diet and the way of thinking or speaking, desiring to incorporate both Korean and American values within the home (Clayton, 2011, p.18).

Playing dual roles as a student and a mother was a double burden for me requiring a proper balance between family and school responsibilities. In addition to the nature of both responsibilities requiring so much commitment, both of them felt so new to me and required me to adapt while also making adjustments to the unfamiliar country. Modern society of both Western and Asian cultures expects women to become super moms whether they are working, staying at home, or studying, and consequently gives mothers a feeling of imperfection in playing the dual roles, which often results in women’s opting out from work or less-intensive mothering. Either way, women cannot feel a sense of perfection.

Through my autoethnography, however, I recognized that the sense of imperfection is really necessary while juggling multiple roles. Rather than being a supermom which seems to emphasize women’s role as a main care provider, I chose to become a literally student mother who divides her time and energy into two. At some
point, therefore, I attained my goals in playing both roles to get 80 points out of 100; I could not write quality papers while taking care of my children when they were sick in particular; I could not give them every meal with homemade food; and I could not spend the whole day with my children and thus send them to the childcare center. Although it sometimes gave me a feeling of inferiority to have a combination of low expectations and low achievement, I could also feel less weight was being put on me at the same time. Somehow or other my children thrive and I am managing to graduate this year. Rather than reinforcing the intensive mothering ideology, I considered both are important and thus aimed to compromise my dual duty.

Q2. How does my cross-cultural mothering experience contribute to the general understanding of feminism in the context of a diverse society?

As I reflect on the past seven years of my life with dual lenses, both as the mother and as the researcher, I found that my cross-cultural mothering experience has changed my parenting beliefs and approach. Single parenting due to my husband’s absence, in particular, was the biggest factor for the changes. Under the influence of Confucian gender role ideology which views males as superior and females as subordinate, my husband had stood as an authoritative figure, who was in charge of parental discipline while I had mainly exchanged warmth and affection with our children. With the transnational arrangement, however, he had little chance to involve himself in life here and his influence has decreased due to his geographical distance from the family. On the other hand, my work has expanded but a source of help has not. Without familial support available, I have secured my children’s well being, safety, educational opportunities,
while providing them with emotional support. Although I still talk to him before making an important decision, the decision and its consequences rest with me, which gives me so much more responsibility than before. Eventually, cross-cultural living and the transnational form of living required me to redraw the boundaries between man and female role both in and outside the home.

While both fathers and mothers have their own distinct contributions to make in the development of a child, mothers have generally been expected to take the full responsibility for parenting. Therefore people in many societies care about how mothers raise their children, and the expectation for women that many people still take for granted has included coercive motherhood; all women give birth, bear children, enjoy being mothers, and become good mothers. Thus, mothers keep worrying if they are good enough mothers or not, even though they are not all the same nor have the same circumstances of life; women come in a wide variety of ages, races, ethnicities, social classes, religions, and occupational or educational backgrounds; they also differ in shapes, sizes, personalities, standards, talents and much more; some of them would enjoy mothering while others do not or are in-between. Both in Western and Eastern contexts, however, these differences are not taken into consideration when it comes to motherhood, as if there is one size that fits all. Given that motherhood is culturally constructed, mothers from different cultural backgrounds may have different perceptions and experiences of motherhood. Thus, it is important to understand the social context in which the social practice of motherhood is performed and to do so, a cultural and historical understanding of gender relations in a given society is required.
On personal level, it would also be important for women from Confucian heritage cultures to try to abolish the deep-rooted gender role attitude in Confucian society, with a continuous pressure of being a super mom and a feeling of guilt for not performing their roles well. For those mothers who feel guilty, I assume that they feel that way because they are already good mothers worrying about their children’s well-being and hope for their better future with their support guaranteed. Thus, it would be necessary for women themselves to get out of their shell of intensive motherhood, and become more flexible to handle their dilemma.

**Q3. How does my cross-cultural adaptation experience contribute to the general understanding on expatriates in the context of a diverse society?**

For expatriates coming from countries that share little cultural proximity with the host country, it would not be so easy to make sense of their circumstances and make adaptation to the unfamiliar environment. For expatriates, cross-cultural adjustment entails not only the new physical environment, but also the foreign language, system, norms, and behavior compared to their origin of culture. As an expatriate, I have made a cross-cultural adjustment in three dimensions, which refer to my adjustment to the school, interaction, and the general environment such as food and health care (Chang, 1997).

Much of previous research on expatriates pay attention to the cross-cultural adjustment process of expatriates within a host country, and U-Curve theory (Lysgaard, 1955) has been the one most commonly adopted to gain a better understanding of their adjustment experience (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Usunier, 1998). The model assumes that expatriates undergo four stages of adjustment; the honeymoon stage with a feeling of excitement and joy, which is followed by culture shock stage full of frustration while
facing challenges on their daily basis, and then the adjustment stage in which the expatriate gradually adjust themselves to the host country and its associated norms and values, which makes them end up being able to effectively function in the host culture.

Considering the research findings based on the U-Curve model suggest that expatriates’ adjustment process is full of challenges and difficulties (Aycan, 1997; Caligiuri, 2000), my cross-cultural adjustment process was congruent with their findings; in addition, my experience of mothering and studying abroad also made my cross-cultural adaptation harder. However, living as an expatriate in the context of a diverse society not only broadens my perspective and my knowledge of the other country as well as of my home country, but it also brought me a growing sense of agency. If I had not been here in the host country, I would find it difficult to see a sense of agency through a wider lens of cultural awareness. Despite the persistence of some Confucian values in my cross-cultural adjustment process, living apart from my home country and family provided me with an opportunity to have more control of my own life and become more culturally flexible and diverse (Clayton, 2011, p.18).

**Forward Thoughts**

Although I near the end of my story for this dissertation, my story of cultural adaptation will be ongoing. It feels obvious that I would go through a geographic, economic, emotional, and social change of life when going home; I have lived long away from home and thus would repeat the similar cross-cultural predicaments feeling isolated and frustrated in the resettlement environment as Kim (2001) argued; my first child, who has spent most of her life in the United States, would experience some different
predicaments from mine and undergo some cross-cultural challenges in the changed circumstances; and I would face another difficulty as moving out of being an international graduate student and into the professional arena home.

My story of adaptation will never end and so will my autoethnography be, with a desire “to transform my inner self and others” (Custer, 2014, p. 11).
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