

# A Comparative Study of the Culture of Paraguay and Korea

Sara Torres  
(Hankuk University of Foreign Studies)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One planet. One world. Five continents. One hundred and ninety two countries recognized by the United Nations (there are many more!). Over six billion people sharing the planet, people with a specific and complete way of life. Today that one world is a village due to the internet and globalization and there seems to be no barriers regarding geographical distances any longer —it is a borderless world. That is indeed true, but in spite of that key phenomenon, continents, countries, and human societies of the world are still unique in themselves, all of them

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\* Sara Torres Servín, a native of Asunción, Paraguay, is currently teaching Spanish at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. She got her M.A. degree in Applied Linguistics at the Catholic University of Asunción. She also holds a degree in Theology, that covered anthropological and language studies, by the Word of Life Seminary in São Paulo, Brazil. In her doctoral studies she covered aspects of both English literature and linguistics.

comprising a vast range of perspectives that characterize them and separate them from the rest. Each has its own history and way of seeing and comprehending reality. It is this differentiation which makes the world such a rich and diverse place to live in. Take the history of Asia, or Europe, and America, for instance. The America discovered by a European navigator is hardly over five hundred years old, at a time when the Asian population was already thousands of years of age. If we were to make comparisons of the peoples of Asia and America, cultural differences would arise very openly, since these are two worlds so far apart and thus function and process reality in different ways. As human beings that they are they share characteristics that make them similar, of course, but there is bound to be a load of cultural aspects that make them interestingly different. Those differences can motivate very light and quick opinions such as “They’re so lazy!”, on one side, and “They don’t know how to enjoy life!”, on the other, each group judging the other by what is externally seen without taking into consideration the numerous factors that shape the mind, actions, reactions, and interactions of the other society making it be the way it is. This line of thinking is a case of ethnocentrism, the attitude of those who operate from the assumption that their ways of doing things are best —no matter where or under what conditions they are applied. And this when it is known that there are powerful interdependent factors in the environment of each group —political, economic, legal, technological, historical, religious, and cultural— that influence the way those groups function, manage for survival, and process their conception of life and time and view reality in general.

Harris and Moran (2000) say that as generally understood, the culture of a society comprises the shared values, understandings, assumptions, and goals that are learned from earlier generations, imposed by present

members of a society, and passed on to succeeding generations. But it is also a well known fact that a society or any human group is directly shaped, influenced and modeled by the surrounding natural elements such as geography and climate, and even by its own history and national consciousness. And in the final analysis, all these contribute to influence the language that is in a way the reflection of the mind of a given society. Thus there are various factors that come together in order to finally determine the culture of a group, hence the difference we find in the world.

The study of the culture of human societies can certainly aid in a better understanding and acceptance or tolerance of other individuals and their society, taking into consideration that there are marked differences that will inevitably lead to misunderstanding, impatience, and annoyance. It becomes necessary, then, to develop a cultural sensitivity, or cultural empathy, that is no other than an awareness and honest caring about other people's culture and way of life. This sensitivity or empathy requires the ability to understand the cultural perspective of those living in other societies and the willingness to at least understand why, and put oneself in their place. Experience has shown that this is easier said than done.

This paper explores the cultures of an Asian nation, Korea, and an American nation, Paraguay, in an attempt to come up with a comparison of Korean and Paraguayan life paradigms, in order to find the common ground they share, the traits that make them different, and what makes them so unique in the cultural continuum. The topics to be explored are views of time, personal identity, hierarchy, individualism and collectivism, time orientation and views of the future, attitudes towards work, and relationships, to conclude with family life and socializing.

## 2. BACKGROUND — FIRST THINGS FIRST

### a) PARAGUAY

The Republic of Paraguay is a landlocked country located in a flat area in the center of South America, surrounded by Brazil, Argentina and Bolivia, with an area of 406,752 square kilometers. It was discovered in 1524 by Europeans, and the settlement of the capital, Asunción, was founded in August 1537. At the arrival of the European explorers and settlers, the area was inhabited by the natives *Guaraní*, who were friendly people who had no war culture. They were a nomadic society that lived on agriculture and hunting and fishing, and were also the only monotheistic culture on the continent. The union of these natives with the Spanish conquerors and settlers is what resulted in the present Paraguayan population, or *mestizo*, which today accounts for 95 per cent of the population of 6,669,086 inhabitants. Of those, some 56 per cent live in urban areas. The vast majority of the people live in the eastern region near the capital, Asunción. The Chaco or western region accounts for about 60 per cent the territory and houses less than 2% of the population. The climate is subtropical with long hot humid summers and cool winters with abundant sunshine.

The history of Paraguay is shaped by two major wars that almost saw the end of the local male population; long periods of political dictatorship that in a way has molded the mind of the people; and the Catholic religion that was brought by the Spanish conquerors when they first arrived in the place. Today 89.6 per cent of the population is Roman Catholic, 6.2 per cent is evangelical Christian, 1.1 per cent is other Christian, 0.6 per cent practice indigenous religions and 0.3 per cent

professes non-Christian religions, according to the 2002 census.<sup>1)</sup>

Paraguay's largest economic activity is based on agriculture, agribusiness and cattle ranching. The country is the world's third largest exporter of chalk boards, and has a large scale beef and dried beef exports. Its subtropical climate allows for five harvests every year, but its economic potential has been historically constrained by its landlocked geographical situation, a fact that makes Paraguay's economy very dependent on Brazil and Argentina, the two large neighboring countries.

## b) KOREA

The Republic of Korea (South Korea) is a peninsula situated in East Asia, with an area of 100,032 square kilometers and a population of 48,379,392 inhabitants not mixed with other ethnic groups. Most of them live in urban areas, due to rapid migration from the countryside during the country's quick economic expansion in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The capital city of Seoul has a population of 10.3 million inhabitants.

The country was first inhabited since Paleolithic times, unified under the Koryeo Dynasty in 936 AD, and remained as one nation until the Japanese annexation and colonization in 1910. This harsh political situation of colonial rule stimulated the patriotism of Koreans. During this period, Japan exploited Korea economically and banned Korean language education in schools. The lives of Koreans deteriorated deeply under the Japanese colonial rule until the end of World War II in 1945, when the country was divided into North Korea and South Korea. The Japanese occupation period with all the atrocities that accompanied it has left profound marks in the Korean psyche. In June 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea, an action that catapulted the Korean War. The

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1) U.S. State Department, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90263>

1953 armistice, never really signed, split the peninsula along the demilitarized zone near the original demarcation line. No peace treaty was ever signed, and the two countries are still technically at war.<sup>2)</sup>

South Korea is divided into four geographical regions. The terrain is mostly mountainous, most of which is not arable. Only 30 per cent can be cultivated. The climate is humid continental and humid subtropical, and is affected by the East Asian monsoon that brings in the rainy season, from June through to September. Winters are long and bitterly cold, with high temperatures along the southern coast and lower in the mountainous interior.

In South Korea 46.5% of the population have no religion. Of the rest, 29.2 per cent are Christians (Catholics and Protestants), and 22.8 per cent Buddhists. Confucianism and Buddhism are deeply rooted in the minds of the majority of the population. Confucianism and its inherent values have actually become a way of life for the South Korean people and it permeates people's everyday life, institutions and religions. Korean Shamanism was the original religion in the country.

Despite lacking natural resources, and having such a small territory, South Korea is considered a strong economy, the 13<sup>th</sup> largest in the world. Since the 1960's the country has gone through very rapid industrialization and today is one of the world's ten top exporters. It has a highly developed high tech infrastructure, with one of the world's highest internet access per capita. It is the world's sixth largest nuclear power producer. The extremely competitive education and workforce drives the economy. In consumer electronics, South Korea is the world's largest plasma display maker; it is also the world's leading memory chip producer, with important production of semiconductors, laser printers, digital cameras, and electronics in general, besides radioactive isotope

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2) South Korea, [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

production equipment for medical and industrial use. At present the government is investing in robotics industry, financial services, bio technology, aerospace, and entertainment industries.

### 3. CULTURAL ASPECTS OF PARAGUAY AND KOREA — Comparing and Contrasting

Paraguay and Korea are two human societies that differ in profound ways due to the nature of all the factors that have contributed to the shaping of their different ways of seeing, perceiving and understanding the surrounding environment and the world, and of comprehending and apprehending reality. Koreans, for instance, view time in a linear way, whereas Paraguayans perceive it from a cyclical perspective. In Paraguay days are long and there is always a lot of sunshine, ample time for everything to be done, so there is always a sense of “*mañana*,” tomorrow. Winter is never a threat and there are five harvests a year. In Korea there is never enough time for things, and people have to run and rush all the time. Hence the “*Pali, pali*” culture, meaning *hurry up, hurry up*, or *quickly, quickly*... People function in this mode. Winter is long and very cold; there are no crops during this harsh time except with the use of greenhouses working on electric power, which make prices rise staggeringly... On the other side of the Pacific the expression to be used would be “*Take it easy; take your time; don’t worry, we’ll do it tomorrow*...” These traits affect personal and national character, making Koreans impatient and Paraguayans lenient in regards to time and its use.

Because of the value Koreans place on time, they consequently adhere to schedules and deadlines, punctuality and diligence. On the other hand, Paraguayans tend to place more emphasis on people and relationships than on the strict adherence of set schedules. Koreans think that they

should use their time effectively and plan things, whereas Paraguayans believe that schedules and long and short time planning are important, but only in relation to other priorities. Koreans are generous with their time only if they have no previous commitments. Paraguayans always have time, especially for family and friends, and commitments can be easily canceled to take care of something personal/relational. Punctuality is highly valued in Korea while in Paraguay it is common to show up late for many social functions, though not for the more formal instances like school or work. These are two different visions, two sides of the time coin, the perspective of two cultures that have had to adapt to the needs of their immediate environment in order to keep going ahead as a group. And each perspective works for each society. There is nothing wrong with any of them. This is a key point in understanding a different culture.

Apart from this difference, the first cultural aspect to be considered in this study is that of **personal identity**. This has to do with the views of self, of national identity, and how this is reflected on the general behavior of a society in general, since culture influences a society's behavior in countless ways, subconsciously guiding actions, reactions and interactions. In this line of thinking Paraguayans and Koreans are very hospitable and generous hosts, viewing the care of visitors as something of utmost importance. This is embedded in the Guarani and Confucian traditions of hospitality and caring for someone's neighbors. In Korea the age of the visitors will determine who gets the best seat, cut of meat, etc., whereas in Paraguay the tendency is to treat women and children to the best options first. This is an indication that the Paraguayan social structure is largely egalitarian but at the same it has a tradition of authoritarian rule and a concomitant lack of democratic institutions. In Paraguay one's family gives identity to a person. The sense of family is very strong, the mother being the gravitating force that

brings all members together. This can be sensed more especially on Mother's Day, when the whole country is mobilized because of this event. On every corner of the country this day is celebrated in the most special way. In Korea the tendency is more to be with friends or people one's age, even though the family is highly valued, this again due to the cultural factors of hierarchy. It is the group that gives identity to the individual in Korea, but in the home the mother is too the magnetic force that sets life into motion. Outside the home women do not yet occupy positions of high power even when they are extremely intelligent, highly efficient and orderly, and very practical, with a high degree of organization. The promise of a successful career most of the time ends when women become mothers and stay at home. In Paraguay there are women, though not many, in high official positions. For them education is not an end in itself but simply a way to lead to better options in life. They usually marry young. Korean women favor marriage at an older age.

Regarding the national identity issue, both Koreans and Paraguayans are proud of their identity as a nation. Paraguayans are deeply proud of their heritage. Their culture has been heavily shaped by its Spanish colonial past creating a modern culture that is a unique blend of European and indigenous heritages. An important trace of the original Guaraní culture that has endured is the Guaraní language, understood and spoken by 95% of the population. Guaraní and Spanish are official languages, but Guaraní is part of the national identity and an object of national pride. There has even been a fusion of the two languages, a phenomenon that gave birth to the linguistic hybrid *jopará*, the language spoken by almost everybody in the national territory, which is a powerful factor of national social cohesion. In Korea the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has meant profound changes in

the nature of traditional Korean society. The Confucian concept of filial piety and loyalty to ancestors of the past has been largely substituted by an intense nationalism and the interests of the state have taken priority over the interests of the family, according to the Country Reports Organization.<sup>3)</sup> The root of strong nationalism in Korea stems from Confucianism, the national consciousness of "one rootedness," and the experience of colonialism during Japanese occupation. Koreans are proud of their country's accomplishments, including the contributions of traditional Korean culture and the nation's modern economic success. Achievements in many fields have contributed to a stronger national pride, as was seen when the Korean soccer team reached semi finals in the World Cup in 2002 and when athletes brought home gold medals from the Beijing Olympics in 2008, besides many other international achievements.

The Confucian philosophical way of thinking has also shaped the Korean mind in regards to personal modesty, which is considered a great virtue. By this approach, people's existence should be felt in the form of acts and conduct, and they are obligated to provide opportunities for others to experience their good deeds, never expressing their goodness verbally. Self initiated effort for public recognition or self aggrandizement is a shameful conduct for a person of virtue. So Koreans often use extreme modesty when they speak about themselves, always minimizing any achievement they may have. They usually refer to themselves saying that they speak a language "very badly," for instance, when they are doing so in a most excellent way! Paraguayans, on the other hand, possess too little if any modesty. Being timid and not having self confidence are traits that people do not like to see in others. Assertiveness and self advertising are highly encouraged. Ever since

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3) <http://www.countryreports.or>

elementary school children are motivated to express their thoughts, to speak in public, to assert themselves. So they grow up learning how to handle this side of their personality. Self confidence expressed in the way people carry themselves and speak is highly valued in Paraguayan society. People tend to feel attracted to individuals that show assertiveness and know how to speak convincingly. They are considered as having a “great personality.” In the more personal level, Koreans are demonstrative, friendly, quite aggressive, self disciplined, and hard working. They enjoy their friends the way Paraguayans enjoy their families. Paraguayans are very friendly too, have a calm, placid nature—the Guaraní ancestors were very calm and confident people who would never fight—and view work only as a means of support for themselves and their families.

Another aspect considered in this study has to do with the concept of **hierarchy** in both Korean and Paraguayan societies. Korean culture is embedded in Confucianism, which has shaped the Korean mind and character. In this philosophical view, hierarchy runs very high in the relationship continuum. It is a very rigid system that is even helped by the language that conveys this distinction of rank. The Korean language has different levels of formality, and greetings will differ depending on the people one addresses—younger, older, or the same age as one. Age is a determining factor in defining this hierarchy, followed by rank and profession. If a person is just one day older than another, he or she has to behave as under that older person. Even siblings use the hierarchy language to refer to an older brother, *opa*, older sister, *nuna*, *onni*, never calling brothers or sisters by their names. Friendship is also based on age. People can count as friends only those who were born in the same year that they were also born. Outside the home, and especially in the workplace, this aspect of Korean culture is even stronger. There are cases

of people who start a fight because a person who is younger does not use the language appropriate to address them. Korea and its people have certainly undergone great changes the last couple of decades, but the respect for authority, formality, class, and rank is still very strong.

As far as Paraguay is concerned regarding this hierarchical realm, first of all, the language provides two ways of addressing others, the familiar and the respectful. Everyone who is familiar and close, even being a little or a lot older, and having whatever rank will be treated in the familiar way with *tú*, the second familiar person singular. The younger generations are not using the formal pronoun *usted* any longer to address people in a respectful way. It is quickly disappearing from use. Secondly, the tendency in Paraguay is for a more relaxed atmosphere in personal relationships. Age does not count when it comes to friendship and friends. The author happens to have excellent friends a lot older, the same age and a lot younger than her. Paraguayans do not value too formal settings, and very quickly two persons who are newly acquainted will be on friendly terms. This informal trait makes people more open and approachable than in Korea, where the tendency is for people to remain serious and not engage very openly with others too fast. The case is even more marked with foreigners. A point that levels these two perspectives is the fact that both cultures place a lot of respect on the elderly. In Korea this is plainly seen on buses or on the subway, where there is always a section reserved for them, apart from elevators for the use of the elderly. In Paraguay the general feeling is “ladies first” or “women and children first,” more than “the elderly first,” but they are certainly respected and cared for by the family.

A third dimension that makes Korea and Paraguay such different countries is that of **individualism and collectivism**. The culture of Korea is still very much bound to the traditional Confucian teachings of spiritualism and collectivism in spite of the fact that the country has been

greatly influenced by US culture in many ways. Korea ranks really high on collectivism, the view by which a society sees the well being of the group (family, company, country) as more important than the personal well being. Because of that the success of the group takes precedence over the individual. The group is seen as the domineering force in society. Loyalty to the group is paramount and group harmony is a must. In a culture like this, standing out from the group is looked down upon and discouraged, since that can be a threat to the group security and survival. The author happens to have a Korean colleague who said to her once that Korea would never get to obtain a Nobel Prize in any discipline, due to the fact that the group would not allow that person to stand out and be superior to the rest. On the same level, open criticism and public disagreement are considered very serious because in Confucian philosophy it is not proper to damage another person's reputation. People feel comfortable in this setting of interdependence and they feel that they "belong." So they have to speak, act, dress, and conduct their life in the manners set by the group. Being a member of a group is essential to one's identity, success, and/or survival in Korea. The fact of being in a group and being part of it makes saving face vital.

Besides all these characteristics, and given the nature of collectivism, family and personal relationships are important for Koreans, and connections are vital for business introductions and transactions. Success depends greatly on social contacts and friends expect to rely on each other for just about everything. The priority of guarding the social and professional reputation of their peers is also a driving force. The focus is on the self discipline that forms the integrity of "our group." The concept of "We" resonates high with Koreans. That is why it is difficult for foreigners to be included as part of the "group." A foreigner will never get to be a Korean. In the dimension of interpersonal relationships people see themselves as brothers and sisters, and see the authority in

power —the president of the country, for instance— as their father.

Conversely, Paraguay stands at the individualistic side of the continuum. In this frame of reference personal well being is more important than that of the group, and individual achievement is valued over group accomplishments. Paraguayan people are encouraged to participate with their personal contributions and the motivation to be different is high. They like to stand out from the group and being acknowledged. Personal freedom and individual rights are basic. This has historical traces since the history of the country has been quite unstable politically speaking and people had only themselves to rely on. That is why individuality is a precious treasure that everybody values, favors, and exerts. The right to dissent is zealously guarded by the people. Being a member of a group does not define who a person is. As a cultural trait, students are very used to discussions in school, to debate, to express their ideas openly and without fear. They even seem to like the idea of going against the establishment. There is a saying that goes “¿Hay ley? Soy contra,” meaning “Is there a law? I’m against it.” But then again this is characteristic of all Latin American culture.

An interesting point to be made here, however, has to do with the fact that Paraguayans are also very much collectivists, but in the family domain. Families are large and what runs rampant in this setting is the collective way of viewing life. Families are like little fortresses to protect their members. It is more the idea of a clan. But outside of this, the way people have to deal in society is by being individualistic. This mindset of collectivism or individualism affects even the approach to problem solving in both Korean and Paraguayan contexts. In Korea people tend to have a holistic way of solving things, they rely on intuition and are more pragmatic, and they always go for group consensus. On the contrary, the way people solve problems in Paraguay is certainly based on intuition but also a heavy dose of emotion. The individual approach

is important. Paraguay has great people they consider national heroes in an individual way. They love to include foreigners in their midst and see them integrating into the local culture. In general Paraguayans are very patient with foreigners.

**Time orientation and view of the future** is the fourth point to be explored in this work. In this realm, Koreans favor a balanced time perspective that is future oriented but set in the present at the same time. This makes them make short, medium, and long range plans, stick to them and succeed in their endeavors. They have a projection over time and it looks as if they really have a control over time. Paraguayans are much more present oriented and the real concept of time for them is somewhat imprecise. For them the idea underlying their view of the world is "*live the present,*" as if life follows a preordained course and human action is determined by the will of God, and the present cannot help to modify the future. This has a negative incidence on planning and making preparations for the future. People do not project themselves in longer than perhaps five years. It is not very easy to see actual results since not much has been planned. Normally the fact of planning and setting deadlines instills in one a desire to reach goals. This motivates and pushes one to expect something. Paraguayans have not been challenged much in this arena. Koreans excel in planning, preparation, and scheduling in a detailed way, plus working very hard to achieve results. And those results are obvious for the world to see.

This time orientation dimension also weighs its toll on fatalism in both cultures. For Korean the sense of fatalism leads necessarily to preparation, the notion of projecting yourself to the future, sometimes in an exaggerated way. Parents worry too much about their children's future and consequently invest a lot in their education, hoping to produce individuals who will be ready for the best employment that will ensure their future. Children and teenagers spend most of their time studying

in private institutes after school. The sense of fatalism for Paraguayans does not let them see beyond tomorrow. The tendency is to stay with the status quo, and take life in an unplanned way, considering disciplined routine somewhat unnatural. The feeling that underlies is one of conformity to the present situation and not willing to do something to change things that could be for the better.

The fifth topic that concerns us in this study of cultural differences between Koreans and Paraguayans is their **attitudes toward work**. Koreans are quite hard working. This is the normal way they see and express themselves and is also what they expect from all individuals in their society. The opposite constitutes a very negative trait that no one wants to incur in —being lazy has terrible connotations. The idea of work Koreans embrace is that only hard work will make them accomplish their objectives in life. So they feel highly motivated to work without counting the cost. For the typical Korean work is a sacred duty. In the history of the country the long winters that did not make cultivation of the land possible would always force Koreans to work very hard to prepare for the long cold months. It was a matter of survival and they really applied themselves to the hard task of preparing for the future. Korean attitude toward work is also the result of colonialism and ideology. The hard colonial experience of the exploited and the ideology of development centered economy that Korean people have is what make them be obsessed with hard work. Korea does not have natural resources and most of the territory is mountainous. So the force and the drive for work have always been paramount for Koreans. Today things have changed for the better, conditions are better, technology and industry are prosperous, but still the people keep working hard and saving and investing for the future.

Education is today the most urgent and immediate thing to be acquired by Koreans. They see the acquisition of skills, thriftiness, patience and

perseverance as great values. It is no wonder that these days the world is seeing more and more Koreans coming to the front in many disciplines. As an extension of their hard working nature, Koreans give their loyalty to the company they work for, and extra hours, working on weekends and holidays without being paid is part of having a job. They will always walk the extra mile for their employer. Society sees people's identity as defined by the job they keep, especially men. Financial soundness due to hard labor is synonym of success and prestige and people in this category are highly admired. Young people prepare all their life for a good job.

Paraguayans see work basically as a means to support themselves and their families. For many people work does not constitute a blessing. From a historical point of view, this comes as a legacy of the first inhabitants of the land who were nomadic people that lived mainly on the land and hunting. As nature was always so bountiful, these peoples did not actually have to make much effort in order to find their means of survival and have a supply of fruits and vegetables or meat ready for them on a regular basis. Once the hunting, fishing, and agricultural products were depleted in a given area, these noble people would simply move to another area that would offer them all they needed without any cost. This added to the high summer temperatures that would make work difficult and a struggle remains in the Paraguayan psyche. In the same way that relationships and people are a priority, leisure becomes more important than work. The tendency is for people to see work as something you cannot do without but have to endure. The outcome of such a mindset is plain for the world to see in present day Paraguay.

Another aspect to be analyzed in our study is that of **relationships**. This human component of life is a rich parameter with which to measure or analyze a society. Relationships are frequently the window through

which other people can contemplate and see the real culture of a society actually happening. Relationships reflect culture in a clear way. The ways in which members of a given human society act, react, and interact tell a lot about the manner in which the mind of those people is shaped and function. One specific way in which this cultural analysis can be realized is by looking at the way people in a society communicate with each other and among themselves. For Harris and Moran culture and **communication** are essentially synonymous and there is much to be learned from the way different cultures communicate. Each culture has a style of communication that other groups may not understand. In the case of **verbal communication**, in Paraguay people are more in favor an **indirect style** of communication, that is, they prefer to imply what they are saying instead of actually saying something. This requires creative speaking and listening techniques and may be so subtle that an outsider may not even perceive the nuances of the local communication. But a more **direct approach** is not looked down upon. It all depends on the situation and context in which the conversation is taking place.

The style in Korea tends to be indirect as well but somewhat stronger. People would not often tell others that they should not do something but instead they would usually compliment them for what they are doing well. Koreans may withhold bad news or adverse opinions or express them in an indirect way. It is normally very unlikely that a Korean would say something offensive to a foreigner. They always try to keep good manners, and treatment of other people is something very important in the Confucian perspective. Paraguayans do not favor confrontation and neither do Koreans. Both prefer to keep composure, especially in public. Paraguayans are very affectionate and show a lot of emotion among family members and friends, but are more reserved in public. Korean composure is laudable. Paraguayans enjoy jokes and merriment. In

Paraguay silence in conversation is not appreciated and it makes people feel rather uncomfortable. In Korea, however, it is expected and appropriated. It is an interesting soap opera phenomenon on TV as well, where people keep long silences when they converse, and it is noticeable that they feel comfortable with it. Young couples can spend long silent pleasant pauses before they resume their topic of conversation.

In the case of **non verbal communication**, Korea and Paraguay have differences that can shock each other. The first to be mentioned is **spatial relations**, in regards to **personal space**. Paraguayans stand close to one another while talking whereas Koreans preferably stand at arm's lengths from one another. When they meet strangers the distance is farther. For Paraguayans it is rude to back away from someone while speaking. In public places —the market, buses, subway, crowds— Koreans do not keep distances but rather push and bump into other people. For foreigners it is very shocking that they do not apologize for doing so. Paraguayans feel comfortable being close whereas Koreans tend to back away when speaking with a foreigner that would come too close.

Another non verbal difference that stands out between Koreans and Paraguayans is **eye contact**. In Paraguay a person is considered suspicious, shifty, untrustworthy, or a liar if he or she looks away and does not make direct eye contact. It is rude and considered bad manners, especially if it comes from younger persons towards adults. Children are always expected to look straight in the eye of the person speaking to them. Direct eye contact creates an atmosphere of trust and respect. Although Koreans traditionally favor indirect eye contact, both direct and indirect eye contact is acceptable during conversation. Many foreign teachers who teach in Korea find it disturbing that students do not make eye contact but rather keep a blank look. Staring is considered

inappropriate in both countries, but in Korea more so. Moreover, it is not customary to see men looking at women in Korea, while in Paraguay this male tendency is always somewhat exaggerated. They usually claim that they like to watch and admire God and Nature's creation!

Apart from the two points already mentioned, **touching** is another non verbal communication that comes in different packages in the two countries. In Paraguay there is a lot of touching between men and men, men and women and women and women while talking —hand on shoulders, hand on arms, and hand on hands. Conversation cannot be complete without touching. In Korea it is very common to see two girls or two women or two men walking arm in arm or hand in hand. This is a normal case of friendship. Other than that Koreans do not seem to favor physical touch, although these days it is getting more and more common to see young couples holding hands or even embracing in public. But this is still not approved by the older generations, who find public demonstrations of affection as something shameful. Touching between strangers or acquaintances, especially between opposite sexes, is considered inappropriate. For Paraguayans, however, speaking without touching is beyond comprehension.

Finally, the last topic explored in this paper is **family life and socializing** in Korean culture and in the Paraguayan setting. In Korea family members do not function as individuals but are rather part of the “group.” The national feeling of collectivism transcends the family circle. A woman ceases to have an identity the moment she becomes a wife and mother, when she starts to be called “the wife of X” or “the mom of X” after his oldest son. In Paraguay a woman called Miss Rosa Martínez who marries Mr. Carlos Fretes has her name changed to Rosa Martínez de Fretes, *de* meaning *of*, an indication of property. But this is the Spanish legal system that was brought with the conquerors and

colonists in the past. In both Korean and Paraguayan contexts a clear point is that women are very hard working and have contributed enormously to the well being of the country. They are still expected to do all the housework and take care of the children. Both countries owe much to their women. *Ajumma* and *Kuñá karái* are two very special words in both cultures. It refers to married women and mothers who are the driving forces of the nation, one in Korean, the other in Guaraní.

Paraguayans find it very colorful that in Korean tradition the husband is expected to hand over all or most of his salary to his wife, the one in charge of the family finances. In Paraguay it is always the man who handles the money and takes care of finances. In both countries the father is the actual bread winner even when wives work outside the home as well. In both countries the family is an important part of an individual's life. In Korea family ties are very strong, in spite of the fact that only on special long holidays like Lunar New Year and Thanksgiving —three days each— the majority of the population goes to their hometowns to visit parents and relatives. Young people prefer to go out with their friends —of the same age— and spend time with them rather than being with their parents and brothers and sisters. They associate by age. In Paraguay the family stays close together. Family means people, closeness, togetherness, support. So Koreans favor family yet prefer to be in the company of friends. Paraguayans love family and enjoy being together. Easter, Christmas, New Year and all major holidays constitute occasions for family gathering.

Regarding sports, Koreans do not usually practice sports, especially women. Schools do not seem to favor a strong sports culture. In Paraguay children, teenagers, and young people especially, love to play team sports. The vast majority of the boys play soccer. There are soccer fields all over the country. These days more and more girls are taking

part in this activity too, and there are professional female teams that are very popular with the public. Due to the long summer time and the warm temperatures, youngsters and adults as well enjoy swimming. In Korea children usually practice taekwon do. Soccer is something people like because it is popular these days. Koreans tend to favor what is popular and in fashion. Paraguayans have a long sports tradition in fencing, basketball, rowing, sports fishing, swimming, and volleyball. Many people take part in these activities and sports games attract lots of people to stadiums where they cheer for their favorite teams. In Paraguay it is a well known fact that there are two things people *always* speak about: soccer and politics.

Another aspect of the social life of Korea that is very deeply rooted in the country is the academy or institute culture. This is a system of education that completes the instruction youngsters receive at school. In Paraguay children and teenagers go to school but there is no such thing as an academy culture. They do take piano lessons or English but this is something optional that they choose to do. In Korea it is more like a mandatory thing and children end up studying all year long for long hours. The situation is much more complex for high school students who stay at school all day long until late hours of the night preparing for university entrance exams. This system does not allow teenagers and young people to engage in an active social life. Only when they begin university studies do they have more time to themselves, a fact that makes them feel at a loss and not knowing how to handle so much free time all of a sudden. Competition in society is fierce and that drives the population to invest their life in preparation for the best jobs. In Paraguay the feeling of competition is very low given the small population. On occasions there are jobs but not the people to fill the positions!

PC rooms constitute another way of life in Korea. They are extremely popular with middle and high school students and young people in general. Rather than getting together for sports or activities, the youngsters go to PC parlors to check mail, play games, or just surf the web, in spite of the fact that they all have computers at home. They usually go there after class and spend the time together like this. University students spend their leisure time with friends their age at cafés, restaurants, movies, and discotheques. They share an out of home like life. The home is reserved for sleeping. Contrary to this life style, Paraguayans favor home based activities. They usually celebrate parties, meetings, barbecues, church gatherings, and any kind of gathering at home. Birthdays parties are always celebrated in the home of the person who has a birthday. That again is an occasion for family gathering. Students normally get together at the home of a member of the group and study together or do homework together since much of the work assigned by teachers is team work.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

This paper has explored comparative aspects of the culture of Korea and Paraguay, and has shown that these two human groups are very different, and yet they share some similar characteristics in many ways. It was stated at the beginning that the study of human culture can help in developing a better understanding and tolerance of other individuals and their societies —within normal parameters— due to the differences that exist. It is important to possess a minimum of cultural sensitivity and open mindedness so as be able to accept other cultures without criticizing or judging them. With this idea in mind several topics have been presented, starting with a background that would somehow explain

or clarify why Koreans and Paraguayans think, act, react and interact the way they do. Following that some important cultural issues of Paraguay and Korea were compared and contrasted. Those issues have to do with what makes Koreans and Paraguayans be the way they are today, after centuries of being shaped by several internal and also external factors.

The topics that were covered in this study are, in order of appearance, *views of time*, which has shown that Koreans are always in a hurry and punctual while Paraguayans are slow and not strict with punctuality. *Personal identity* has revealed that in Paraguay people like to assert themselves whereas Koreans are very modest. Concerning *hierarchy*, this is a Korean way of doing things by age. In Paraguay *individualism* is the way people go through life yet in Korea *collectivism*, or group, is the norm. The *time orientation and view of the future* of both countries are in the opposite side of the continuum —Koreans look toward to the future, Paraguayans stay in the present. In Korea people see work as a sacred thing while in Paraguay it is just a means to support oneself. As far as *relationships* go, *communication* is viewed as essential to both cultures, thus revealing much of what lies deep within the minds of the members of each society. In *verbal communication* Koreans and Paraguayans opt for an indirect style. *Non verbal* aspects of the communication continuum explain the reason why Koreans and Paraguayans react to *personal space* —distant vs. close; *eye contact* — indirect vs. direct; and *touching* —a little vs. a lot. And as a way of conclusion the topic of *family and socializing* has shown that Koreans love family and stay with friends while Paraguayans love friends but stay with family.

It is clear to see there are differences, sometimes differences with a wide gap in between. But as already mentioned before, those differences

can and should be tolerated with the right attitude of mind and heart. In the final analysis, what makes human beings of any particular society acceptable to others is their kindness and willingness to accept others as well, with no distinction. This is indeed not a cultural trait, but a countercultural one.

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❖ ABSTRACT

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CULTURE OF PARAGUAY AND KOREA

Sara Torres

Korea and Paraguay are two very different nations, each with rich culture and traditions. Each has its own history and way of seeing and comprehending reality. If we were to make comparisons of the peoples of these two countries, cultural differences would arise very openly, since here we come face to face with two worlds that function in different ways. As human beings that they are there are many traits that identify both societies, of course, but there is bound to be an enormous amount of cultural aspects that make them interestingly different. Those differences can motivate very easy and quick opinions, such as “They’re so lazy!” or “They don’t know how to enjoy life!”, one group judging the other just by what it is seen and without taking into consideration the numerous factors that shape the mind and actions of the other group and make that particular society be the way it is. It is only within a spirit of cultural empathy that the most striking differences can be accepted and tolerated, when each group tries to put itself in the place of the other and experience life from the other’s perspective.

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### Key Words

cultural differences, cultural perspective, view, frame of reference, cultural empathy, paradigm

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