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국제학석사학위논문

**Research on the Changing Safety Perceptions of
Foreign Students Living in Korea before and
after the 2014 Sewol Incident**

2014년 세월호 사건 이후 외국인 유학생들의
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**Research on the Changing Safety Perceptions of
Foreign Students Living in Korea before and
after the 2014 Sewol Incident**

A thesis presented

by

Alex Michael Sigrist

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master
of International Studies in the subject
of International Area Studies

**Graduate School of International Studies
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August 2015

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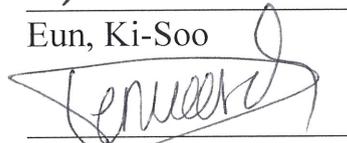
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ABSTRACT

South Korea's recent Hallyu and economic booms have contributed to a large influx of international students flocking to get a taste of Korean culture, and the correlations between pop culture, economic success, and international student numbers have been studied extensively. However, little research on how deterrents can affect the consumer behavior of these students has been conducted. This research investigates the effects of large-scale accidents on international students' perceptions of personal safety in their country of study and how that affects their decision to remain in that country or leave. International students in Korea at various stages of their university career were surveyed and interviewed to determine the effects that the Sewol ferry sinking had on their perceptions of personal safety in Korea and on their intentions to continue living there. This study found that while short term increases of such perceived safety risks occurred immediately after the incident, the fluctuations in perceptions were less pronounced as time went on. The major changes were not in the international students' perceptions of the risks, but rather in their perceptions of the various actors involved – the government, the media, and the general public.

Keywords: study abroad, immigration, perceived risk, personal safety, Korea, Sewol

Student Number: 2012-24111

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 International Students, the Sewol, and Perceptions of Personal Safety

The international student presence in the Republic of Korea (hereby South Korea or Korea) has been a topic of much interest in recent years due to its sudden rise, correlations to a surge in the popularity of Hallyu¹, and the increase in economic opportunities (M. Lee, 2014). From 1995 to 2011, international student enrollment rose from 1,983 students to 89,537, an increase of 4,415%. Due to this success, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology announced plans to raise its target number of international students to 200,000 by 2020. (2012)

The popularity of Hallyu has been given much attention in regards to the rapid rise in international student enrollment, and although other factors have also been considered positive contributing factors (Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2014), a minuscule amount of research can be found on other repulsion factors that play a role in an individual's decision to study (or not to study) in Korea. This paper concentrates on another aspect

¹ *Hallyu* refers to the recent phenomenon of the spread of Korean pop culture to other countries, especially to other countries in East and Southeast Asia.

of the consumer behavior while deciding to study abroad in a foreign country – the perception of personal safety as a factor in risk assessment.

This paper seeks to examine how international students living in Korea had their perceptions of their personal safety altered by the sinking of the Sewol ferry (hereby the Sewol ferry incident or just the Sewol incident). Not only did the incident cause much grief and despair to many people, but it also raised many questions about regulation, government efficiency, corruption, and safety issues in Korea (Power, 2015).

It has been documented multiple times that Koreans have had a shift in awareness and way of thinking about safety as a result of the Sewol incident (Kwon and Lah, 2014). The objective of this study is to determine how much and in what ways, if at all, the perceptions of safety of international students studying in Korea were affected by the incident and by the subsequent reactions of the Korean government, the Korean people, and the Korean media. Through the combined methods of general surveys and interviews conducted with international students who were studying in Korea at the time of the Sewol incident, this paper will attempt to shed light on how much and in what ways, if at all, international students can have their perceptions of personal safety in a foreign country affected by such incidents of accident on such a large scale.

1.2 Sewol Ferry Incident

On the evening of April 15, 2014, the Sewol, a South Korean ferry, embarked en route from Incheon to Jeju Island with 476 people on board (Jang, 2014). Of those passengers, 325 were students from Danwon High School on a field trip. The captain of the ship, Joon-Seok Lee (hereby referred to as Captain Lee), was filling in for the regular captain. Captain Lee had accumulated over 40 years of marine experience and had also travelled on this route from Incheon previously (Villapaz, 2014). However, at the time of the incident, the 26-year-old third-mate Han-gyeol Park (hereby referred to as third-mate Park) was at the helm of the ship, and she had never experienced leading a ship through the particularly treacherous pathway where the incident took place (Choe, 2014).

The ferry transported travellers between Jeju Island and Incheon, but it also served as a cargo vessel. In 2012, even though it was already an 18-year-old vessel, Cheonghaejin Marine purchased it from a Japanese company, and many modifications that affected the center of gravity – and thus stability – of the ship were made. On this trip, the vessel had a cargo load of 3,608 tons, or 3.7 times the allowed capacity (Kwon and Lah, 2014; ‘Greed was Biggest Culprit’, 2015).

In the following paragraphs, a straightforward sequencing of events and listing of facts will be laid out. Further information on various opinions, criticisms, and reactions will be saved for the sections dealing with government, public, and media responses.

On April 15, 2014, around 9:00 PM KST (Korea Standard Time), the Sewol

ferry finally embarked from Incheon on its final voyage after a two and a half hour delay due to heavy fog. It's 3,608 tons of cargo were largely unsecured, and much of the ballast water, which is responsible for helping maintain balance on the ship, was discharged to allow for more cargo to fit on the ferry before it sailed throughout the night towards Jeju Island. The next morning, third-mate Park took over the command of the ship as Captain Lee stepped out for a rest. The ship was heading to an area near Jindo Island that the Chosun Ilbo called "one of the most treacherous waterways in the country" when third-mate Park made a sharp maneuver that likely caused the unsecured cargo to overburden one side of the ship ('Irregularities, Incompetence,' 2014). This initiated the sinking of the vessel just before 9:00 AM KST. Student Duk-ha Choi made the first distress call at 8:52 AM KST after the ship had started to list, and the crew made its distress call three minutes later at 8:55 AM. The crew advised passengers to remain where they were and to put on life jackets. Around 9:30 AM, the boats from the Coast Guard and helicopters arrived, and the Sewol is said to have already tilted to 60 degrees at that point. Around 9:37 AM, the captain claims to have issued the evacuation order, but it is uncertain if the passengers were relayed the message. The captain and his crew were among the first to leave the ship, as the captain called on the first crew to evacuate around 9:46 AM. The rescue process lasted for about another two hours, after which there were no new survivors found. ('Irregularities, Incompetence,' 2014; 'Greed was Biggest Culprit,' 2015; Zhang and Wang, 2015; Kwan and Lah, 2014; 'South Korea Ferry,' 2014)

There were 476 passengers and crew on the Sewol ferry at the time of the accident. Of those, only 174 were rescued, and of the 325 teenage students on the ship, only 75 survived the ordeal. As of the composition of this paper, the official death toll stood at 295 passengers, with nine bodies unaccounted for. ('Irregularities, Incompetence,' 2014; 'Body Found,' 2014; Zhang and Wang, 2015)

1.3 Review of Literature on the Sewol Incident

As an important contrast while analyzing the responses and opinions of the international students in Korea, a brief overview of some of the academic assessments of the incident – and more specifically analyses of the responses of the related actors – is necessitated. Many factors concerning the public, the government, and media were examined in Korean and other academic circles, and a few of those that are deemed most closely related to this research will be covered here.

A common area of concern brought up by Korean academia deals with the general effectiveness of the many areas of society; in other words, systematic failures in Korean society were the perceived problems surrounding the Sewol incident. Korea as a whole was criticized as being unable to cope with many emergencies of a large-scale nature due to the lack of flow of information and assistance between various parts of civil society, which was noted as an important “emergent property” that needed to be improved to safeguard against future disasters or related incidents. To put it in another way, different parts of society had to all work together effectively to prevent

something like the Sewol incident from happening; however, this had clearly not happened, and the losses of the incident would have at least been mitigated if they did work together better. Risk management systems, disaster management systems, the health care system, and the “economy of safety” were mentioned as examples of groups where information and assistance should have flowed smoothly in Korea. As was commonly reported in the media as well, the recommendation was to reconstruct these societal building blocks in a way that would enhance the preventative measures in place, increase emergency response efficiency and allow civil society to play a more active role in protecting the people of Korea. (J. Lee, 2015)

Another area of weakness of Korean society brought up dealt with the correlations of transparency in a society with both altruism and societal participation. An increase in the transparency index of society is significantly correlated with higher levels of altruism and societal participation. The connection between greed and altruism had been discussed widely following the Sewol incident, with those involved from all parts of society being accused of acting selfishly before the incident (regulatory failures and profit-driven greed), during the incident (escaping the ship without helping others), and after the incident (passing on blame and not taking appropriate steps to help families involved). Thus, as a criticism to the current structure of society, some have advocated for more transparency, as well as more active participation from the citizens in society to help prevent future accidents from occurring. (Koo, 2015)

In a comprehensive assessment of the factors that contributed to the Sewol ferry accident and its casualty total, Zhang and Wang divided the causes into six different categories. The first were the unsafe acts of individuals involved, including Captain Lee, third-mate Park, the rest of the crew, and the passengers. The other categories included unsafe conditions, unsafe behaviors, the safety management system, the safety culture, and safety supervision; these categories placed blame on the captain, the crew, the managing company (Cheonghaejin Marine Company), the company administration, and the regulatory agencies. Of those, with the exception of acts of omission of the passengers – not escaping and not properly giving the abandon ship order – the rest involved were accused of committing acts of commission. (2015)

The government, as part of the assessment, also was blamed for mistakes made before the incident. Namely, lax regulations and the lack of adherence to those regulations were listed as shortcomings that contributed to the sinking. These regulatory failures were, and still are, seen as systemic issues that should have been and still should be addressed; both Koreans and foreign sources from the academic sector, news agencies, and other organizations have criticized the government for these failures. (Kwon and Lah, 2014; Zhang and Wang, 2015)

1.4 Theory and Methodology

This paper seeks to use a framework of consumer behavior theory to understand how the Sewol incident affected the mindsets of international students who

were studying in Korea at that time. International students must also consider the risks and rewards of “purchasing” an education abroad, and perceived personal safety – which is considered a risk factor in this “purchase” – will be the focus of this study. By constructing both a survey and semi-structured interview, this research looks to determine in what ways this incident of “possibly” or “accident” altered both the perceptions of personal safety and related behaviors of international students studying in Korea at the time of the Sewol incident.

1.4.1 Consumer Behavior and International Students

To understand what encourages or discourages people to move to and from countries, a large body of work incorporating consumer behavior, fear, rationality, and risk needs to be analyzed. For the purposes of this paper, the focus can be narrowed to better understand how international students in Korea feel about their own personal safety while residing in Korea. Since research into the perceived personal safety of international students remains limited, this section will first briefly analyze perceived risk in general consumer behavior, then shift towards perceived risk in consumer behavior related to tourism, before finally covering research on perceived risk of becoming a victim through accident.

Risk plays a critical role in the decision-making process in consumers when making a purchase choice. However, when assessing consumer choice, it is perceived risk that ultimately affects the final decision. In an early study, perceived risk was

divided into two basic (albeit overly-simplistic) categories: consequences and certainty (Cunningham, 1967). While this analysis of consumer behavior was not scientific in nature, using these two measures as a starting point creates a solid jumping-off platform with which to begin exploration into perceived safety in a foreign country.

While making a decision of whether or not to travel to a foreign country, strong consideration is given to both the risk and reward of such a purchase. This purchase can be viewed as the cost of the whole stay, the time spent on the trip, the opportunity cost, or some combination of the three; thus, we can view the decision to travel, study, or live in another country as a consumer purchase in which the consumer will make a decision that incorporates his or her perceived risk. What are the potential consequences that can arise? What is the level of severity that those consequences bring with them? What is the likelihood that these consequences can arise? What is the likelihood that these consequences will be severe?

The transient nature of the international students requires this paper to focus its background research on studies that analyze the patterns of foreigners going to countries on a less-permanent basis. Studies that apply to the personal safety perceptions of international students in their destination country are very limited; thus, this section will focus on previous research and papers relating to the perceived risks of tourists.

Travel carries with it inherent risks, and those risks have been categorized in previous research. Roehl and Fesenmaier specified some of these risks by dividing them into the following categories: general and recent trip risks. General risks can be

viewed in the lens of risks that are expected on any trip; in contrast, recent trip risks are those risks perceived differently due to experiences on recent travel excursions.

Within those categories, there were further divisions, including equipment, financial, physical, psychological, satisfaction, social, and time (1992). These risks are nearly identical to those international students face. While making decisions on whether or not to study abroad, all of these categories could be factored into the final decision. These risks have been found to affect the decision-making of tourists (Sonmez and Graefe, 1998), and visitation to a destination is negatively correlated to the risk associated with that destination (Sonmez and Apostolopoulos, 1999). This paper will make the assumption that these risks would also affect the decision-making of international students, and the personal interviews were monitored to confirm the validity of this assumption.

Another area of interest in this study is the amount of influence that certain demographic markers can have. Various research projects have divided travellers into separate classifications to determine the differences in risk perception and risk avoidance based on certain demographic measures. The Travel Industry of America polled tourists immediately after the World Trade Center attacks on September 11 and found two unique risk profiles among respondents (2001). The travellers were divided based on their ambivalence to risks or lack thereof, and Floyd and Pennington-Gray expanded upon this by including the perception of risk as the reason for these divisions (2004).

Floyd and Pennington-Gray furthered the discussion by adding that the source

of information varied between these two groups, as well. The first cohort, of whom the participants tended to be younger and more often female, was more likely to use news sources or direct calls to locations to assist in the decision-making process, while the second cohort was more likely to rely on personal judgment. (2004)

By linking these two, an absence or low level of worry can be connected more closely to higher age and the male gender. Older people could feel more secure to travel without certain precautions due to their more diverse and ample experiences – which could be described as “wisdom” – or due to their stressing of importance of experience over possession – including money – as they approach old age. In fact, research reflects this through analyzing differences in pre-purchase happiness levels for experiential purchase and material purchase (Kumar, Killingsworth, and Gilovich, 2014). This paper will focus on a younger group of subjects, as the age of students in general tend to be as such. Thus, finding differences between the two genders – and especially seeking to confirm if male international students in Korea do indeed have less worry about the perceived risk regarding personal safety than female international students do – will be more the focus of this research.

Of additional importance in the Floyd and Pennington-Gray article was the revelation of the top two highly-perceived risks of both cohorts, classified as “risk of possibly and accident” and “risk of being a crime victim” (2004). Both perceived risks were rated highly by both cohorts. The perceptions of safety in Korea must be further explored with these two classifications in mind. South Korea has registered much lower crime rates than countries of similar economic status, which is placed at the

upper-middle-income level. As with many other countries in Asia, South Korea has a particularly low level of violent crime rates when compared to countries of comparable economic stature (Peerenboom, 2013), so the responses of the subjects in this research's surveys and interviews are expected to reflect as such. Many of the respondents may often feel "safe" on a daily basis in Korea due to this low crime rate, so the survey and interviews use some questions to direct them away from this type of safety. Perceived safety in this paper will tend towards areas that would have some relation to safety issues related to the Sewol incident. These areas include, but are not limited to, government response, regulations, and media coverage concerning issues of accident that could potentially affect the personal safety of the respondents.

1.4.2 Research Design

The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how the Sewol Ferry incident impacted the personal safety perceptions of international students living in Korea. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was chosen to offer more opportunity to learn about the changes that occurred as a result of the incident. The first method used was a quantitative approach in which participants were asked to answer certain questions based on a numeric 1-5 scale in order to track any potential changes in perception with numerical values. From this data, this research hoped to ask more poignant questions and understand the reasons for any shifts in perceptions during the interview phase of this research. The interview, or qualitative

phase, used a semi-structured interview approach in order to get the most natural opinions with minimal interference; however, subjects were often encouraged to elaborate or expand to related topics if the researcher deemed it appropriate to the understanding of the international students' perceptions of personal safety in Korea.

This study focused on students who were studying in Korea at the time of the Sewol Ferry incident, which occurred during the first academic semester of the 2014 school year. The age demographics of this group were kept relatively constant, with all of the respondents being international students in their 20s and 30s in Korea, including those who were language students, Bachelors, Masters, and PhD students at the time of the incident. This was kept constant to keep under control the number of variations caused by changing perspectives related to age, professional background, and reasons for coming to and remaining in Korea.

First, survey participants of the targeted demographic (2014 spring-semester students) were found using direct contacts through e-mail, phone, and social networking sites, such as Facebook, and they were not limited to acquaintances of the researcher. Any qualities that would make a participant an exception case – such as one who had children or one of Korean descent – were noted, but did not exclude anyone from the survey.

Six intensive interview participants were selected out of the pool of thirty-eight students who had participated in the general survey. Of the six, a group representing a variety of backgrounds was selected. Two women and four men were selected. The five different nations represented were as follows: the United States (two), Malaysia,

the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Mongolia. Two of the participants, one from the United States and one from Mongolia, have Korean ancestry. All participants were asked in advance if they would consent to being interviewed and to their words being transcribed on paper before they were officially asked to participate in the study, and no one who was asked declined.

CHAPTER II

SEWOL FERRY INCIDENT RESPONSE IN KOREA

The Sewol ferry sinking was a weighty time in both the sentiment of the Korean people and in the reputation of their government. The incident itself made waves internationally as many media outlets around the world covered it and gave their own interpretations of events. As the surveys and interviews for this paper progressed, it became evident that the responses of the government, the public, and the media (both national and international outlets) helped shape the lens through which international students in Korea viewed the overall situation; therefore, it became necessary to include not only the background details of the incident itself, but also the reactions of various players in the public, private, and government spheres.

2.1 Government Response

The government response has been highly criticized for its efforts and reactions regarding the Sewol sinking, with criticism ranging from initial responses to the incident to its present day actions. Initial criticism had been aimed at the delayed, somewhat lethargic nature of the government actions during and immediately after the sinking (Pfanner, 2014). The government rescue efforts were hindered by the lack of

communication between separate, yet related, organizations that were supposed to help with the rescue efforts, highlighting government inefficiency (Nam and Gale, 2014). Another controversial move was the Korean government's rejection of rescue operations help from the United States (no permission granted) and Japan (direct denial) (Ko, 2014; S. Lee, 2014). President Geun-hye Park promised to have the Coast Guard disbanded for its ineffective rescue operations and institutional shortcomings just over a month after the sinking (Liljas, 2014).

Accepting responsibility for the incident is another area in which the Park administration has taken a lot of heat. Public officials were accused of focusing on covering up problems rather than taking responsibility and apologizing ('Irregularities, Incompetence,' 2014). Prime Minister Hong-won Chung submitted his resignation just over a week after the incident, but many viewed it as a move of appeasement in an effort to shift blame away from the current administration (Yoon, 2014). The President herself has been the subject of criticism for the appearance of insincerity during apologies and the possibility of staged photo opportunities during memorial events ('South Korea Ferry Disaster,' 2014).

In its ongoing effort to regain the public's trust, the Korean government recently announced new regulations related to safety inspections in Korea. In May of 2015, the Fair Trade Commission (FTC) laid out the new safety standards that require companies to disclose the results of safety inspections to the public. The types of inspections include not only ferries, but also airplanes, buses, hotels, concert halls, sports stadiums, and other facilities (H. Lee, 2015). Of interesting note is that these

regulations come more than a year after the sinking of the Sewol ferry, and the tardiness confirms or strengthens many of the opinions about the unhurried, ineffective, and possibly corrupt nature of the Korean government when dealing with pressing issues (Elise, 2015; Kim, 2014).

2.2 Mass Media Response

The responses of the mass media varied greatly depending on the source, the source's relationship with the Korean government, and whether or not the source was based in Korea or in an overseas country. While the foreign (in reference to South Korea) media coverage will be examined, it is the Korean media coverage that was most heavily examined and criticized from the outside in the months following the Sewol incident; therefore, a majority of this section will focus on the Korean mass media outlets.

Korean media outlets were plagued from the very beginning by their own missteps. Misinformation, unchecked sources, and poor reporting ethics were apparent in numerous occasions within the first few days of the incident. The first major source of confusion and frustration came from the false claims made by the Gyeonggi-do Province education officials who initially stated that all of the students had been rescued. Media outlets reported these "facts" to Korean audiences, but soon had to backtrack as it became evident that this information was unfounded. ('Irregularities, Incompetence,' 2014; Koleilat, 2014)

The initial unchecked survival account was just one of a litany of blunders that forced many media outlets to issue apologies to the public for their treatment of the disaster. The Joongang Ilbo issued an apology via a full-page segment for its “misleading and provocative” coverage of the events as they unfolded. Their missteps included publishing uncensored photos with the faces of the deceased visible and spreading misinformation. MBN interviewed a self-described private diver who reported that there were survivors trapped in the ferry. This information was not only false, but the person in question was found out to be an imposter, and the station apologized for that mistake. Cable TV station JTBC offered apologies for its inappropriate questions asked to student survivors of the incident, and the newspaper Dong-a Ilbo apologized for violating the Journalists Association of Korea rules on disaster coverage. (Nam, 2014)

As a result of the coverage of the Korean media on the Sewol incident, public trust in the media fell to an all-time low. According to the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, the public trust in the media fell from 4.2 to 3.5 (on a 10 point scale, with 10 being the highest). (Koleilat, 2014; Friedhoff, 2014)

Foreign media, especially in the beginning, often reported mostly what Korean media outlets were reporting. As such, when the misinformation was starting to be discovered, the foreign outlets started covering the Korean media’s poor coverage of the Sewol incident, as well. Some were outright accusatory (Min, 2014), while others took more neutral stances by merely reporting apologies of the misinterpreted facts (Nam, 2014; Koleiat, 2014; Friedhoff, 2014).

2.3 Public Response

The public response to the incident has been one of many different faces. There were unified responses of solidarity with those who had lost family members in the Sewol incident. Some citizens and leaders expressed guilt at not being able to save the students, in the sense that their lack of involvement in the oversight of regulations and of other institutions helped contribute to the circumstances surrounding the incident. It was guilt of societal proportions, one that brought people an uneasy solidarity of admission (Kwon and Lah, 2014).

Many events throughout Korea were cancelled for mourning in light of the incident as a sign of respect. University festivals, concerts, cultural exhibitions and other events were cancelled; more than that, people appeared to restrain themselves from activities of leisure, such as going to the movies and shopping. To make note of the other end of the opinion spectrum, there were those who disagreed with the cessation of events, as it seemingly made the effects of the tragedy worse by economically hurting those uninvolved directly with the sinking. (Weiss, 2014)

There were protests of solidarity with families and those that were against the government and systemic issues at different levels of Korean society. Since the incident, they have continued sporadically and for various lengths of time (Borowiec, 2014; Eleftheriou-Smith, 2015). Even a year after the incident, there are still protests and calls for change. In Seoul in the spring of 2015, 52 members of families directly affected by the loss of kin in the incident had their heads shaved in protest of the handling of the incident. They decried the attempts of financial appeasement of the

government, asking for more truthful dialogue (Mundy, 2015). On the anniversary of the sinking, families prevented South Korea's President Park and Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo from paying their respects to a memorial and cancelled a formal event planned for the evening. The public has generally supported the family in their calls for an independent investigation of the incident ('South Korean President's Vow,' 2015).

The levels of public trust in various institutions also shifted greatly in the months following the tragedy. The Asan Institute for Policy Studies compared these levels ten months before the sinking, right before the incident, two weeks after, and then three months after. The national government, the presidency, the National Assembly, the media, and the military all suffered a significant statistical loss in public trust in the wake of the incident, as can be seen in the following 10-point scale chart taken from the July 2014 press release:

The younger cohorts gave much lower scores in confidence than the older generations. While most institutions had rebounded (though not fully) by July 2014, the trends show a growing distrust in the government and institutions that constitute much of Korean society. (Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2014)

The general public was not without its controversial moments, but they were somewhat isolated incidents that were not indicative of the overall public sentiment. There were many who dispersed fake messages, made false reports, and used other methods to inflate the rumor mill and cause a lot of distress to families and confusion and anger to the general public ('Irregularities, Incompetence,' 2014). At the

Table 1. The Korean public’s changes in trust levels of various Korean agencies

	June 2013	April 15, 2014	April 30, 2014	July 22, 2014
Presidency	6.2	6.0	5.5	5.4
Military	5.8	5.4	5.3	4.7
Civic Groups	4.9	4.7	4.6	4.5
National Government	5.1	4.8	4.1	4.3
Universities	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.8
Labor Unions	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.3
Big Business	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.3
Religious Organizations	4.2	4.0	3.6	3.9
Media	4.2	4.2	3.5	3.9
Judiciary	4.0	3.9	3.4	3.7
National Assembly	3.3	3.1	2.5	2.9

beginning of the Chuseok holiday², members of the online conservative group “Ilbe” counter-protested a hunger strike of the bereaved families of the Sewol incident. During the counter-protest, they threw chocolate bars at those on the hunger strike and ate pizza to mock the families there (Han, 2014). This was not generally supported by the public, but was nonetheless a display of how partisan the incident had become at times.

² *Chuseok* is the Korean holiday celebrating the harvest that typically occurs in September or October of each year. It usually officially lasts for three days, but is often longer when added to the weekends, and most families use this opportunity to gather all the relatives of the extended family together.

2.4 Difficulty in Gauging Foreigner Responses

Much of the reason for needing more personal accounts and surveys of foreigners living in Korea is not only the dearth of research, but also the speech restrictions placed on foreigners in order for them to receive and maintain their visa status. Immigrants in Korea have been restricted from participating in any activities that would influence the politics in Korea, including protests ('Immigration Control Act,' 2005). It was only recently that foreigners who had permission to vote were able to even show support for political candidates (Lee, 2012).

Due to a fear of federal punishment, such as the revoking of a visa status, many voices of foreigners residing in Korea cannot be heard in public places outside of social media. As such, this research offers the unique opportunity to document the opinions of some of the foreigners who were residing in Korea at the time of the Sewol incident. The importance, thus, of this research is not that it merely shares the opinions of international students; the importance is that it shows how such incidents of accident and how the actions of the actors involved can shape the perception of personal safety in their country of residence.

CHAPTER III

SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

3.1 Data Collection and Analyses

This research utilized both a general survey and an in-depth semi-structured interview in order to comprehensively obtain related opinions and information on how foreigners shifted their perspectives on personal safety in Korea. The general survey was sent out first in order to obtain both quantitative data and some general guidance that would help the interviewer design questions more efficient at obtaining the information sought out by this study. English was used as the main language of both the general survey and the interview.

Both the general survey and the in-depth interview obtained some background information on the participants to determine if there were any extenuating circumstances that would cause vastly different responses from the rest of the subjects. In such a case that a potential extenuating circumstance was found, but it did not lead to any outliers in data or unusual responses, it was not mentioned in this paper except for the cases that were specifically studied, such as gender differences.

3.2 General Survey

The general survey focused on perceptions of personal safety in Korea over a time period divided into three temporal categories: before the Sewol incident, immediately after the incident, and the present time. It also sought information from the subjects on perceptions of the government, media, and general public in order to help determine reasons for any changes in those perceptions. Most questions were accompanied by answers, which followed a scale of 1-5, with 1 representing the most negative response (for example, “never,” “not at all”); 5 representing the most positive response (for example, “always,” or “completely”); 3 representing the neutral position; and when appropriate, an option to pass (for example, “don’t know”). Follow-up text or written comments were permitted on each page; however, the focus of the research into reasons and rationales was in the semi-structured interview portion of this study. The questions were distributed online using a survey platform, Survey Monkey, and the questions used for the general survey can be found in Appendix 2.

3.3 Intensive Interviews

After collecting information from the general survey, questions were formulated to create the general skeleton of a semi-structured interview. The questions used were open-ended and encouraged the participants to both analyze the situation as an objective observer as well as reflect on their personal reactions. In this part of the research, the objective was to determine the reasons as to why there were or were not

any changes in the perceptions of personal safety of the international students in Korea. The interviews act as a more detailed illustration of the survey responses to give a better overall appreciation of the answers that were extracted. They also allowed the researcher to learn more thoroughly about the other factors that play a role in personal safety – the government, media, and general public in Korea – and how the subjects reflected on these factors. The questions that were used for the semi-structured interview can be found in Appendix 3.

The interviewer, with the interviewees' consent, transcribed the interviews. The interviewer then asked follow up questions at the end to confirm his understanding of what the interviewees had intended to say. After parting with the interviewee, the interviewer then transferred the notes to a computer and filled in the interview notes gaps to the best of his memory.

Each interview was performed in one sitting. The length of time of the interviews was not considered as a factor needing to be controlled, as the researcher did not want to limit the subjects' personal analyses or self-reflections, nor did the researcher want to extend the time to produce forced answers. The interviews lasted anywhere from 25 minutes to an hour and a half.

After the interviews were all completed, they were compiled together. The interview answers were scoured for patterns that were consistent or inconsistent in the participants' answers and for answers that seemed to confirm or go against the general survey findings.

CHAPTER IV

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW ANALYSES

4.1 General Observations on International Student Responses

The responses to the survey questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews provided a well-rounded picture of foreigners' perceptions of both the Sewol incident and issues concerning their own personal safety perceptions in Korea. They were analyzed separately to search for trends, and the responses in the surveys and interviews were then also compared to help fill in missing explanations that would otherwise be difficult to uncover if they were analyzed in isolation.

4.1.1 Survey Analyses

A total of thirty-eight international students (studying in Korea at the time of the Sewol incident) participated in the surveys. Both written and numerical responses were collected. The numerical responses were listed on a scale of 1 through 5, with 1 indicating the low value; 3 indicated the average, no change, sufficient, or "sometimes" answers; and 5 indicating the high value.

When asked how often they thought about their personal safety in Korea at certain times in relation to the Sewol incident, the responses came back as follows:

Table 2. Frequency of Thoughts on Personal Safety

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Weighted Average
before the Sewol ferry incident?	26.3% 10	39.5% 15	21.5% 8	10.5% 4	2.6% 1	2.24
immediately after the Sewol ferry incident?	5.3% 2	34.2% 13	31.6% 12	21.1% 8	7.9% 3	2.92
currently?	15.8% 6	36.8% 14	26.3% 10	18.4% 7	2.6% 1	2.55

There was a high shift in the frequency that people thought about their personal safety immediately after the Sewol incident, but the large increase seemed to only be temporary. Now, the levels have bounced back down closer to the weighted average of before the incident. Currently, there is still a noticeable change in awareness of personal safety, but not nearly as large the significant shift noticed in perceptions immediately after the incident

When asked how safe they felt (or feel) in certain situations before the incident, immediately after the incident, and currently, the respondents answered as follows:

Table 3. Perception of Personal Safety Level before Sewol Incident

	Not at all	A little	A fair amount	Very	Completely	Weighted Average
riding on public transportation (buses, cars, trains, etc)?	2.6% 1	5.3% 2	21.1% 8	36.8% 14	34.2% 13	3.95
riding on boats/ferries?	5.3% 2	10.5% 4	23.7% 9	42.1% 16	18.4% 7	3.58
being in large buildings?	2.6% 1	5.3% 2	2.6% 1	50.0% 19	39.5% 15	4.18

Table 4. Perception of Personal Safety Level Immediately after Incident

	Not at all	A little	A fair amount	Very	Completely	Weighted Average
on public transportation (buses, cars, trains, etc)?	2.6% 1	13.2% 5	31.6% 12	23.7% 9	26.3% 10	3.59
on boats/ferries?	18.4% 7	36.8% 14	26.3% 10	2.6% 1	15.8% 6	2.61
in large buildings?	2.6% 1	13.2% 5	13.2% 5	44.7% 17	26.3% 10	3.79

Table 5. Perception of Personal Safety Level Currently

	Not at all	A little	A fair amount	Very	Completely	Weighted Average
on public transportation (buses, cars, trains, etc)?	0.0% 0	13.2% 5	26.3% 10	31.6% 12	29.0% 11	3.76
on boats/ferries?	7.9% 3	26.3% 10	34.2% 13	13.2% 5	15.8% 6	3.03
in large buildings?	2.6% 1	7.9% 3	21.1% 8	42.1% 16	26.3% 10	3.82

These numbers again point to a similar trend in the international students' perceptions of safety as was noticed in Table 2. The weighted averages in Table 4 show a large drop compared to Table 3, indicating a decrease in the perception of personal safety in all categories. Also similar was the rebound in Table 5 that points to increased confidence in one's personal safety over time, but not a full recovery from before the Sewol incident.

Twelve comments of significance were written in relation to Tables 3, 4, and 5. More than half of them mentioned either Korea being a generally safe country or the low likelihood of accidents happening in Korea. One person mentioned a trip to Japan that he or she canceled after the incident, because it involved a Ferry from Busan. One person mentioned being more cautious about air vent grates, another mentioned the Lotte Tower as a point of concern, and another mentioned the potential dangers of the subways. One male mentioned that dangers in personal safety related to strangers (such as through "theft") were very low in Korea, while a female mentioned that personal safety related to "harassment" was a source of concern in Korea.

When asked about the responses of the government, the media, and the public concerning the Sewol incident, the respondents answered as follows:

Table 6. Perception of Responses of Various Players to the Sewol Incident

	Poor Response		Sufficient Response		Great Response	Don't know	Weighted Average
Do you think that the Korean government responded appropriately?	63.9% 23	22.2% 8	13.9% 5	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	1.50
Do you think that the Korean media responded appropriately?	41.7% 15	19.4% 7	25.0% 9	8.3% 3	2.8% 1	2.8% 1	2.09
Do you think that the Korean public responded appropriately?	11.1% 4	13.9% 5	41.7% 15	19.4% 7	13.9% 5	0.0% 0	3.11

According to Table 6, foreigners' opinions of the government and media responses were generally negative, with the government's response being the least favorable. The respondents gave only a slightly favorable opinion of the Korean public's response, although the responses were more spread out, which means the negative and positive opinions were somewhat split on the issue of public response appropriateness.

When asked about how the Sewol incident changed their opinions of the government, the media, the public, and how safe one feels on a daily basis in Korea, the respondents answered as follows:

Table 7. Changing Opinions concerning Government, Media, the Public, and Personal Safety in Korea

	Much worsened	Slightly worsened	No change	Slightly improved	Much improved	Weighted Average
the Korean government?	25.0% 9	52.8% 19	19.4% 7	2.8% 1	0.0% 0	2.00
the Korean media?	16.7% 6	33.3% 12	30.6% 11	11.1% 4	5.6% 2	2.54
the Korean public?	5.6% 2	5.6% 2	52.8% 19	25.0% 9	11.1% 4	3.31
how safe you on a daily basis feel living in Korea?	2.8% 1	38.9% 14	52.8% 19	2.8% 1	0.0% 0	2.57

Only opinions about the Korean public improved as a result of the Sewol incident, which is consistent with the tables above, as well. The government’s image suffered the greatest, as has been shown in the previous tables.

When asked how confident they were in the ability of the Korean government to handle a crisis situation, the respondents answered as follows:

Table 8: Confidence in Korean Government to Handle Crisis Situation

	Not at all	A little	A fair amount	A lot	Complete confidence	Don't know	Weighted Average
before the Sewol incident?	5.6% 2	11.1% 4	50.0% 18	11.1% 4	11.1% 4	11.1% 4	3.13
immediately after the Sewol incident?	27.8% 10	47.2% 17	19.4% 7	2.8% 1	2.8% 1	0.0% 0	2.06
currently?	25.0% 9	30.6% 11	38.9% 14	2.8% 1	2.8% 1	0.0% 0	2.28

Table 8 shows the large extent to which the government suffered a crisis of image in the eyes of the international student population in Korea. In the weighted average, there was drop of over one point immediately after the Sewol incident. However, when asked about current opinions, the bounce back was only 0.22, showing a relatively small recovery in the government's image in crisis management, even after more than one year had passed.

Five comments related to Tables 6, 7, and 8 were written out. Four of the comments were critical of the Korean public, with one of those including criticism of the media, and the other was critical of politicians for exploiting the situation. This is in contrast to some of the poll results, but perhaps there are explanations for this. One possible explanation is that the question as stated, which included the phrase, "anything else you would like to add," encouraged some people who gave more critical ratings of the government to speak up and not let the Korean public and media "off the hook."

The final question asked for additional comments concerning how the respondents' perception of the Korean government, media, or people had changed, but the responses were limited. Two participants mentioned how many of the problems associated with this dealt with compressed modernity. Another said that the government needs professional crisis management guidance. Finally, one respondent mentioned that there was not strong presence of the government, the media, or the public in his or her mental periphery, but the Sewol incident caused him or her to

notice their existence and also a solidarity of the media and public against the Korean government.

Overall, there were three significant quantitative takeaways from the survey. First, it is clear that the international students' perceptions of the government changed the most and shifted the most negatively, with the least rebound to the original perceptions (numerically speaking) a year after the incident. Second, there was a bounce back towards the original stances (perceptions of the government, the media, and the public) of the respondents after time had passed. Finally, in relation to personal safety, especially when going back to Tables 2 and 5, foreigners still have an above average perception of safety in Korea with a low frequency of worrying about accidents in transportation and building structures. All of these paint a clear, but not perfectly complete, picture of international student perceptions of personal safety in Korea.

4.1.2 Individual Interview Analyses

Collecting the interviews provided some valuable insights that, even when examined independently of the surveys, shed light on some of the significant impacts (or lack there of) on foreigners' perspectives of the topic of personal safety in Korea. This will allow for the further painting the "whole picture" to help fully comprehend how the Sewol events affected the perceptions of international students in Korea in regard to personal safety. This section will take a look at the interview responses –

independent of the survey responses – and give specific examples to back up certain claims.

The first main point of analysis was the consistency in the respondent's general perception of personal safety in Korea and the reason for it. All of the respondents reported feeling generally safe in Korea. First, all had very little hesitation of coming to Korea. Some, such as participant 1, came without much (if any) experience in Korea or with Korean culture:

I'm not sure I really had many hesitations on coming to Korea. I had never taught before. Maybe I was a bit worried that I wouldn't perform well as a teacher... But other than that, I had no other fears. I figured if others had done it, I could do it, too. There were a lot of Americans that had come to Korea with the same or even less skills than I had, so I thought I could do it, too.

Others who had been here before had a similar attitude of fearlessness or even ambivalence to the issue, such as participant 4, who said about whether she experienced a change in her idea of personal safety in Korea after arriving, “No, not really. The only choice I had was which school I wanted to attend, Seoul National University or UBC (University of British Columbia). The main factor, aside from location, that I was considering was school prestige.”

After arrival, expectations were either confirmed or improved, such as was the case with Participant 6, who said, “The only change that happened once I got here was my fear in North Korea decreased. I realized there was nothing to worry about. There was not a real threat.”

The reason for this ambivalence was similar among all of the respondents, even if not directly stated: the participants felt that their personal safety in Korea was

good, because they used their home countries as reference points, and they each viewed their own country as more dangerous than their circumstances in Korea. Participant 3, from Mongolia, noted, “Korea is one of the countries with strict law and regulations, and it felt like a pretty safe place to live.” Both American participants, 1 and 5, made reference to areas of the United States where they felt unsafe, while adding that those types of “no-go” areas do not exist in Korea.

None of the participants said that their plan of sojourn had changed as a result of the incident, which leads to the next big revelation from the analysis: the fear of the unexpected accident plays a minor role in the decision of an international student to stay in or leave Korea. All of the responses to that question were given without hesitation. Only participant 1 gave an answer of significant length, but he merely expanded on everyone’s general sentiment. He said:

It didn’t change anything. Like I said before, I feel a lot safer here in Korea. I think there’s a higher level of comfort that I have here as compared to how I felt in America with my personal safety. The Sewol was big news, but when we think about the countless boat rides, airplane flights, and other types of travel that happen every day, we know the odds are really low – like 0.001% rate of accidents. It’s a very small number. Also, if something happens once, it’s less likely to happen again. People learn from the mistakes of the past usually. There’s more accountability. There’s more fear and awareness of what went wrong. And if we want a comparison, let’s look at Carnival Cruises. Something goes wrong every other week on one of those boats. I didn’t hear about things going wrong on Korean ferries except for this one time.

The next significant finding was the general increase in dissatisfaction with the government and media after this event. Participant 2 said:

I think it was a pretty poor government response, although that might be an understatement. I’m not sure it’s a fact that what they said were lies; I think it’s more likely that they were just wrong. They even rejected help from the US navy. That seems like a horrible decision.

To be fair, though, nobody knows exactly what happened. However, it did seem poorly organized. Boats were not used. Just a bad overall impression of the government on the issue.

Participant 3 added that she “felt like the response to the incident was very slow and ineffective. The public response was appropriate as they were evidently frustrated and disappointed in the way the government handled the situation.”

There was a little bit of sympathy from some of the interviewers. This softening of stances was often in response to their opinions that the media and public had overblown the situation and exaggerated what the government could or should have done. Participant 6 articulated that sentiment most clearly, saying:

I thought the way they handled it was a little exaggerated. They didn't do very well, but it wasn't that bad. The weather, circumstances, and other factors certainly restricted them.

I think I was most shocked by the media response, and as a result, the public response. I feel like the whole thing started to become just one of those finger-pointing wars in Korea. Everyone just kept saying, “It's not my fault.” Politicians played the game, too. Every actor seemed to have irrational responses. It was used by all players – government, media, and the public – for their own needs. I think the people who died were ultimately forgotten. It was more of a popularity thing.

This comment leads to the final major finding of the interviews, which was the lack of consensus on how the participants viewed the public responses to the incidents.

Participant 5 had sentiments that echoed those of participant 6:

From the public perspective, I think it was very overblown. When there was an outcry from people directly associated with the situation, it was understandable. People feeling for the families and lost ones – that was understandable. The public was more voicing up pent-up emotions not related to the Sewol. I think the exact response would have happened with other serious events. A lot of this frustration had been building up for years, and it finally erupted under the circumstances.

I have a certain level of criticism for the public's response. To me, a lot of it is just mindless complaining. They will keep complaining and do nothing about it. It's all talk, no action. When the election season comes again,

private ideologies reign supreme. They don't back up their protesting. People are very illogical in this way. Sometimes I think they were just protesting for the sake of protesting.

Participants 1, 2 and 4 seemed more uncertain on their own opinions on the public's responses. They all expressed some support or sympathy for the Korean public, but they lamented the lack of any real change resulting from it. In participant 4's words:

[As for the public response], it's nice to see that people are still supporting the victims, but it's kind of dwindling down. It sort of felt like a trend in Korea. They were supportive at first, but after a while, people sort of just said, "ok, it happens." It was impressive in the beginning, but I wish the support had been there more long term. We need that long term support for there to be any legislative change.

Participant 3 expressed the most straightforward support by saying, "The public response was appropriate as they were evidently frustrated and disappointed in the way the government handled the situation."

Individually, these participants offered some unique insights into their own thought processes. Taken in the aggregate, however, the responses from these six participants can be used to gauge general reactions of international students in Korea to the Sewol incident or other similar events that may occur in the future.

4.1.3 Combined Survey and Interview Analyses

The survey and the interview responses both gave insight to international student perceptions of safety in South Korea. The survey gave some statistical analysis into how the international student opinions on personal safety and on the related actors

changed as a result of the Sewol ferry incident. The interview responses added some depth by revealing some of the thought processes of the students when analyzing such situations. A combination and analysis of the two methods can be used for corroboration purposes and for drawing further conclusions based on the intersections – or diversions – of the two sets of answers.

Combined, the responses point to one overarching revelation: from the perspective of the international students, it was not the amount personal safety outlook that changed significantly, but the opinions of the actors involved with one's personal safety that changed the most. Looking over the figures, the opinions of the government were hit the hardest as a result of its handling of the crisis, and that was also reflected in the answers given by the interviewees. Media, in both cases, also took a blow in its reputation, but not quite to the extent of the government. The opinions of the public were somewhat mixed in both the surveys and the interviews. In Table 6, we are able to see a very clear breakdown of this.

Also, taking the relatively small long-term change perception of personal safety in the surveys, notably in the comparison of Table 3 and Table 5, there can be a cross-reference with the interviews that helps explain this finding. When this is done, a consistent picture of how the Sewol incident affected student perspectives can be seen; that is, a very small, if not negligible change in the feelings of personal safety occurred. In this situation, as well as the changing opinions regarding the actors involved, we can see an over-lapping of the two results, offering confirmation and a depth of understanding as to why the results are so.

There were some differences with the responses seen in the surveys and with those of the individual interviews, which could have added to the limitations of this research if the survey and interviews were analyzed in isolation. Initially, doing the surveys first and then modeling the interview questions did create the expectation that surface level answers would be similar. However, if the questions in the survey or the interview stage led the participants too much away from their true thoughts, that could create inconsistencies. For example, statistically speaking, there was a change in how safe the international students felt in recent times as compared to before the Sewol incident. However, during the interviews, the responses were consistent and showed that the incident did not change the day-to-day worries of the students. In fact, with the exception of safety on ferries and in relation in the new Lotte Tower³, almost no change was recorded in the interviews other than general awareness.

However, we are able to cross-reference the interviews with the results of the survey, which shows one of the benefits of using both surveys and interviews. When Tables 3, 4, and 5 are compared to the interview responses, the Lotte Tower fears are corroborated by the increase in fears of being in large buildings uncovered by the surveys. Furthermore, even though Table 6 says that there is an increase concern about personal safety, this can be explained with the interview responses, a few of which mentioned that the awareness of safety issues had been permanently heightened by the Sewol incident. Perhaps the day-to-day concerns did not increase for respondents, but

³ The *Lotte Tower* is a building under construction in Seoul that is set to be the fourth tallest building in the world when completed. However, due to some accidents at the site and sink holes showing up in the area, many people are reminded of the Sewol and the lack of dependable regulation that plagues the reputation of the Korean government.

day-to-day awareness did, causing the differences in found in the survey. By having two methods of collecting data, more opportunities to extract data through comparison can arise, as seen here.

4.2 Comparing Korean Academia Writings to International Student Responses

The reactions, opinions, and responses of the international students shared some similarities and some contrasting ideas with those of the Korean academic community. What was telling about this was in what ways they differed; the similarities were less surprising. Both groups tended to agree that there were issues with efficiencies of the society. There was also agreement in the need for further transparency in the government, as well as some agreement in the importance of civil society taking an active stance in reconstructing society.

However, the differences in how one viewed one's place in society became evident when discussing the optimism or pessimism concerning Korea's ability to change, as well as the general tone of the participants versus the tone of the writers. The foreigners involved showed signs of being apart from society. Responses that showed pessimism in Korean society's ability to change were followed by some feelings of indifference, especially regarding their personal safety concerns and motivations to leave or stay in the country. There never seemed to be the active desire to engage in creating the change that they called for. The academics – perhaps due to their nature or the necessities of producing material for the job – showed more clearly

signs of being “a part” of society. Perhaps this lack of feeling of belonging to society was a cause of the lack of change in perceptions of personal safety in their daily lives in Korea, but more research would need to be conducted to make more definitive conclusions.

4.3 Response Comparisons by Gender

Another interesting finding came from the gender disparity in the perceived types of personal safety that came across in both the interviews and the surveys. The initial hypothesis in gender disparity was more focused on whether men or women would be more worried, and thus affected by incidents of accident; this paper had assumed that men would be less affected because of the societal conditioning can lead men into believing they have more self-control in situations of accident. However, the findings of the surveys and interviews points to where the disparity in perception really lies. In the comments sections of the surveys and in the interviews, men were more likely to mention the incidents of accident. For example, both of the male Americans interviewed spoke more of unprovoked violence, especially when comparing Korean urban areas to the “no-go” zones in the United States. Their focus on personal safety in Korea was more about instances of accident happening, even though that did not translate to worries. The females in this research seemed to note safety issues more related to those of general harassment by men; this personal safety perspective is less focused on issues of accident, but more on issues of aggression from other people (in

this case, male on female aggression). Not enough conclusive theories can be produced from this research, but it can lead to a jumping point for more research in the future on what constitutes personal safety concerns for different demographics while living or studying in foreign environments.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The reasons for studying in a foreign country have been researched before, and many reasons to study abroad have been presented. Specifically referring to Korea, the increased opportunities economically and the Hallyu effect have both surely played a role in attracting students. However, when it comes to reasons for avoidance of a certain region, less is known in the academic field. Thus, this study looked into consumer behavior and risk assessment, and then applied that to travel research and study abroad motivations to determine the effects of accident and chance on demotivating factors keeping people from studying at a particular destination. It looked specifically about how the Sewol incident affected the mindsets and perceptions of personal safety of international students who were studying in Korea at that time. The Sewol incident had a very profound effect not only on the Korean population living in Korea, but also created a lasting impact on the foreigners in Korea at the time of the incident

Through the use of surveys and interviews, it was found that the threats of random chance do not create a significant change in the long-term mindsets or plans of

those international students. In fact, the larger changes came in how the international students viewed the actors who played a part in their personal safety. More than the incident itself, the poor responses about both the media and the government seem to have had the most lasting effects on their opinions. International students also generally agreed with the academic community in Korea that called for societal improvements on the systematic failures experienced throughout the process, but there was still a noticeable disconnect, or lack of attachment, to Korean society as a whole. Gender did play a role in how respondents viewed personal safety in Korea, but the overall impact of the Sewol incident was similar across genders.

The implications of this research are not groundbreaking, but they can add to the body of research in tourism, study abroad, and risk assessment dealing with incidences of chance. One outcome is that expatriates who have experience in a country will likely have their decision-making concerning sojourn in said country less affected than someone who may not have the experience of living there. Another is the possibility that how “included” or attracted to the society an expatriate feels can affect the way they deal with issues concerning personal safety. Furthermore, the way international students’ perceptions of a government change seems to have more to do with the government’s responses to the incidents rather than the accident itself. Finally, especially in this particular case, an underlying distrust in the government by the people and a constant systemic problem of regulation and accountability at all levels of society can lead not only to an excessive protest from citizens, but an excessive amount of criticism from outsiders, such as those who were interviewed for this research.

5.2 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The limitations of this prevent any sweeping generalizations about how international students' opinions on personality safety in Korea have changed as a result of the Sewol incident. The survey was largely limited due to the narrow demographics of the applicant pool. On one hand, the applicant pool size did allow for the collection of results that could be compared for consistency from one person to the next; however, the results can only be attributed to a small student contingent of the foreigner population in Korea. As such, further research addressing other segments of foreigners residing in Korea would be appropriate.

In addition to incorporating more segments of the foreigner population in Korea, comparative studies analyzing differences in foreigner reactions to sudden accidents would increase the breadth of understanding of how these events affect the psyche of foreigners. The number of students analyzed in this study limited the possibilities of expanding into certain demographic comparisons, such as those based on gender, academic level, nationality, ethnicity, and more. More focused studies could take on those demographic differences individually and could potentially produce some significant findings.

Going beyond those living in their respective foreign countries when tragedy strikes, those who are considering traveling to or living in those countries would also be able to provide valuable insights. By looking at how people who have no first hand experience inside a particular country react to news of such large scale accidents, the size of the impact of direct experience in a country on a person's perception of safety

can be assessed. With the collection of a wide range of research analyses, a deeper understanding of how accidents affect travel and sojourn plans at the macro level can then be determined to help predict future trends and help countries to learn better ways to deal with reactions of such tragedies when they occur.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. Recruitment Consent

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Alex Sigrist, and I am a Masters degree candidate from the Seoul National University Graduate School of International Studies. I have prepared an anonymous survey concerning changes in foreigners' perspectives on safety in Korea as a result of the April 2014 Sewol incident. To participate, you must have been a student in Korea at the time of the incident. The survey is voluntary. By clicking, "next" at the bottom of the page, you agree to participate in this survey.

This is an anonymous survey, so please do not put your name anywhere on this survey.

All individual answers will remain confidential.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Please answer the questions to your comfort level.

The results will be reported in Masters thesis that will be finished in the summer of 2015. Please answer at your earliest convenience.

If you would like to receive a copy of the final work - or just the statistical results of this survey - please send a message to Alex*****@****.com.

If you would like to participate in a one-on-one confidential interview after completing this survey, please send a message to the above e-mail address.

If you have any questions about this, please ask through e-mail, as well.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alex Sigrist

By clicking "next," you agree to participate in this study.

APPENDIX 2. GENERAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

Page 1. Recruitment Consent

Recruitment consent

Page 2. Background Information

1. Background information

- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- Are you of Korean descent?
- Are you of Asian descent?
- How long have you lived in Korea?
- Academic status in April 2014? (Exchange, Bachelors, Masters, PhD, etc.)
- Did you have children as of April 2014?

Page 3. Perceptions of Personal Safety in South Korea

2. How often did (do) you think about your personal safety in Korea

- before the Sewol incident?
- immediately after the Sewol incident?
- currently?

(1) Never

(2) Rarely

(3) Sometimes

(4) Often

(5) Always

3. Before the Sewol incident, how safe would you feel (do you feel) about _____

- riding on public transportation?
- riding on boats/ferries?
- being in large buildings?

(1) Not at all

(2) A little

(3) A fair amount

(4) Very

(5) Completely

() Not sure

4. Immediately after the Sewol incident, how safe would you feel (did you feel) about being _____

- on public transportation (buses, trains, etc.)?
- on boats/ferries?
- in large buildings?

(1) Not at all

(2) A little

(3) A fair amount

(4) Very

(5) Completely

() Not sure

5. Currently in Korea, how safe would you feel _____

- on public transportation (buses, trains, etc.)?
- on boats/ferries?
- in large buildings?

(1) Not at all

(2) A little

(3) A fair amount

(4) Very

(5) Completely

() Not sure

Is there anything else you would like to add in this section concerning your perceptions of personal safety? (Free response)

Page 4. Government, Media, and Public Responses

6. Concerning the Sewol incident:

- Do you think that the Korean government responded appropriately?
- Do you think that the Korean media responded appropriately?
- Do you think that the Korean public responded appropriately?

(1) Poor Response

(2)

(3) Sufficient Response

(4)

(5) Great Response

() Don't know

7. How did this change your opinion of:

- the Korean government?
- the Korean media?
- the Korean public?
- how safe you feel on a daily basis living in Korea?

(1) Much worsened

(2) Slightly worsened

(3) No change

(4) Slightly improved

(5) Much improved

() Don't know

8. How confident were (are) you in the ability of the Korean government to handle a crisis situation _____

- before the Sewol incident?
- immediately after the Sewol incident?
- currently?

(1) Not at all

(2) A little

(3) A fair amount

(4) A lot

(5) Complete confidence

Don't know

Is there anything else you would like to add in this section concerning the government, media, or public of South Korea?

Page 5. Final Comments

9. Is there anything else you would like to add concerning the Sewol incident that would make you an “exceptional” case?

No

I know someone directly involved in the incident

I know someone who was affected by the incident

Other (please specify) _____

10. Do you have any more comments about how your perception of the Korean government, media or public has changed?

APPENDIX 3. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Background information:

- Nationality
- Age
- Education level to date
- Academic status at the time of the Sewol incident
- Length of stay in Korea
- Married? With kids?

Questions:

- What drew you to Korea?
- What hesitations did you have beforehand?
- What was your perception of your own personal safety in Korea before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of your own personal safety in Korea before you came to Korea for the first time?
- What was your perception of Korea's safety record before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of Korea's safety record before you came to Korea for the first time?
- In what ways did your opinions about safety in Korea, either personal or on the national level, change as a result of the Sewol incident?
- How do you feel about the government response to the incident? What about the public response?

- How did the incident affect your thoughts on your own plans of sojourn in Korea?
- How confident would you be that the government could effectively handle a crisis situation?
- Anything else that you want to add that you feel like you were not able to express?

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEWS

This appendix contains the interviews of all the participants who agreed to take part in the full interview portion of this research. The method used was a semi-structured interview, with the guiding focus of the interview being the perception of safety in Korea. The interviewees did not seem to have much of a change in their perception of personal safety, but their opinions of the groups directly related to the Sewol incident (the Korean government, media, and populace) were heavily affected; thus, as the interviews progressed, questions for probing into these perceptions were used.

PARTICIPANT 1: BACKGROUND

Participant 1 is a 29-year-old United States male who has been living in Korea on and off for a total of four years. The interview was held outside at a café around 3 PM on Saturday, May 9, 2015. While there was no time limitation, the interview only lasted 20 minutes, and the participant agreed to have his answers transcribed. After the interview was completed, the interviewer asked some questions for clarification that were not included in this transcript. The answers were reconstructed to the best of the interviewer's memory immediately after the subject left. There were no problems during the interview.

PARTICIPANT 1: INTERVIEW

What drew you to Korea?

I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life before Korea. I wasn't quite ready to settle down, so I thought I'd just come to Korea and just teach. I had been wavering between that a grad school before I made my final decision to come here. I thought to myself, "Why not travel, have an adventure?" So, that's what I did.

What hesitations did you have beforehand?

I'm not sure I really had many hesitations on coming to Korea. I had never taught before. Maybe I was a bit worried that I wouldn't perform well as a teacher. Maybe they'd see me as some sort of fraud. But other than that, I had no other fears. I figured if others had done it, I could do it, too. There were a

lot of Americans that had come to Korea with the same or even less skills than I had, so I thought I could do it, too.

I guess if there were one concern I had (though I don't know if I would call it a fear), it would be that I might not easily be able to meet people here in Korea.

I was a little worried that I would have a poor network of friends.

What was your perception of your own personal safety in Korea before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of your own personal safety in Korea before you came to Korea for the first time?

I think I've always felt safer in Korean than compared to when I was living in the US. In the US, I didn't necessarily feel safe all the time. Even in college, I felt worried sometimes, because I had been living next to the ghetto in my university city. There were thefts, rapes, murders... we heard about these things all the time, so you always had to have a sense of caution when you were heading out on the town.

When you were going out at night, even if you were just going out for a walk, you would usually be out with a friend. You wouldn't go alone. Some areas were definitely a "no-go" zone.

When comparing it to how I expected it to be... I guess I would say I felt even safer when I arrived. But, at the same time, I knew it was supposed to be safe. I had done a lot of research online. I would just do a quick search if I was worried about something. Plus, the recruiter that we used had a lot of useful information online. I felt pretty confident that I would be fine in Korea before

I came, and after arriving here, my predictions were confirmed. It was no big deal to head out somewhere at night, even if that place was a secluded area. What was your perception of Korea's safety record before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of Korea's safety record before you came to Korea for the first time?

I don't know. I guess I just figured it was a lot like anywhere else. The difference was, with Korea, I felt no concern for my health. I didn't feel like anything threatened me personally.

Of course, I knew about areas where Korea had some work to do. Definitely, the driving laws are much more relaxed here. The taxis can be kind of erratic. But even considering that, I never actually feared injury or dying. I just knew about the issue, but I always felt safe.

Part of the reason may be the fact that I didn't know any Korean. I couldn't really watch any of the news. I was sort of ignorant to what was going on in the world around me – at least in Korea. Unless you would actually drive past an accident, you would be pretty unlikely to hear about it. I guess it's "out of sight, out of mind." I didn't experience it. I didn't hear about it. The fear didn't exist for me.

As for South Korea [and how I saw it] before I arrived here, I really didn't know much about it. I had no idea of their safety record. I knew North Korea was there, but it held more of an excitement factor for me. It never really felt like an actual threat, but it was cool to be near the action.

Even the North Korea threat was barely on the radar. The threat is militaristic, not some asymmetric warfare. I always figured if there were an armed conflict on the peninsula, there would be enough time to leave. It would be a military invasion, and even if it was a surprise attack, I always thought I'd have enough time to get out of here.

It's not necessarily like the Middle East. There, the attacks seem to be more random. In a sense, I wouldn't be able to control my likelihood of survival. It would just happen – a bombing, a kidnapping, or whatever else.

In what ways did your opinions about safety in Korea, either personal or on the national level, change as a result of the Sewol incident?

You never really worry about something happening until it happens. When something bad happens, you start to think about the possibility of it happening to you.

I always knew the safety regulations in Korea were not really up to par with other developed countries. However, I think of Koreans as more meticulous than other people. Maybe, “more orderly” is a better phrase. So when we found out that the ship sank because of being overloaded with too much cargo...that was something that changed my opinion. It was definitely something that I didn't expect. I think that sort of changed my opinion about Korean people a little bit.

How do you feel about the government response to the incident? What about the public response?

I was absolutely shocked. I mean, really? How close to land the ship was and how slow it sank...how could so few lives be saved? That just doesn't make sense to me.

When we were watching the news, I just didn't understand what [the coast guard was] doing. They were just waiting around, standing idly by, as these young kids were going down with the ship. I don't understand what they were doing.

Where do you think the blame lies?

I think it's a little bit the government, a little bit the system, and a little bit the individual. I guess a little bit of everything.

When we're growing up in America, we are taught to act when someone needs help. In Asia, people walk by other people who need help all the time. I don't understand what was going through their minds. Why didn't the coast guard respond better and more quickly?

And the men... the captain and the crew, wow! I can't think of anything more shameful [than how they reacted]. There's a 50-year-old [the captain] on board, and he just left the ship while there were children still remaining? I don't care even if it wasn't his fault; you think they would put their lives in some danger to try and save the children.

What was your opinion about the public response?

The Korean people? I'm not really sure how they viewed [the situation]. I can't imagine how the parents of the victims felt. I respected the fact that they

mourned for the situation for so long, but they should have had a real call for action. We needed changed, and we didn't get any. "Remember! Remember! Remember! We will never forget!" Ok, that's great, but now how are we going to make sure that kids are safe in the future? I don't think anything really changed.

I had a lot more to say on this topic a year ago, but I guess I kind of forgot some of those things over time.

How did the incident affect your thoughts on your own plans of sojourn in Korea?

It didn't change anything. Like I said before, I feel a lot safer here in Korea. I think there's a higher level of comfort that I have here as compared to how I felt in America with my personal safety. The Sewol was big news, but when we think about the countless boat rides, airplane flights, and other types of travel that happen every day, we know the odds are really low – like 0.001% rate of accidents. It's a very small number.

Also, if something happens once, it's less likely to happen again. People learn from the mistakes of the past usually. There's more accountability. There's more fear and awareness of what went wrong.

And if we want a comparison, let's look at Carnival Cruises. Something goes wrong every other week on one of those boats. I didn't hear about things going wrong on Korean ferries except for this one time.

The main thing it affected wasn't really about my plans to stay in Korea, but it did open my eyes a little to how society runs. Koreans were always taught to

obey, but I didn't really experience and understand that until now. I think those children should have just said, "forget it. I'm out. I'm leaving this ship," rather than listening to their elders.

How confident would you feel that the government could effectively handle a crisis situation?

I guess because there's a lack of crime here...the more that goes wrong, the better you become at dealing with the problem in the future. The knowledge sort of builds on itself.

I see a lot of ambulances coming down the road, and people don't move their cars. They're just not used to getting out of the way. That kind of scares me. Maybe that would be the reason I wouldn't trust them to help me in a new crisis situation.

Anything else that you want to add that you feel like you were not able to express?

No, not at this moment.

PARTICIPANT 2: BACKGROUND

Participant 2 is a 26-year-old Swiss male who has been living in Korea on and off for a total of four years. The interview was held at a student lounge around 7 PM on Sunday, May 10, 2015. While there was no time limitation, the interview lasted about 40 minutes, and the participant agreed to have his answers transcribed. After the interview was completed, the interviewer asked some questions for clarification that were not included in this transcript. There are parts of the interview that were left out,

either to help conceal the identity of the interviewee or the interviewer found them irrelevant to the research at hand. The answers were reconstructed to the best of the interviewer's memory immediately after the subject left. There were no problems during the interview.

PARTICIPANT 2: INTERVIEW

What drew you to Korea?

I was an undergrad when I decided that I wanted to spend at least one semester in a major Asian city. I thought about a lot of places. Hong Kong was interesting, but I wanted a place that didn't have a large English-speaking population. Taiwan was too small. Not Japan. So I ended up applying to Beijing and SNU (Seoul National Univeristy) for a business exchange program. I wound up at SNU, and through that I actually became interested in change management at South Korean chaebols (large, often family-owned conglomerates). After that, I went back to get my Masters degree in Switzerland in banking and finance.

My girlfriend graduated from SNU, and I knew it had fantastic brand recognition in Korea – perhaps not so much in Europe. She wanted to start a career here and work for at least two years in business, and I wanted to be with her, so I applied to SNU.

What hesitations did you have beforehand?

Well, studying in Korea might have been utterly worthless for me. To be honest, I don't know if it's really beneficial for someone with a Masters degree from a prestigious university in Germany to continue to get a different Masters degree in Korea.

I had wanted to be near my girlfriend for the next two years, so I also considered three universities in China. I figured it was close enough, and I could visit her pretty easily. However, when I looked closer into those programs, I realized how tightly controlled they were by the Communist Party. You needed about 25 signatures from party officials just to get permission for your research proposal. Basically, the whole environment was anti-academic. So, I came to SNU.

What was your perception of your own personal safety in Korea before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of your own personal safety in Korea before you came to Korea for the first time?

Oh, it was excellent. Maybe because I'm a tall white man, I always felt a certain level of safety here. The infrastructure is pretty good, as well. Compared to before I came, I am surprised at how good it is. I didn't expect a world-class infrastructure here; I expected decent for a "not as developed" country, but I was proven wrong.

The taxis, though... maybe in the cabs, I don't feel that safe. But other than that...

What was your perception of Korea's safety record before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of Korea's safety record before you came to Korea for the first time?

*Skipped because answered above

In what ways did your opinions about safety in Korea, either personal or on the national level, change as a result of the Sewol incident?

I think the only thing that changed is I became more aware of the issues.

Before, I didn't really pay attention too much to issues of safety; however, now when conversations about the Lotte tower and sink holes come up, I get involved. I wouldn't have been involved in those conversations before.

I probably would not have listened to the captain if I felt threatened. I was surprised generally by how willing Koreans were to just follow orders. They were told to "inflate their life vests"! How couldn't they think that it's a bad idea? You don't inflate your life vests when you're still inside a vessel. I feel like there would have been fewer casualties in Western countries.

On the other side, though, Korea is a country of trends. A little bit after that, there was an issue with a subway train that had stopped on the tracks. They were told to stay put and remain calm, but everyone seemed to remember the Sewol and didn't listen to the conductor, which was the wrong thing to do in that situation. I guess that's just more proof of a culture involved in group think, sometimes.

How do you feel about the government response to the incident? What about the public response?

I think it was a pretty poor government response, although that might be an understatement. I'm not sure it's a fact that what they said were lies; I think it's more likely that they were just wrong. They even rejected help from the US navy. That seems like a horrible decision.

To be fair, though, nobody knows exactly what happened. However, it did seem poorly organized. Boats were not used. Just a bad overall impression of the government on the issue.

I definitely think the public response was good. I think more should be done. The story was huge, and then it was forgotten, only to resurface again around the time of the one-year anniversary of the event.

The people did seem to be somewhat divided, though. There were some people who were even picking on the families of the victims. They could, in a sense, sit back while other people say that the families are just politicizing the issues, when really all they wanted was change – the families didn't even accept the government reparations when they were offered them. It shows that it's very easy for the government to get away with their mistakes.

Globally, when people look at this incident – anyone who really knows anything about maritime safety and rescue – probably cannot believe the government's reaction to this event. Looking at all the technology Korea has, it just doesn't make sense.

How did the incident affect your thoughts on your own plans of sojourn in Korea?

Not at all

How confident would you be that the government could effectively handle a crisis situation?

Less confident, but it depends on the size and the scale. The next think that happens could be anything. The Lotte Tower? What about the incident where people were jailed for selling fake spare parts to nuclear power plants? If the government can't event take care of a ferry, what can it take care of?

Anything else that you want to add that you feel like you were not able to express?

They should really take advantage of the US alliance.

PARTICIPANT 3: BACKGROUND

Participant 3 is a 25-year-old Mongolian female who has been living in Korea on and off for a total of four years. The interviewee requested not to be interviewed in person, but rather to respond via e-mail. She was chosen in order to garner a unique perspective – that of another Asian nationality, but with Korean ancestry. While there was no length limitation, the interviewee wrote only short responses. After the interview was completed, the interviewer followed up with some questions for clarification that were not included in this transcript. The curt nature of the responses does not take away from their validity and significance.

PARTICIPANT 3: INTERVIEW

What drew you to Korea?

Always have been fascinated by the culture and language.

What hesitations did you have beforehand?

Language barrier and housing issues.

What was your perception of your own personal safety in Korea before the Sewol incident?

Korea is one of the countries with strict law and regulations and it felt like a pretty safe place to live.

How did it compare to your expectations of Korea's safety record before you came to Korea for the first time?

It was almost better than I expected as it seemed like they took safety issues very seriously.

In what ways did your opinions about safety in Korea, either personal or on the national level, change as a result of the Sewol incident?

The Sewol incident changed my opinion about safety in Korea in the sense that it put doubt in my mind about Korea's capability to handle crisis and emergency situations.

How do you feel about the government response to the incident? What about the public response?

I felt like the response to the incident was very slow and ineffective. The public response was appropriate as they were evidently frustrated and disappointed in the way the government handled the situation.

How did the incident affect your thoughts on your plans of sojourn in Korea?

It has not greatly affected my plans of sojourn here but it has made me rethink about the existing safety issues here.

How confident would you be that the government could effectively handle a crisis situation?

Based on the way the government has handled the Sewol incident, there is now a certain level of doubt on whether the government could effectively handle such a situation.

PARTICIPANT 4: BACKGROUND

Participant 4 is a 25-year-old Malaysian female who has been living in Korea for the past two years as an international graduate student. The interview was held inside her graduate school building around 3 PM on Tuesday, May 26, 2015. While there was no time limitation, the interview lasted about 40 minutes, and the participant agreed to have her answers transcribed. After the interview was completed, the interviewer asked some questions for clarification that were not included in this transcript. There are parts of the interview that were left out, either to help conceal the identity of the interviewee or the interviewer found them irrelevant to the research at

hand. The answers were reconstructed to the best of the interviewer's memory immediately after the leaving subject. There were no problems during the interview.

PARTICIPANT 4: INTERVIEW

What drew you to Korea?

My professor wanted me to come to [South] Korea to study here. He thought it would be important for me to write about thesis while living here in this country.

What hesitations did you have beforehand?

No, not really. The only choice I had was which school I wanted to attend, Seoul National University or UBC (University of British Columbia). The main factor, aside from location, that I was considering was school prestige.

What was your perception of your own personal safety in Korea before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of your own personal safety in Korea before you came to Korea for the first time?

Well, at least it was relatively safer than Malaysia. Things just go fine here. There are just technical problems here and there. I don't worry too much about problems like that. If it happens, it happens. In Malaysia, I was trapped in an elevator for quite a while. I've never really thought about safety too much here (in Korea).

What was your perception of Korea's safety record before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of Korea's safety record before you came to Korea for the first time?

I don't know, I never really thought too much about it. It's just relatively safer than Malaysia, I guess.

In what ways did your opinions about safety in Korea, either personal or on the national level, change as a result of the Sewol incident?

I don't think it should really change. Accidents happen. That's just the way it is. It kind of reminds me of Malaysia. Safety just doesn't seem to be much of a priority. I guess I don't want to get on a ship now in Korea, but I've always been skeptical of [the safety of] ferries. Maybe it's just my opinions coming from a developing country. It [a large scale accident] is not bound to happen, but it could.

How do you feel about the government response to the incident? What about the public response?

I wish the government had responded faster and more efficiently. It should be much quicker and more reliable than it was. It's very frustrating.

Post-incident...I could imagine this happening in Malaysia. I tried to see this from the perspective of the president. I try to sympathize with her a bit.

Perhaps not much could have been done.

[As for the public response], it's nice to see that people are still supporting the victims, but it's kind of dwindling down. It sort of felt like a trend in Korea.

They were supportive at first, but after a while, people sort of just said, “ok, it happens.” It was impressive in the beginning, but I wish the support had been there more long term. We need that long term support for there to be any legislative change.

How did the incident affect your thoughts on your own plans of sojourn in Korea?

I don't think so. I think it's because I don't think about my safety too often and I feel relatively safe.

How confident would you be that the government could effectively handle a crisis situation?

That's a tough question. I'm not “not confident” in the government. I don't know if they'll be ready when it's really needed. There seems to be more damage control than preventative control. Not sure if that's really going to change. I guess I'm pretty skeptical about it.

Anything else that you want to add that you feel like you were not able to express?

No, I don't think so.

PARTICIPANT 5: BACKGROUND

Participant 5 is a 27-year-old United States male of Korean ancestry who has been living in Korea for the past two years as an international graduate student. The interview was held inside his graduate school building around 8 PM on Tuesday, May 26, 2015. While there was no time limitation, the interview lasted about 45 minutes, and the participant agreed to have his answers transcribed. After the interview was

completed, the interviewer asked some questions for clarification that were not included in this transcript. There are parts of the interview that were left out, either to help conceal the identity of the interviewee or the interviewer found them irrelevant to the research at hand. The answers were reconstructed to the best of the interviewer's memory the day after interviewing the subject. There were no problems during the interview.

PARTICIPANT 5: INTERVIEW

What drew you to Korea?

That's complicated. I didn't necessarily come to study. Some people do, but I came because I wanted to experience Korea, and I thought I wouldn't get another chance. I've been on vacations to Korea before, but it's not the same as actually living in Korea.

What hesitations did you have beforehand?

None

What was your perception of your own personal safety in Korea before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of your own personal safety in Korea before you came to Korea for the first time?

It's extremely safe – as safe as can be. I lived in Oakland for six years, so (safety) was nothing (to be worried about). There wasn't really a change when I came here from my previous perceptions.

What was your perception of Korea's safety record before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of Korea's safety record before you came to Korea for the first time?

Well, I guess this is pretty complicated, too. A lot of people were worried about the North Korea missile threats. Some of my friends went to Hong Kong or Busan (alternatively "Pusan"). North Korea didn't really faze me. The Sewol event didn't really faze me, either. My life didn't change as a result of it. I never got mugged or cat-called. I didn't feel afraid on the streets.

In what ways did your opinions about safety in Korea, either personal or on the national level, change as a result of the Sewol incident?

Not much at all. My personal opinion about other people's opinions changed. I think the negativity was vastly overstated. It seems that the smallest incidents are given a disproportionate amount of coverage, such as the concert-grating incident (footnote needed) where about ten people died. In the grand scheme of things, it really wasn't that big a deal (footnote: when asked to elaborate, he clarified, "the number of people who died is small compared to many other causes of death"). The Sewol was a manmade disaster – these things happen. I certainly became more aware of other people's concerns about safety, but mine did not change.

How do you feel about the government response to the incident? What about the public response?

The government was clearly responsible for the crisis to begin with. There were lots of problems with a lack of regulation, so they definitely bear responsibility. They also did a terrible job of dealing with the media and with public responses. The families were forced into a gymnasium, and they tried to protest, plain-clothed cops were placed among them to keep an eye on them. The government really didn't care about the incident. It was more about covering its own reputation than dealing with the incident.

From the public perspective, I think it was very overblown. When there was an outcry from people directly associated with the situation, it was understandable. People feeling for the families and lost ones – that was understandable. The public was more voicing up pent-up emotions not related to the Sewol. I think the exact response would have happened with other serious events. A lot of this frustration had been building up for years, and it finally erupted under the circumstances.

I have a certain level of criticism for the public's response. To me, a lot of it is just mindless complaining. They will keep complaining and do nothing about it. It's all talk, no action. When the election season comes again, private ideologies reign supreme. They don't back up their protesting. People are very illogical in this way. Sometimes I think they were just protesting for the sake of protesting.

How did the incident affect your thoughts on your own plans of sojourn in Korea?

It didn't.

How confident would you be that the government could effectively handle a crisis situation?

The public relations effort will be the same – they will mess it up, again.

I think the government will definitely be on edge from now on, so they have to be a little better in how they handle a crisis. Maybe not much better, though.

The problem is structural – this isn't only limited to crisis response.

Government regulation, in general, is a problem. But at the very least, the government is on edge, so they will act quicker.

Maybe they won't be as prideful, next time. They might accept help from the Japanese or other countries. They refused to let foreign countries help them, but then they made the excuse that they lacked manpower.

Anything else that you want to add that you feel like you were not able to express?

Yes. It's not related to public safety but more related to the interaction between the government and its people. People feel disconnected from the government – they have an us-versus-them mentality. But in my opinion, the government is the people. South Korea has free elections, so the government does represent the people. People cannot separate themselves from the failure of the government.

Trying to answer the question “how can the government get better?” is the wrong way to look at it. The problem is more fundamental. The real question is “what can change about Korean society that will make the government better?” If people really cared, they would make sure that things changed.

People just deal with the problem in their own way, then move on pretty quickly. They do not change as quickly as they should.

That being said, South Korea is still a very safe place to live. They fixed the subways with those barriers, so there are less subway deaths. I mean the leading cause of death among young people is suicide. That's a horrible thing, but that says something about the likelihood of dying from other causes.

Let's look at Japan. In Japan, the stabbing incident in the subway was overblown as well. I don't mean to disrespect those who died and those affected, but minor things are blown way out of proportion because they are more shocking. There are several homicides per week in Oakland – they just don't get reported as much. In countries like Korea, there's just less to worry about. I was mugged twice in Oakland, one by gunpoint. In Korea, there are no guns.

PARTICIPANT 6: BACKGROUND

Participant 6 is a 27-year-old Dutch male who has been living in Korea on and off for about three and a half years. He is currently a graduate student. The interview was held inside his graduate school building around 9 PM on Tuesday, May 26, 2015. While there was no time limitation, the interview lasted about 30 minutes, and the participant agreed to have his answers transcribed. After the interview was completed, the interviewer asked some questions for clarification that were not included in this transcript. There are parts of the interview that were left out, either to help conceal the

identity of the interviewee or the interviewer found them irrelevant to the research at hand. The answers were reconstructed to the best of the interviewer's memory the day after interviewing the subject. There were no problems during the interview.

PARTICIPANT 6: INTERVIEW

What drew you to Korea?

Studying. I wanted to study about the history of Korea and other things related to Korea.

What hesitations did you have beforehand?

Maybe there were some, but not really. The North Korea and South Korea tensions, I guess. Maybe language. It was all pretty limited. I saw it more as an adventure. There were worries, but I might as well overcome them as part of the adventure.

What was your perception of your own personal safety in Korea before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of your own personal safety in Korea before you came to Korea for the first time?

Pretty good, actually. It was considered to be a pretty safe country. Perception of safety is a little different for me, because I was more worried about being mugged or pickpocketed. As always there was the North Korea threat, but that only skimmed across my mind once in a while.

The only change that happened once I got here was my fear in North Korea decreased. I realized there was nothing to worry about. There was not a real threat.

What was your perception of Korea's safety record before the Sewol incident? How did it compare to your expectations of Korea's safety record before you came to Korea for the first time?

Same as above. Didn't think about it too much.

In what ways did your opinions about safety in Korea, either personal or on the national level, change as a result of the Sewol incident?

It changed a little bit. Maybe most of the change was in how I would listen to instructions. I was made more aware of it. I shouldn't necessarily listen to the people in charge. I still think organized responses are a better way for people to react to a crisis situation, but it's also necessary to use logic and consider if you're being told the right thing to do.

How do you feel about the government response to the incident? What about the public response?

I thought the way they handled it was a little exaggerated. They didn't do very well, but it wasn't that bad. The weather, circumstances, and other factors certainly restricted them.

I think I was most shocked by the media response, and as a result, the public response. I feel like the whole thing started to become just one of those finger-pointing wars in Korea. Everyone just kept saying, "It's not my fault."

Politicians played the game, too. Every actor seemed to have irrational responses. It was used by all players – government, media, and the public – for their own needs. I think the people who died were ultimately forgotten. It was more of a popularity thing.

How did the incident affect your thoughts on your own plans of sojourn in Korea?

Not at all. Stuff goes wrong. It's all part of the process, the way things work.

Not like I ever want to take the ferry.

I don't like flying, but I need to get places. That's just a reality I have to accept.

I do skip the air vents (footnote needed), though.

How confident would you be that the government could effectively handle a crisis situation?

I tend to give the benefit of the doubt in these situations. I think circumstances played a big role in what happened. May the government could have been better, maybe they've learned. The trend is to go against the government what it's really not in the government's hand to begin with.

Anything else that you want to add that you feel like you were not able to express?

I guess there's one funny thing I'd like to add. There's a church on the bus ride to the school, and they always used to have this sign up. It said, “잊지 않겠습니다” (we will never forget). Then, on April 16 (the first anniversary of the sinking), the banner was gone, just like “that.”

I don't know how it's supposed to work. When do you have to take down those sorts of things? But, on the very (anniversary) day itself, it was taken down. Kind of weird, right?

It's very suspicious whether the campaign is sincere or not. I think it more points to other dissatisfaction of society as a whole. For Koreans, this was just one way to express themselves.