Some Differences Between Korean and Malay Culture Concerning Values and Attitudes of Workers Towards Work-Related Challenges

Dr. Kim Keum-Hyun
Academy of Malay Studies
University of Malaya

1. Introduction: Korea-Malaysia Cultural and Economic Contacts

Korean society has always emphasized the importance of maintaining its homogeneity as a basic feature of its cultural identity for thousands of years. Although there had been a significant increase in intercultural or mixed marriages in Korean society for the last two decades, this trend had not been able to significantly modify or change the centrality of the idea of homogeneity as a basic feature of Korean cultural or social identity. Koreans have been proudly maintaining and practicing this sense of identity, constituting of elements like common ancestry, common language and cultural basis forming, a deep bond or integration among the Koreans. Therefore we have a situation where on one hand the Koreans consider homogeneity as almost the essence of their identity and cultural integration, whereas viewed by outsiders the same insistence on homogeneity is seen by them as reflecting the ‘ethnocentricity’ or the parochial attitudes and values of Koreans.

Such feelings towards the alleged ‘ethnocentricity’ is not totally groundless especially in situation where Koreans come into contacts with other cultures and societies, where particular situation or circumstances do reflect Korean lack of understanding or sensitivity of the diversity and complexity of intercultural interaction. Such limitation could pose a serious obstacle or barrier to Korean endeavor to step up their international collaboration with others in various fields. Experience seems to have shown that the more Korean companies invest overseas, the more intercultural communication problems cropped up in their international interactions, significantly due to their ignorance of intercultural differences and diversity. Such ignorance of the complexity
and sensitivity of intercultural contacts could well trigger intercultural misunderstanding and conflicts, impeding Korean companies realizing their goals of being major players in global collaboration.

The year 2010 was very meaningful or significant for Korea-Malaysia relations as the two nations celebrated their 50th year of diplomatic ties. The relations between Korea and Malaysia had been stepped gradually throughout the fifty years since 1960. The last two decades in particular had seen drastic rise in terms of bilateral economic collaboration. The remarkable jump in economic cooperation is clearly reflected in the fact that in terms of bilateral trade and economic investment Korea has been ranked the 10th leading trade partner for Malaysia during the last ten years, jumping significantly however to the 6th largest trade partner with US 15,703 million dollars whilst ranked 8th in FDI with US 353 million dollars in 2008 respectively.

Besides this, the two nations have been having good cooperation in the education sector too, where the Malaysian government has been sending many students, as well as government officials to Korea to study or acquire Korean technology and work ethics since as early as 1980 under the ‘Look East Policy’ inaugurated by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Muhammad when he was the Prime Minister then. In the reverse process, Korean parents had been availing themselves of the opportunity to provide English education for their children during their residence in Malaysia. Thanks to Hallyu or Korean wave in Malaysia, more Malaysians are interested in not only Korean language, drama, and music, but also all aspects of Korean culture including food, fashion, customs and life style. Accordingly number of Malaysian tourists to Korea has been increasing every year since early 2000. This implies that Malaysians are more exposed to Korean culture through all kinds of medium like mass media, Korean visitors, Korean companies operating in Malaysia. However Malaysians’ understanding on Korean culture can be said to be superficial. On the other hand, most of Koreans are still not interested in Malaysian culture like language, customs, and religion which are integral to understand Malaysian culture and to communicate with it’s people.
2. **Research on Intercultural Diversity**

In the contemporary globalizing world, the Malaysian government has succeeded in cultivating the interests of many foreign investors to collaborate with Malaysia economically. However, in spite of the various efforts of the Malaysian governments to ease or facilitate such collaboration to ensure success, there are still intriguing problems yet to be adequately understood or appreciated, besetting communications and collaboration between the two parties.

Although Korea and Malaysia have enjoyed good diplomatic relations for 50 years, the lack of understanding of other cultures cannot be denied. If two nations are earnest in forging solid collaborations in various sectors, it is obvious that mutual cultural understanding and appreciation is an important prerequisite, without which conflicts and misunderstanding is inevitable. A careful observer of Korea and Malaysia relations can easily identify some areas of intercultural misunderstanding or even conflicts arising from each other’s ignorance of the world-view of their opposite number, encompassing their values, attitudes, norms and pattern of behavior. More particularly, one of the major problems in the way is the divergence or gap in their cultural ways, encompassing their respective values, sentiments, attitudes, norms and so forth. For example, Malaysian workers have faced various situations of conflicts at their work places since they have to adjust to the new conditions and demands of corporate culture mainly determined by the various multinational companies, Korean ones included.

These adjustment or adaptive demands placed upon them have led Malay workers to feel dissatisfied with their working conditions, leading to high rate of turnover, lacking the sense of belonging or ownership, the lack of corporate culture or identity shared in common by all. Such feeling of discontent and alienation could well be fertile grounds for all forms of cross cultural misunderstanding, miscommunication as there is little common ground or consensus by way of values and life orientation. Such lack of consensus in interpreting situation or assessing a given problem does not foster good teamwork or common corporate interests or goals.
Methodology

It is the hope of this paper to highlight this problem and in a modest way to redress it. This paper attempts to identify some of the root cause of this cultural misunderstanding and conflict. It utilizes the socio-cultural approach in its empirical research on one of the major Korean company operating in Malaysia. In line with its basic beliefs, the paper hopes to show that the divergence of cultural values among the workers influence their perception and basic definition of their situation or conditions. Such divergence of cultural views or world-view influenced their attitudes, pattern of behavior and responses to various problems or challenges faced, their management or working style, which if not addressed could lead to serious misunderstanding or conflicts. As part of its analysis, this paper attempts to investigate and understand intercultural differences, their social-cultural context giving rise to the differences, between Koreans and Malaysians at their workplace.

In this inquiry, references are made to previous researches on intercultural communications conflicts between Koreans and Malay workers employed by a major Korean company, where several intercultural differences have been identified as significant sources or causes of conflicts between the two cultures concerned. Such problems become even a bigger concern when they arise in situations where the different parties are supposed to be cooperating towards realizing the corporate interests or organizational goals.

In the interviews I conducted with Korean and Malaysian respondents in 2000 and 2005, the respondents expressed many interesting perceptions towards each other, particularly when they faced difficult situation or unwarranted circumstances. Korean perception of Malaysians are that of a people who are ‘good natured’, warm hearted, but are however passive and careless, low in spirit, lacking motivation, commitment, dependent upon others and lacking discipline in their work performance. On the other hand, the Malaysians have their own perceptions of Koreans who are generally viewed as hardworking, hot tempered, impatient, aggressive, intimidating, stubborn,
and even at times ‘out of their mind’ or ‘crazy’, and unrealistic or in denial of reality in striving to realise their goals.

It is easy to see how such divergence of perception of each other can be a fertile ground for misunderstanding and strained relations between them as they share little by way of mutual respect and understanding forged by some consensus of values. Such differences open the way to disputes, frictions in performing their tasks, in ensuring and implementing quality control and in general definition and redress of problems and tight work situations.

This particularly focuses on the differences of basic philosophical definition of nature in its relationship to man, which is of course a central problem of philosophy, morality and values in all cultures and societies. It is this central problem of values and ethics which in turn colors man responses to problems and challenges in life, thereby giving rise also to the diversity and divergence of cultural responses. Many scholars and researches in the field of management and anthropology had attempted to understand cultural differences and diversity, as well as the variety of management approach or style among nations. Many among scholars of corporate culture and values explore the best method or conceptual framework to understand roots of frictions and clash of values between cultures and societies. Among them are Kluckhohn & Strodbeck (1961), Hall E. (1976), Harris P. (1987), Adler N. (1997; 2002), Kotler P. (1994), Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars (1993; 1997), and Hofstede G. (1980; 1984; 2001). They propose various criteria and models to enable them for a typology of organizational culture. Such analysis enabled a comparison of types of organizational structures, their values or corporate makeup from various perspectives.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1993: 1997) have suggested seven traits or elements for identifying and analyzing cultural differences. Trompenaars (1997) coined a new terms and concepts in this connection, being ‘inner-directed orientation’ and ‘outer-directed orientation’. By ‘inner-directed orientation’ is meant a culture which believes that man is able and need to control nature by the strength of their will and action. In contradiction, ‘outer-directed orientation’ views
organization as a product of or subject to the influence of nature. It considers the development of organization to be determined by its environment, and is therefore expected to be ideally in balance or harmony with nature. Consequently human beings are considered an integral part of nature and therefore need to live harmoniously or coordinated with the environment.

This paper attempts to scrutinize these differing definition of nature in relation to man or human beings as such central theme strongly determined peoples values, responses, attitudes in facing trying circumstances or difficult challenges in life in general, including those of the work place or in corporations. To make the analysis more clear on this problem of intercultural differences and value discordant, this paper shall look at illustrative cases of dispute, misunderstanding, or communication confusion. This paper shall apply Trompenaars approach in explaining intercultural differences and conflicts and the background causes leading to them, arising from basic ideas or values on nature and the environment entertained by the workers concerned. This basic orientation towards nature strongly determined worker’s attitudes towards work and its demands. I proposed to use the term and concept of ‘takdir’ to cover the Malay worker’s orientation in this regard. The traits or elements of the respective culture or orientation of the workers would be checked in a comparative perspective so as to give a clear picture of the cultural differences. Each relevant case will be examined within the framework of the development of conflict, examining the correlation between misunderstanding and the causes leading to the conflicts as follows:

a. Intercultural interaction  
b. Interpretation within their own values, and  
c. Analysis of conflicts

3. Divergence of intercultural values within the context of adverse circumstances

Divergence of values between those of Korean and Malay workers have created an atmosphere of confusion, uneasiness, discordant and misunderstanding in the Korean company being researched. The following cases illustrate the differing perspectives of the respective parties on matters,
particularly with regards to their evaluation of adversity, demanding circumstances, the limitation or capability of human action, and the avoidance of risk and uncertainty. In these respects, the Korean and Malay workers expressed not only differing viewpoints but opposing ones, with one party showing elements of ‘inner directed orientation’, while the Malay workers in general expressed the traits or characteristics of ‘outer directed orientation’.

One of the characteristics of ‘inner directed’ cultural orientation is the high confidence placed by workers in the capability of human being, hence their reluctance to acknowledge the impossibility or hopelessness of any given situation in the face of adversities. In contrasting manner the ‘outer directed’ cultural orientation tends to humbly acknowledge or submit itself to the ‘will of God’, some kind of supernatural forces, or even powerful forces of nature, before which human capability or action are quite limited. Such basic divergence in orientation opens up misunderstanding or confusion over what is expected of workers by way of job performance in the multinational company as their basic cultural orientation influenced or shaped their attitudes and behavioral responses to adversities or challenging circumstances.

3.1. Confusion of workers facing the ‘never giving up’ management principle

Case 1 ‘Nothing is impossible. If something is impossible, make it possible’

a. Intercultural Interaction

Most senior executives in Korean companies do not entertain any kind of ‘bad news’ conveying that some work or assignment had failed or fallen short of expectations. Mr. K, a Korean manager, especially refused to hear of any admission of failure on the part of his subordinates. Mr. K always insist upon his management principle or maxim that ‘if something is impossible, do make it possible’. Mr. K, who is determined never to fail always force or pressurize his workers to step up their efforts in their assignments until they succeed. His pressurizing management approach earned him the nickname of ‘Napoleon’ (a French conqueror noted for his
maxim ‘there is no impossibility in my thought’) among many Malay respondents who resented
his reluctance to admit or acknowledge any kind of ‘impossibility’ in job performance, as well as
his unsympathetic attitude towards failures.

In the perception of Encik M, a Malay worker holding the position of supervisor for five years,
there are many Korean workers whose attitude or behavior conform to that of Mr. K’s of the
Korean company. Korean top executives or staff seem to be always convinced that all job
assignments can be successfully discharged, holding on to the principle that ‘there are no works
which cannot be done or discharged, if the personnel concerned is sincere and of strong volition’.
Most Korean workers are too confident in their capability, so much so they appear to be
dominating and even haughty or arrogant. Encik M’s problem is that he has to follow his
superior’s orders and try to appear perseverant, even though he feels he is trying in vain and
merely wasting his time and effort. Consequentially, some of Encik M’s colleagues avoid
informing their bosses of bad results in their performance unless asked about it in the knowledge
that their bosses would be sure to insist that they continue trying until they attain success. Encik
M does not comprehend this overconfident or self assured attitude of Korean managers and
workers. From his perspective at times human beings should be humble or modest enough to
accept reality and acknowledge failures when necessary.

b. Interpretation from the perspective of the values of Korean and Malay workers

In this case Malay workers feel rather stressful, bewildered and helpless when Korean workers
and senior management refuse to accept the reality of the situation in the context of which
according to their assessment success is impossible. According to their belief and values, Malay
workers are quite willing to acknowledge the limitation of man’s ability in certain circumstances.
Hence after making some efforts they acquiesce to the situation with open heart, though the
outcome is disappointing or unsatisfactory. Malay values guide them to forge a harmonious
relationship with the environment or nature which they deem too powerful or unruly for man to master or control.

Malay workers have no difficulty in accepting life setbacks or unfavorable results as Malay culture and religion always remind them of the supremacy of nature, the will of God, fate, all of which are beyond human mastery or control, before which man should humble himself. In this regard the values of Malay workers are strongly influenced or colored by elements of fatalism, commonly termed and understood as Qadariah by them. According to this thinking they sincerely believe that their fate or conditions cannot be reversed or determined by human effort and action. Consequently they are more accommodating of their lot in life, though unfavorable or tragic it may be, as compared to people of other cultures who do not believe their fate had been predetermined independently of their will or action.

Consistent with this orientation, most Malay workers are respectful of the phenomena of nature or the environment, and are inclined towards a more harmonious, complimentary and positive interaction with nature or the environment. This attitude is naturally extended to their working milieu or idea of organized life. Malay workers do their utmost to discharge their duties, achieve success in any given task, and realize their target or goals through harmonious and accommodative dynamics with their circumstances. Such inclination of Malay workers had been understood as the consequence of ‘fatalism’ by many scholars. Kim Shin (1995) had noted elements of fatalism among Southeast Asian workers. Under the influence of such ideas, they believe that they cannot determine the course of their life through their efforts and action, that their lives depend on God’s will and predetermined fate. Accordingly they have the notion that their will, volition or resolve are not important and of consequence. Sinaga S.H (1998:213) also observed that Malaysian culture shows elements of fatalism which impede to its attempt of change or improve world. The Malays tend to think that accepting the status quo or any given situation will ensure stability to their community and social order.
Trompenaars (1997) noted that Malay workers believe that the power of nature is beyond human mastery and control. Only 26% of Malay workers think that attempts at mastering or controlling natural forces such as the weather is worth trying. Most Asian nations show similar tendencies as Malaysia, except Korea and Thailand. His observation highlights the intercultural difference pertaining to human capability between Koreans and Malaysians. According to his research most Malaysian workers, that is 74% of them, think that man is not capable of controlling natural forces, while more than 39% of Korean workers are enthusiastic of human attempt at controlling and harnessing natural forces. This seems to reflect the dampening effects of fatalism on the values and attitudes of Malay workers who are not inclined towards self determinism but instead resigned to their lot in life.

In the above case, the interpretation of Korean workers and management is very different from that of the Malays. Koreans think Malay workers are not serious about their job as they do not work hard, give up easily, and not fully committed to their tasks. Such assessment by the Koreans are influenced by Korean values which view life circumstances as being reversible by human will and action. This has the effect of Korean workers stressing on effort to master their circumstances or situation completely.

It should be mentioned that there is a prevalence of fatalistic elements even in Korean life or society, but these seems to be solely confined to the level of individual destiny. Some expressions of this fatalistic tendencies include fortune telling, various forms of reliance on Korean shamans, ‘mudang and jomjungi’ in matters of marriage, business ventures and so on. However Korean workers seem to draw a line between such individual fatalism and group values and ethics of workers in Korean companies. Within the world of work, Korean workers view demanding circumstances or adversities as a challenge or opportunity for them to prove their capability, before which they should not give up easily before exhausting their mettle or resourcefulness. Therefore, although Koreans are quite aware of the limitation of human action in life and do
admit to some extent some elements of fatalism at the individual level, they seem to rely more on their capability and the efficacy of human action in their working environment.

In this connection, Trompenaars (1997) found that most Korean workers (72%) think that ‘what happened to me is the result of my deed’. This means that in general Korean workers take full responsibility for the outcome of given tasks, incidents, results and decisions made. This figure is the highest among Asians. Most western countries including the United States and European countries also reflect similar views as Korean workers. As Korean workers and management believe that ‘what happened to me is the result of my deed’, they strive to succeed in their tasks or jobs, where they are not supposed to blame unfavorable circumstances as excuses for their unsatisfactory results or performance.

**c. Analysis of potential intercultural conflict**

Having considered the above case from the differing value premise of the parties involved, it can be said that the confusion or tension spring from the differing intercultural definition of unfavorable circumstance. Korean workers reflect the values and attitudes which strive to prevail over adversity while Malay workers expressed values which strongly affirmed that everything had been destined by the will of God.

Firstly from their definition of circumstance, the Korean workers reflect values which points towards effort of fate control. They believe that man is capable of overcoming and managing their circumstances, particularly at their workplace. Thus Korean workers strive to determine their circumstances or conditions while Malay workers are more deferential towards natural forces and are awed by their power. In accordance to Islamic beliefs as understood by many workers, they are eager for a harmonious relations with the environment and are not desirous of determining their circumstances always, since they are quite prepared to resign to their fate as having being determined by God. From the Korean management point of view, such fatalistic or resigned
attitude of Malay workers can have an adverse effect on the productivity of the company since the Malay workers seem to absolve themselves of any responsibility over poor performance or results in this manner. Asma Abdullah (1996:106) had observed that ‘the Malays emphasize their religious belief more than company matters, including productivity. They have the attitude of autonomous surrender’. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993) view such fatalistic element as distinct feature of Asian managers. Asian managers are inclined to think that they are subject to the control or domination of external forces.

Secondly, from their inclination towards mastering their fate we can deduce Korean social values which had always been strong in encouraging self-determinism, that is to say that man is enjoined to strive towards bettering their conditions, manage adversities and reverse any unfavorable circumstances. Such ‘resisting and controlling’ spirit or culture is always urging man to challenge and push the limits of his capability in overcoming adversities and challenges. It is a fundamental element in this ethics that man should continually strive towards realizing his goals successfully. To a great extent this value premises had been conditioned by ‘aggressive culture’ and ‘military culture’ which emphasized highly achievement and frowns upon any failure. The influence of ‘military culture’ in Korean society makes it unacceptable to pledge difficult circumstances as justification of failure, but instead advocate continual effort until the goal is achieved successfully. In addition to this factor, the historical experience of Korea in facing many external threats and invasions, for examples from countries like China, Japan and some small tribes and North Korea, had also conditioned Korean character towards aggressiveness. In order to prevail against such odds and challenges to their survival in history, the Korean character and spirit had been tempered hard. In this regards some scholars think that it is a feature of the Korean character that it becomes even more resilient and resourceful in the face of adversities, tragedies or crisis. One often cited example by Western scholars in the way in which the Koreans overcome successfully the economic crisis of 1997, to rebound strongly from the setback of recession.
The values of Malay workers reflect ‘accepting’ elements, that is conditioning more towards submitting or resigning to one’s fate openly since it had been ordained by God. Such inclination is reflected in the maxims like ‘menyerah, sudah nasib, sudah takdir, wajib tawakal, sudah jodoh’, all of which point to the spirit or ethos of ‘accepting culture’. Such cultural orientation readily admits the limitation of worker’s capability, they being human after all; it is also more accepting of the awesome power of nature, external forces and life circumstances as the workings of God’ will. This ‘accepting’ element can be reinforced by the continual influence and conditionings of amicable, compromising, gentle and polite Malay culture.

3.2. Expectation on workers commitment and responsibility

Case 2 ‘Invincible worker’ with extreme commitment

a. Intercultural Interaction

Encik I, an Indian manager who had served for 6 years in the Korean company, broke his leg in an accident. The doctor had his broken leg in a cast. Although he was advised by the doctor to rest for a week, he showed up at the office the following day limping. When Encik I met his Korean superior, his head of department, by chance, the latter was most impressed with his exemplary conduct of showing up at the office despite his injury. Seeing how his boss had been impressed by his showing up, Encik I felt compelled to show up for work regularly since then. Since then Encik I had become a sort of a model employee among the Korean workers and management, but not in the eyes of his other local colleagues who view the conduct of Encik I and the whole episode rather cynically and with some reservation.

b. Interpretation from the perspective of Malay and Korean workers

This case indicates intercultural differences on the kind of expectation placed on workers in terms of their job commitment. Encik I’s colleagues, comprising of Malay workers, do not expect Encik
I to come to office still in cast as they generally give higher priority to individual wellbeing such as health and contentment compared to company’s interests or office demands. They say that Encik I would not have turned up for work soon after his medical treatment if he had been working for a Malaysian company. It was only after perceiving the responses of his Korean superiors that he felt obliged or compelled to attend to his job responsibilities. After experiencing the positive endorsement from his Korean bosses he did not feel comfortable to stay at home to rest as he could deduce from the bosses responses that they did not really care about workers personal. He felt that Korean bosses always stress the discharge of work responsibilities regardless of the personal difficulties or circumstances of the workers.

Initially, Encik I decided to show up at the office to inform management of his injury and to apply for medical leave. As events turned out he was caught in a different circumstances altogether from his original intention. The vote of confidence and approval showed by the Korean superiors to Encik I compelled Encik I to abandon his original intention of giving greater priority to his physical problem over that of his office demands. This is even more necessary when he saw urgent works piling up in his office as usual. In the end he felt guilty if he were to let down his boss’s high expectation of him. His priority changed with office demands superseding any consideration of personal wellbeing to the contrary. Encik I’s decision to revise his priorities was seen by his colleagues as being ‘excessive’, ‘extreme’, ‘stupid’ and even as ‘apple polishing’ as in their evaluation he should give priority and attention to his injury.

Most Korean workers think that Malay workers lack commitment and sense of responsibility concerning their job or assignments. Therefore Korean workers and top management could not help being pleased with the strong commitment, ‘spiritual strength’ and deep sense of responsibility demonstrated by Encik I when he showed up at the office despite his serious injury. This Korean response is consistent with the Korean values which expect workers to make personal sacrifices to their job and company demands even in difficult circumstances. It is usual
within this system of social values to consider workers who give priority to their job rather than personal interests as being ideal workers, while those who place individual interests above their job or organizational demands as being ‘unprofessional’ and inferior workers. The Korean management promotes the conduct of Encik I as being outstanding and praiseworthy to be emulated by all employees. This practice of highlighting exemplary conduct by employees is quite common in Korean companies where such staff are publicize as some sort of company ‘heroes’ who sacrificed personal interests and concerns for the wellbeing of the company.

c. **Analysis of potential intercultural conflict**

The above can be viewed from differing perspectives on job commitment or responsibility entertained by the respective group of workers. The social values of Korean workers regards highly any demonstration of strong commitment, high morale or spiritual strength, and deep sense of responsibility towards work and its successful performance. In fact they are not particularly attentive to the process or effort at achieving result as compared to the outcome or result achieved in the end. This is a manifestation of the ‘controlling and dominating ‘culture of Koreans which attribute the outcome or result of any venture to the effort or performance of workers. In other words it is thinking that success indicate the right effort while failure suggests efforts must continue to its successful conclusion. Consistent with this value orientation, Korean workers believe that workers must take responsibility for the results of their work performance.

The social values of Malay workers defined differently what constitute commitment and responsibility of workers. Under the influence of their values, Malay workers are prone to feel stressed as psychologically since they admit the fact that the results or outcome of their work efforts are subject to the influence beyond their control. Many Malay workers adopt the approach of giving their best effort in their work according to their capability and then surrender the rest to God’s will. In this manner, Malays workers do not feel remorseful or disappointed if they face
failures or bad results in their job assignments, as long as they feel that they have done or try to do their best. This attitude can be understood as a manifestation of the ‘assenting and accepting’ Malay culture. Such value orientation put Malay workers at odds with Korean corporate culture expects and do compel workers to be fully accountable for their work performance and results achieved. Such orientation is rather unforgiving or unsympathetic to failures and low attainment and is not very open to rationalization attributing unsatisfactory results to other external forces like fate or God’s will. Consequently we have situations where Korean workers accused Malay workers of being irresponsible or negligent in their work performance. As such some kind of tension or seeds of conflicts are created because in response the Malay workers accused the Korean workers and management as rather ‘unforgiving’ or unsympathetic to failures and low performance beyond their control.

Korean values as outlined in the above are believed to have been shaped by Confucian teaching. Shin Man Su (1996) thinks that Korean workers take failures to be accruing from their own mistakes and he sees such outlook conforms to the teaching of Confucianism which regards failure as the result of the lack of efforts, volition and spiritual strength. There is another belief among Korean workers which underlies the perception of accountability and responsibility for the consequences of one’s action or deed. Korean workers believe that God is authoritarian, strict and punishes human beings for their wickedness and or evil words. For example if someone falls ill, his misfortune is considered as a sign of God’s wrath for his sins or misdeed. Although Koreans are afraid of God’s judgment and retribution, they have faith too in his benevolence and justice, which ensures that all good striving and conduct would eventually be rewarded with the desirous outcome. In other words, man is held fully accountable for his action and deed. It is such value premises which had spurred Korean workers in their work, culminating in the rapid growth for Korea since 1970’s.
4. Conclusion

This research discovered that misunderstanding between Korean and Malay workers arise out of very different ideas and value premises pertaining to the limit or scope of their responsibility. When a Korean worker of the ‘controlling’ culture vows ‘I will try’ it means that he would give his utmost and he would be determined to attain the goals or targets of his assignment. Sometimes his undertaking is interpreted as a promise or assurance of success among the Koreans. Accordingly Koreans are greatly disappointed or even suffer great shame when they could not succeed in their given task. On the contrary when a Malay worker says ‘I will try’ it carries a very different connotation. He may try his best but he is not under great pressure since other members of society do not always insist on the best or desirous outcome as they admit that such eventuality is subject to factors beyond the worker’s or man’s control. Such intercultural differences could lead to misunderstanding or friction between the respective groups.

Many differences have been noted between the life orientation or value premises of Korean and Malay workers. The social values of Korean workers strongly shows elements of ‘controlling, resilient’ culture which emphasize the following elements: open to challenges, domineering, proactive, desirous of change, regards highly moral and spiritual strength, and acceptance of responsibility and accountability. Differing from this, the social values of the Malays show the following elements consistent with ‘accepting culture’: fatalism, compliance, other-worldliness, yielding, passive and rather weak in spirit. Such differences had also been observed between Korean workers and other Southeast Asian workers and such divergence are fertile ground for conflicts between people of diverse cultures and world-views.
References


