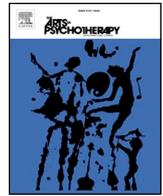




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## Research Article

## Reentry experiences of dance/movement therapists in East Asia after training in the United States

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explores the transitional experiences of East Asian dance/movement therapists who left the sites of their professional training in the United States to travel back to their countries in East Asia. Semi-structured interviews with six participants were conducted to explore two research questions: 1. How did dance/movement therapy (DMT) returnees describe their experiences of transition from the United States to their home countries? and 2. How did DMT returnees experience the transition to their home countries? The researcher derived three themes from the data: (1) Unwanted return, (2) Not professionally at home in one's home country, and (3) Inner and outer resources to overcome challenges. These results highlight and explain that the transition period after reentering involves not only physical relocation but also a complicated emotional process, especially as DMT requires full body involvement during training and internship. Transition inadvertently causes great difficulty for those forced to leave their professional homes. It is hoped that the result of this study, in which returnees honestly and bravely share their experiences and discuss how they made great efforts to overcome and readjust during their re-entry transitions back to their native cultures in East Asia, will help readers to better understand the challenges and resilience of DMTs across cultures.

## Introduction

The Institute of International Education (Institute of International Education (IIE, 2017) reported that 1,078,822 international students attended institutions of higher education in the United States in 2017, a 3.4% increase compared to 2016 ( $n = 1,043,839$ ). Of these 2016 and 2017 international students, students from East Asian countries were heavily represented, including China (32.5%), Korea (5.4%), Taiwan (2.0%), Japan (1.7%), Hong Kong (0.7%), and other East Asian countries (0.4%). In response to the growth of dance/movement therapy (DMT) and the global educational trend of internationalization, dance/movement therapists from the West have begun providing learning opportunities in East Asia during the last decade. Not only have DMT educators from the West traveled to offer DMT trainings and seminars in at least 37 different countries worldwide, but international students have come to the US to study DMT (Dulicai & Berger, 2005).

Becoming a dance/movement therapist requires a master's level of training that cannot be obtained simply by participating in workshops; therapists deal with human emotional and psychological difficulties and crises, which require expert movement-based assessments and interventions. As a result, those who wish to become dance/movement therapists often travel to the US to study, especially when their home countries have not established solid professional DMT training.

Compared to other counseling and psychotherapeutic fields, there has been little study to date on these individuals' DMT learning experiences in the US, transitioning experiences to their home countries, or teaching experiences in home countries, especially not from trainees' own perspectives.

*Dance/movement therapy training in the US*

Dance/movement therapy began to develop in the 1950s and it is deeply rooted in modern dance, whose nonjudgmental attitudes and personal preferences in movement and expression are integrated in DMT through uninterrupted improvisation. Levy (2005) stated that the "basic premise is that body movement reflects inner emotional states and that change in movement behavior can lead to changes in the psyche" (p. 36). The fundamental belief that body and mind are connected merged with the existing theoretical frameworks of psychotherapy and psychology in the 1950s. The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA, 2019a) defines DMT as "the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of the individual" (p. 1).

The ADTA put remarkable effort into developing professional guidelines for DMT training. Although professional DMT training was first imposed at the undergraduate level in colleges and universities

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during the late 1960s, it developed to the graduate level over time (Levy, 2005). Chaiklin (1974), who served as president of ADTA, stated that “the development of a high quality curriculum is presently an urgent need of the dance therapy profession” (p. 63). In response, the standards for DMT training were elevated to require graduate training. Chaiklin’s vision for DMT led to the creation of “guideline[s] for graduate dance/movement therapy programs” (Stark, 1980, p. 16). These fundamental guidelines have since been adapted for both ADTA-alternative educational routes and approved educational programs in the US. Currently, there are seven universities that offer ADTA-approved DMT programs: Antioch University, Columbia College Chicago, Drexel University, Lesley University, Naropa University, Pratt University, and Sarah Lawrence College (ADTA, 2019b).

The DMTCB (Dance/Movement Therapy Certification Board) offers two professional levels of credentials: Registered Dance/Movement Therapist (R-DMT) and Board-Certified Dance/Movement Therapist (BC-DMT). Students who go through graduate school programs approved by the ADTA can apply for an R-DMT degree and work underneath the supervision of a BC-DMT. Then, R-DMTs may apply for their BC-DMT credential after fulfilling supervision and professional experience requirements. Having the BC-DMT credential certifies competency to provide DMT training and supervision and permits licensees to have a private practice (ADTA, 2019c). This means that individuals with R-DMTs need to get a job where they can get a supervision from a BC-DMT. This creates a problem for international students who have to go back to their home countries if they do not get a job and a sponsor for their visas; it is then hard for them to become BC-DMTs in their home countries, which often lack opportunities for professional training and community.

#### Re-entry transitions

The psychological process inherent in a reentry transition involve more than simply returning to one’s home country. *Re-entry* is defined as an individual’s re-acculturation after she or he has spent a certain amount of time in a different culture (Adler, 1981; Arthur, 2003). During the period of transition, international students often experience concerns and stress over issues such as the transferability of technical and educational expertise that they learned, local political situations, career mobility, and fitting back into previous personal, professional, and community roles (Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling, 1990).

Re-entry starts the moment one leaves the host country. International students may experience various different emotions regarding their journeys. While they may look forward to reuniting with family and friends, they may simultaneously experience a sense of loss in leaving the country where they trained and attained professional qualifications (Wang, 1997). For dance/movement therapists, the re-entry transition also includes leaving the professional homes where they trained in both didactic and clinical settings; leaving behind relationships with teachers, colleagues, and clients; and changing life routines they had constructed abroad. They may feel as if they are leaving a part of their lives behind. Of course, much depends on the individual level of acculturation and the structure and style of one’s educational training, and each individual’s transitional experience may be very different.

The entire system of DMT professional requirements is grounded in providing DMT professionally. However, economic slumps and immigration policies often pose considerable challenges for international students who attempt to find jobs after completing their educational programs (Xu, 2006; Yan & Berliner, 2011) and return to their home country to seek work. In addition, in countries such as China, for example, high expectations are placed on advanced degree-holders from the US, creating stress for returnees on top of these barriers (Xu, 2006).

Age presents another challenge for many Chinese returnees, as Asian Confucian cultural perspectives value respect for seniority and the cultivation of hierarchical relationships between young and old

(Ho, 1987; Kim, 2009; Xu, 2006). Completing an international degree program is a time-consuming process, and by the time that students return to their home countries, they may have great difficulty obtaining entry-level positions: Since age is equated with seniority, supervisors are often reluctant to hire workers who are older than they are. This can create friction around social and professional hierarchy, creating a frustrating paradox whereby the best-qualified candidates may be those who struggle the most to find employment.

Jung, Lee, and Morales (2013) studied the re-entry experience of international Korean students who had returned to their home countries after completing doctoral degrees in counseling in the US. Data were gathered via individual semi-structured interviews with 10 Korean counseling professionals. This phenomenological inquiry produced seven major themes: “reminiscence, difference and comparison, benefits, challenges, coping, application and modification, and meaning” (p. 153). Participants described an array of emotions upon re-entry, such as shock, embarrassment, discomfort, annoyance, comfort, cultural confidence, and decreased tension. Although they described their experience as “a growing experience” (p. 159), participants reported a lack of confidence in their roles as supervisors due to their lack of supervisory experience in the US. In addition to acknowledging the emotions present during re-entry, participants mentioned various limitations as they moved from being influential in the US to being influential in Korea. Arthur (2003) felt that re-entry counselling for international students during their transition could be of help because counseling can “provide education about re-entry and help to develop anticipatory coping strategies. An example of a workshop is described using critical incidents as a method of generating discussion about leaving the host country and preparing for life at home” (p. 173).

The ADTA celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2016, and the field is clearly continuing to grow and develop. In response to growth in the number of Asian students and therapists, the ADTA created the Asian & Asian-American Affinity Group (AAAAG) in 2014 to support members with Asian cultural backgrounds in their continued professional growth (ADTA, 2019d). However, in addition to simply noting the growth in the number of dance/movement therapists in this population, it is important to examine international students’ and scholars’ experiences when they leave their professional home in the US and bring their bodies—with new professional identities and educational experiences—to their home countries in East Asia. Not only is DMT still a new field in Asian countries, but this training involves not only the skills of more conventional therapies (e.g., taking notes and listening), but also encompasses bodily learning and clinical experiences. The experiences of international students and scholars who study DMT will therefore be different from those who work in other related disciplines. It is important to explore what international students experience when they have to leave their professional homes and return to their home countries after completing DMT training.

#### The present study: research design

The purpose of the present study was to explore the reentry experiences of US-trained dance/movement therapists who were originally from East Asia. This study adopted a phenomenological design to explore these experiences. Creswell (2013) describes a phenomenological study as a qualitative research method designed to uncover “the common meaning for several individuals of their experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). Phenomenological qualitative research is well-suited to exploration as well as to revealing and uncovering participants’ “essence of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58).

#### Research questions

This study sought to answer the following two research questions:

- 1 How do DMT returnees describe their transitional experiences from

the US to their home countries?

2 How do DMT returnees experience this transition to their home countries?

#### Recruitment of participants

The Lesley University Institutional Review Board (IRB# 13-051) approved this study. The researcher conducted purposive sampling in line with the objectives of this study, seeking suitable participants willing to share their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Criteria for recruitment were (1) be native East Asian, (2) have completed DMT training in the US, (3) have been back in their home country in East Asia for more than one year, and (4) have been working in the field of DMT in their home country for at least one year. Ultimately, six participants were recruited from four East Asian countries. All participants were informed of their rights via a written consent form and recruitment letter before the individual interviews were conducted. Participants signed informed consent forms, and that these consent forms (1) made it clear that they could drop out any time without penalty, (2) anticipated any possible harm (including, for example, emotional difficulties), and (3) indicated that no incentive for participation. All participants were female, with ages ranging from mid-thirties to mid-fifties. Participants had lived in the US from 2 to 13 years ( $M = 6.6$ ,  $SD = 4.8$ ). Five participants had completed their DMT training in graduate programs in the US, and one went through an alternative route by moving forth and back between her home country and the US (See Table 1). All of the participants returned to their home countries to teach DMT-related courses.

#### Data collection

##### Researcher-designed demographic questionnaire

After recruitment, participants completed a 12-question researcher-designed questionnaire, which gathered information about their demographics, age, gender, years of DMT training in the US, years of residence in the US, and years spent teaching in their home countries. The questionnaire was designed to screen qualified research participants and to use interview time more effectively by giving the researcher some basic background information.

##### Interview process

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted via Skype, and each participant was interviewed once, for 1 to 1.5 h. Interviews covered three topics: learning, transition, and teaching experiences. The interview portion regarding transition took about 20–40 min. Since all participants except Jieun asked to be interviewed in English, which not their native language. Because English might have been the only shared language between the researcher and these participants. A list of interview questions was provided in advanced to assist participants in preparing their responses. During interviews, participants shared their transitional experiences as returnees from the US to their home countries in East Asia. After conducting several interviews, the researcher began to notice that participants were repeating similar stories, indicating that data saturation had been reached (Saunders et al., 2018).

**Table 1**  
Participant Demographic Information.

Pseudonym	Reason for Returning	Employment in Home Country	Years in the US
Jieun	No sponsor for H1 Visa	Private Practice	2
Wang	Return was planned	Faculty	3
Tomiko	No sponsor for H1 Visa	Private Practice	10
Kahee	No sponsor for H1 Visa	Private Practice	2
Soyun	Family Issue	Faculty	10
Hiroko	No sponsor for H1 visa	Private Practice	13

##### Member checking

The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher and shared with each participant to increase internal validity. Upon review of these transcripts, some participants asked that parts of their interviews be removed, especially emotionally charged sections referring to conflict within local their DMT communities. The researcher removed all requested content, and did not include this content in determining findings.

##### Peer-debriefing

A peer is a trusted external check who keeps the researcher honest, and who asks important questions regarding research method, analysis, and bias throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013). Peer-debriefing was therefore conducted during data analysis to improve validity. This peer was a music therapist, creative art therapist, and doctoral candidate who has been conducting qualitative studies in a similar field. Peer debriefing was used during several phases of the data analysis process, including coding, developing categories, and developing themes.

##### Data analysis

Data were analyzed using the NVivo10 software program, which is an efficient tool for organizing codes related to interview statements. Since the purpose of this study was to explore native East Asian DMT educators' lived experience of transition from the US to their home country after completing DMT training, this study focused on investigating and describing trainees' experiences in East Asia using vivid descriptions. Moustakas' (1994) data analysis method was adapted for this study, and data analysis consisted of the following processes: (1) Transcribing the interviews (2) Reading each individual interview transcription several times until data could be connected easily (3) sending the interview transcription to each interviewee for member checking, (4) Reading the edited transcription and understanding each individual more deeply, creating a sense of wholeness about the data, (5) Highlighting all meaningful statements and quotes (*horizontalization*), (6) writing memos beside these meaningful statements and quotes (*coding*), (7) Peer-debriefing by sharing original transcriptions with codes, (8) Reviewing and revising coding based on peer feedback and comments, (9) Combining overlapping and repetitive codes and eliminating vague expressions, (10) Categorizing similar meaningful statements and units, (11) Developing larger themes after reviewing categories and subcategories numerous times, (12) Peer-debriefing by sharing the original transcriptions along with the proposed codes, categories, and themes, (13) Imaginative variation by reviewing and reflecting on the overall process of data analysis based on peer feedback and comments, and (14) Writing textual and structural descriptions of participant experiences, with the goal of finding larger meanings.

##### Researcher's reflection and bias

The researcher's experience of training in the US and then returning to teach DMT in her home country provided exceptional sensitivity towards this topic, and her common experiences with the participants helped her develop rapport with them during the interview process. While the researcher was conducting this research project, she was in the process of transitioning her own professional career from the US to Korea. She was mindful of this parallel and tried not to over-generalize or project her own experience of transition while she was analyzing data, engaging in *bracketing*. Bracketing is an especially crucial task for qualitative studies (Tufford & Newman, 2012), and refers to "the task of sorting out the qualities that belong to the researcher's experience of the phenomenon" (Drew, 2004, p. 215). In the present study, bracketing was accomplished through writing out the researcher's thoughts and feelings and sharing them with the peer debriefer throughout the research process to prevent an over- or mis-interpretation of findings.

For example, listening to recordings and reading transcripts of the interviews around transitional experiences reminded the researcher of similar experiences that she had gone through, which could have influenced her data analysis process. This peer regularly reminded the researcher of the importance of separating out her own experiences, questioning her coding, categories, and themes when elements were similar to her own experiences.

*Ethical considerations*

This study is part of a doctoral dissertation (Ko, 2015) which was divided into three parts focusing on learning, transitioning, and teaching experiences, respectively. The present publication is based on the second part of the original work (the section on transitioning), and has been modified for publication in an academic journal. Minor grammatical errors in the interviews have been revised to deliver the intended meaning more clearly and accurately; participants approved of these changes.

**Results**

This study explored participants’ DMT-related transitional experiences from the US—where they had trained to be dance movement therapists—to their home countries in East Asia. Interview transcriptions resulted in a saturation of qualitative data (94 related codes), culminating in nine categories, which were collected into three themes (See Table 2). These findings will be discussed and illustrated with both textual descriptions and direct quotes. The analyzed interview data include participants’ emotional reactions, reflections, and experiences relating to leaving their professional homes, going back to their home countries, and establishing themselves professionally as returnees.

*Theme 1: unwanted return*

*Need to stay longer for professional growth*

Four participants (Kahee, Jieun, Tomiko, and Hiroko) felt that they needed to stay in the US longer for their professional growth. Although Tomiko wanted to stay longer to have more clinical experience at settings such as psychiatric hospitals in NYC, she had to return to Japan after having worked at a nursing home for only seven months. Hiroko also “definitely did want to stay” to have experiences in different clinical settings, but she also had to leave the place where she had worked for several years.

Jieun and Kahee had to return to their home countries immediately after they completed their DMT training: This was not their choice, but they had no control over their decision. Jieun returned to her home country after desperately but unsuccessfully searching for a job in the States. Although she wanted to stay in the US to have more professional clinical experience, the job market was difficult due to budget cuts for mental health services during the time of the great recession about 2007–2009. Kahee, in contrast, was financially supported by the government in her home country, whose scholarship policy required two

years of mandatory service in her home country; if she did not return within a short window of time, she would have had to pay back the scholarship. This was not an easy situation for Kahee, who had a strong desire to stay in the US. She felt devoted to becoming a lifelong professional dance/movement therapist, and she still needed to work on her advanced credential, the BC-DMT.

*No control over visa issues and emotional difficulties*

Four participants (Kahee, Jieun, Tomiko, and Hiroko) shared how their lack of control over the consequences of leaving their professional homes due to visa issues created emotional difficulties, and responding to questions relating to leaving their professional homes to return to their home countries provoked a burst of emotions. Jieun shared how her visa issues as an international student posed an additional burden, leading to a painful transitional experience from the US back to her home country:

It was so painful, like being in hell. I wanted to live in the US, and [I] wanted to have some more work, have more experience. But when I got a call for the second interview for a job, I was already in my home country due to the visa issue, which made me even more desperate; it was too late to go back to the US. I cried every night.

Making the decision to return to her home country was a difficult and complicated decision for Kahee. She described the year of this decision as the hardest year of her life, and one of great struggle with the dilemma of whether or not she should continue with DMT as a career – although she wanted to continue her career as a DMT, to do this she needed clinical experience, supervisors, and a professional support system. Ultimately, she had to return to her home country when her employer decided not to support her work visa.

Tomiko and Hiroko shared how they were both abruptly notified that their workplaces would not support their work visas, creating difficult situations for them. Tomiko became emotional and tearful when recalling enjoyable memories of working with clients in New York. Tomiko added that going back to East Asia did not feel like she was coming back to her home country she would rather feel that she was coming back to hometown rather than home. This change speaks to how much she had grown emotionally attached to the place where she had developed herself as a dance/movement therapist. Hiroko shared that, although her H1B visa [a type of non-immigrant working visa] had expired. she and her family did not expect that we were going to have to return to East Asia. Hiroko was, however, informed at the last minute that her company could not sponsor her to extend her visa. This abrupt notification put Hiroko in the situation of having to leave her professional home:

I remember when I learned for sure that I was going back to my home and I cried a lot, cried a lot, [I] remember that I cried a lot [...]. I won't say it was easy, [...] I think the biggest thing I felt was I was very angry about the fact that all the transitions I've made in my life prior to this were [due to] somebody telling me. [...] Like, a visa is telling me that I have to end my life and I had to go back, so I was very angry.

**Table 2**  
Developing the three themes based on categories and codes from interview transcripts.

Themes	Categories informing themes
1: Unwanted return	Need to stay longer for professional growth No control over visa and emotional suffering
2: Not professionally at home in one's country	Feeling responsible and passionate Emotional suffering due to conflict with local DMT Professionals Lack of Recognition of DMT Lack of supportive environment for DMT No sense of belonging
3: Inner and outer resources to overcome challenges	Finding supportive resources Rigorous DMT training in the US and personal development

Leaving her professional environment, especially in such an unexpected and powerless way, brought up fears for Hiroko: “One of the things that I was really concerned about and afraid of was that I wasn’t going to be able to take with me what I had back in the States... on a professional level and then also on a personal level.” Hiroko explained that “I wasn’t in my DMT world.” Tomiko also felt that she was going back to her “hometown” and not to her “home” when she had return to her native country. With the exception of Wang, none of the participants reported that it was their choice to leave.

#### *Theme 2: not professionally at home in one’s home country*

##### *Feeling responsible and passionate*

When participants first returned to their home countries, they shared both their passion and a sense of responsibility for bringing DMT into their native cultures. Several returnees shared comments on this subject. For example, Kahee exclaimed, “When I first came back, I felt like, ‘Oh I’m going to tell everybody what DMT is, what is that [all] about. I have an inner calling to share DMT with the world.’” Soyun felt that she needed to deliver a strong and compelling introduction to DMT in her home country as a pioneer to help to establish the field of DMT professionally. Tomiko was prepared to work with any kind of situation, even though people did not know about DMT; she was ready to introduce DMT and felt confident in doing it. Finally, Wang explained and introduced DMT on television and on radio programs, promoting this field to the public.

##### *Emotional suffering due to conflicts with local DMT professionals*

Although all participants were passionate about sharing DMT when they first returned to their native countries, all except Wang shared that they experienced emotional difficulties related to conflicts they had with local professionals while they were trying to introduce DMT. Kahee, Tomiko, and Hiroko specifically noted that their emotional difficulties were related to political power in the DMT community between returnees and people in their home countries.

Tomiko admitted that she felt wounded and upset when she reflected on these experiences; although she tried not to take it personally, it was hard not to. Kahee confessed when she first came back it was really difficult, a painful disaster. Hiroko admitted there were politics, and she reported having intimidating moments with existing professionals in the local DMT community. Kahee recalled a lot of hostility, especially from jealous and competitive local dance/movement therapists. These therapists had not trained in the US and were threatened by the perceived cachet of an American-trained therapist, fearing a loss of power. Kahee felt that her Westernized personality also created more difficulties in her dealings with the local DMT community, as she had learned to be more outspoken and confrontational:

I didn’t care about hierarchy, so you can figure, in this kind of [hierarchy-oriented] culture, how much difficulty I could face. [...] I would tell the truth. I didn’t really care about the person, what kind of position the person possessed. [...]. I challenged the field. I challenged stereotypes, biases, unethical behaviors, etc. I disagreed with a lot of things and I didn’t think it [what the local DMT community was doing] was professional to do. So, I challenged the field; in return, I got a lot of challenges.

As a result of speaking up, Kahee experienced many difficult moments. When a senior person in her country labeled Kahee an “American-style dance movement therapist,” she was unhappy about how her work and professional identity were pigeon-holed so reductively by local practitioners. Kahee considered this lack of affinity to be the result of insiders’ power, competition, and jealousy toward outsiders who had studied DMT abroad or who were from outside of the local DMT community. Soyun shared the confusion that she felt, after training in the US, when she returned to a society so strongly steeped in

hierarchical relationships. She needed to do a lot of work to acculturate back to her birthplace, sharing both an image and a bodily sensation:

A picture with missing pieces of the puzzle, with no clear image. [...] My body parts were not engaged and not integrated. I was confused. I did not know where to put my feet, and I felt my body was floating. I wanted to feel that I was standing firmly; this physical sensation made me emotionally confused and I felt anxious, frustrated.

Jieun shared how having an advanced degree from the US yet not having a job put tremendous pressure on her, as people in her country have extremely high expectations for anyone who has received advanced education abroad. These judgmental expectations made Jieun emotionally vulnerable, compounding the difficulty around her job search.

##### *Lack of recognition of DMT*

All six participants experienced adjustment challenges on both the professional and personal levels stemming from a lack of recognition of DMT as a mental health profession and as a form of psychotherapy. When Kahee first returned to her country, she found that the mental health field there was not well developed, with no jobs for dance/movement therapists. Furthermore, Kahee felt that the field of DMT was not really respected as a part of the psychotherapy profession:

When I started working [in my country], it’s [a dance/movement therapist] pretty much called, like..., a dance teacher; I was just doing some kind of leisure activity, some kind of entertainment kind of thing. People just didn’t respect [it] and, well, they didn’t know.

Wang described herself as the first and only dance/movement therapist in her home country. This made her feel lonely, and there were challenges because people in her country did not know much about what DMT is. Wang felt that she needed to actively promote DMT. She needed to explain what dance/movement therapy was, and to explain how different it is from aerobic dance or taking a dance class. She spent a lot of time explaining DMT to different people when she returned, which was exhilarating, but also exhausting. Kahee and Tomiko found that the fields of psychotherapy or mental health were not well developed in their home countries, and Kahee lamented the fact that the mental health field in general did not even recognize DMT as a profession. Tomiko shared how many of her students, even now, are not familiar with psychotherapy, which is still not popular or widespread in her home country.

##### *Lack of supportive environment for the profession of DMT*

Kahee and Wang reported a lack of a supportive environment while they were working on their BC-DMT certifications in their home countries. Kahee explained that when she got back to home country in 2004, there was no opportunity to do DMT, and no supervisor to work with in pursuing her BC-DMT credential. It was a great struggle to get her BC-DMT because of the lack of professional resources in her home country. Wang shared similar feelings:

I needed supervision, I needed my professional support, all these things I was not able to receive in my home country, so I did not have a person whom I could talk to about treating clients using dance/movement therapy for quite a few years.

Jieun and Kahee also discussed how a lack of recognition for DMT led to a lack of opportunities for DMT jobs in their communities. Jieun reported that getting a job was more difficult in her country than in the US without personal connections. Kahee confided when she came back, there was a long down-time during which time she could not find a job. However, all of them were able to start DMT-related jobs within a year.

##### *No sense of belonging*

Tomiko, Kahee, and Hiroko all confessed that they felt no sense of

belonging when they returned to their home countries. Kahee described herself as “an outsider” because she was not previously part of the dance or psychology field before she studied DMT. She felt like she a person coming out of nowhere and studying DMT in her country. Tomiko felt alone in her home country and disconnected from other DMT professionals. As Tomiko has been developing her own career independently, she has finally begun to settle down in her working environment and to achieve a sense of professional identity and security. Her feelings of being back in her country are expressed through her metaphors about the differences between a home and a hometown. “I did not feel that I was coming back home; I felt like I was going to the place, my hometown. So, it was a very interesting feeling; I was coming back to my hometown, but I did not feel like (I was) coming home.” Similarly, Hiroko emphasized several times that her professional status in her country was one of an “outsider” because, in her home country, without DMT friends, she was not in her DMT world.

### *Theme 3: outer and inner resources to overcome challenges as returnees*

#### *Finding supportive resources*

Four participants (Jieun, Tomiko, Hiroko, and Kahee) tried to find supportive resources, whether locally or even internationally. Wang and Kahee shared how they were able to find supervisors in other Asian countries to work on their BC-DMT certifications. Kahee struggled with the decision of whether or not to work on the advanced credential of BC-DMT because she lacked professional support. However, she ultimately found a colleague in Hong Kong who continually encouraged her to work on her BC-DMT by helping her to stay focused on the students who needed her help. Kahee elaborated:

For me, to have my BC-DMT, it took me so many years. When I graduated, I got [the] R-DMT and then I just came back here. I would think, if I [had] stayed in the States, that would be faster for me to have my BC-DMT and then I wouldn't have had so much [extra work], I wouldn't have spent so much [time]. [I struggled] so much to get a BC-DMT [...]. There was a period of time I thought, “I will just give up; I'll just give up.”

Wang was also helped by a dance/movement therapist from another Asian country while she was working on her BC-DMT in her home country. Wang felt that she needed a supervisor who understood Asian cultures while she was using DMT:

So, I wanted to ask someone [in an Asian country] to be my supervisor because I always thought that Eastern cultures and Asian cultures are very important. So, I tried to learn from Junko [pseudonym of a BC-DMT in an Asian Country] what I need[ed] to be aware of when I was using DMT in [an] Eastern Asian culture.

Tomiko shared that she met people who accepted her in many different ways and who were supportive of her difficult situation. She was lucky to be introduced to a psychotherapy association where she had a lot of group psychotherapy training. Through training, she learned a lot about her society within this cultural context that helped her also explore her personal issues.

Through her involvement with this group psychotherapy association, Tomiko was able to continue to educate herself. This was important and new because she had not had any education in the mental health field in her country before. Tomiko also shared that taking personal psychoanalysis was a necessary and beneficial experience for her while re-adjusting to life in her home country. Hiroko stayed conscious of her existing situation:

I tried to understand what was happening so that I would know what I should be prepared for, so I was able to set a boundary and think about what I should be doing, what I wanted to be doing, what I was not doing, [and] what other people were doing.

Hiroko, the most recent returnee among the participants, has kept

her connections to her US DMT active by taking a professional role. This has provided a feeling of connection to the DMT world where she has DMT friends.

#### *Difficult DMT training experiences and personal changes*

Kahee and Tomiko described how their rigorous DMT training helped them to tolerate challenges in their home countries. Kahee explained that her school trained her to be very tough in her skills, technique, and mentality. This strength naturally helped her to cope with difficult moments such as “those pressures, those unfriendly situations, and those not-healthy kinds of environments.” Although Tomiko sometimes needed to handle resistance and bad reactions on the part of others, she was able to see those reactions in an analytic way, which helped her to work through the challenges of delivering DMT in her home country. During this time of emotional and personal turbulence, her strategy of setting boundaries helped her to overcome these barriers.

#### *Composite description of two research questions*

The first research question addressed how DMT returnees described their transitional experiences from the US to their home countries and inquired as to what they perceived to be the most difficult aspects of this process. Returnees reported both personal challenges and unsupportive professional environments in their home countries. The first and second themes explored various aspects of their lack of a desire to return and the personal crises that awaited them. Participants expressed their desire to stay in the US longer for professional growth; this was coupled with a lack of control over visa issues that forced them to return to their native countries.

Most of the participants discussed being unprepared to leave the US or to establish themselves professionally in their home countries, an experience they described as difficult and very stressful. These participants all came from collective cultures and tended to display a tendency toward strong attachment to schools, teachers, clients, and classmates; while these interrelated relationships created a deep layer of meaning for them, it also may have made their transition more difficult. In East Asia, one's self is inextricably bound to others such as one's neighbors, family, and friends. This socio-cultural community context in the self-concept speaks to the influence of Confucianism (Kim, 2007). In contrast, DMT is deeply rooted in modern dance, which holds at its core the importance of individual self-expression, a non-judgmental attitude towards expression, individually meaningful movement, and individual emotional content (Levy, 2005). These aspects align with Western values of self-actualization, individuation, and independence, and with the idea of working to create a new self. Especially for someone with a contradictory cultural background (i.e., one that rejects or struggles with these principles), complex unconscious or conscious psychological processes could make it exceptionally emotionally difficult to leave one's professional home and readjust to one's home country.

Participants also stressed that part of their uneasiness around leaving the US was that they had made a great deal of effort to nourish their professional identities while there, and they were unsure as to what awaited them when they returned to their native countries. Participants' experiences of returning to their home countries were equivalent to leaving their professional homes. Especially as their DMT training required profound and sincere engagement with both their physical bodies and professional communities, the sudden loss of their professional homes left them feeling uncertain and stressed.

Most participants' experiences of reentry to their home countries were just as difficult as their initial experiences of leaving their families and countries to go abroad for DMT training. Participants' vivid sharing of memories was heightened by their emotionally charged descriptions of being unprepared to leave their professional homes and experiencing conflict with other DMT professionals upon their return to their home

countries. Participants described their transitional time with varying degrees of intensity, from “being a hell” (Jieun), to “down time” (Kahee), to “not being at home” (Tomiko). The most common reason that participants gave for not wishing to return to their home countries was their need for time to grow professionally in the US. They also felt a strong attachment to the place where their professional identity had been born and nurtured.

Some participants struggled to establish their DMT practices due to conflicts with local dance/movement therapists. They offered reasons such as disagreements over issuing DMT certification (Kahee, Wang), being labeled an American-style dance movement therapist (Kahee), negative reactions toward DMT (Tomiko, Kahee, Jiun), and judgments and high expectations for US degree-holders (Jieun). Conflicts with local dance/movement therapists caused emotional difficulties, less involvement with local communities, and a longing for the DMT community participants had left behind in the US. However, all participants were ultimately able to develop themselves independently in their home countries.

The second research question looked at how DMT returnees experience their transition to home countries. The third theme, *strategies or resources for overcoming challenges*, explored how returnees were able to overcome difficulties. Participants found that the rigors of DMT training in the US, their desires for growth in their DMT professions, and the creation of connections with other dance/movement therapists were all helpful. When returnees were not able to get support professionally, they reached out to people in other East Asian countries for support of their desire to achieve professional certifications.

Some returnees experienced times of conflict in their home countries, which led them to try to develop their professions independently. The rigors of training they had experienced in the US helped give them strength and resilience to overcome the challenges that they encountered in their home countries. Hiroko specifically recommended maintaining continual communication with local dance/movement therapists to further develop and solidify this new profession.

There was an unexpected finding regarding conflict that participants experienced in their home countries. Although participants did not focus on challenges that they experienced in their teaching approaches—preferring to focus more on success stories as DMT educators—they ended up sharing a great deal about the personal challenges that they faced as returnees, including unsupportive professional environments in their home countries. Wang—who took an alternative route to program completion, which entailed moving back and forth between Asia and the US more often—shared different experiences compared to the other participants.

As a qualitative researcher, it was difficult to cut off or ignore this emotional content that emerged during the interviews, especially around questions regarding participants’ transitional experiences. The interviewer was also surprised to hear how similar many of these experiences were, with a personal mental image of an umbilical cord being cutting off unexpectedly, at a time when participants needed more professional growth. Hearing about participants’ experiences after returning home, the researcher then had an image of a kite whose string had been cut. However, to continue this metaphor, participants quickly and wisely became aware that different environments have different weather. Flying their DMT kite, after making great efforts and learning new skills, all of them were ultimately successful in being able to read the wind to fly high and wide in their homeland.

## Conclusion

This qualitative research has some limitations. First, as this was a phenomenological method, results cannot be generalized to all such returnees, many of who could have an easy, enriching, and successful readjustment, with the full support of their community and with returning home being a welcome and happily anticipated event. This study is also limited to the time frame of a specific transitional period

focused on leaving, reentering, and adjusting, which is by definition prone to chaos and instability. Other limitations included the difficulty of finding a large enough sample for these strict criteria, as well as the difficulty of protecting participant anonymity in such a small community while simultaneously sharing enough detail to contextualize their unique experiences. The fact that interviews were conducted in a language that was not native also surely had some impact on responses. Finally, although the researcher engaged in peer debriefing and discussed efforts made to bracket her own experiences, the researcher’s own lens likely had some impact on findings.

The reentry transition discussed by participants was not only about physical relocation, but also an emotional transition. Unlike most other fields of study, DMT training is not only academic, but requires the full sensitization and engagement of the whole body, mind, and spirit. This *embodied learning* means that many instructional settings involve learners’ entire body (Johnson-Glenberg, Birchfield, Tolentino, & Koziupa, 2014; Lindgren, Tscholl, Wang, & Johnson, 2016). DMT requires full participation in highly personal processes of self-exploration, awareness-building, and clinical experience, including bodily involvement at internship sites. The present study provided vivid description of emotional difficulties, which were shared honestly, bravely, and generously by participants. It is hoped that the findings of this study help DMT educators and other members of this professional community to better support and help students from foreign countries. International trainees of any kind encounter a great deal of difficulty when they are forced to leave their professional homes before they are ready, especially if they have no choice in the matter. The participants in this study lamented the lack of support for DMT in their home countries, since DMT is still a new field in East Asia. When there was an existing professional community, returnees clashed with local DMT professionals, many of whom were threatened by the perceived power of an American-educated professional, or who saw American-educated therapists as bringing strange or culturally inappropriate ideas.

The DMT returnees in this study might have benefitted from counseling that reflected an openness to their feelings upon leaving their professional homes, or from maintaining professional connections through the ADTA or through the community where they studied DMT in the US. Finding East Asian mentors who had gone through similar experiences (which some participants reported being able to do) could also have been helpful. By sharing the challenges that they experienced during their transitions back to their native countries, they provided valuable accounts of their experiences of finding inner and outer resources, which can benefit others who are preparing to return to their native countries after having completed DMT training in the US. It is hoped that this study will also prepare, encourage, and support returnees in bringing DMT to their home countries, especially in areas where DMT is not yet widely accepted as a form of psychotherapy or as a legitimate profession.

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