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## Exploring the Everyday Language of KOREANS -A Study of Possibility on Positive Thought and Culture Psychological Conceptualization of 'Boram'

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### Abstract

*This research attempted to reconstruct 'Boram', a realistic, vivid, and daily word deduced from the minds of the general public, as a psychological concept. To do this, the context in which the word 'Boram' is used in real life was studied, and analyzed for its meaning and type through a qualitative research method. Research data was deduced and organized from the context and contents of the word 'Boram' used by participants in unrestrained situations such as when watching TV wherein the researcher has no control over. As a result of the research, 'Boram' is defined as a feeling that comes after being satisfied on the result of contributing positive meaning to a work chosen by the doer, and going through a problem-solving process. In addition, the cognitive process of Boram is a 'post optimistic thought.' Since emotion that is generated from such cognitive process is rewarding or worthwhile, Boram is an emotion that is felt when realizing the hope of an individual. Furthermore, Boram is classified into 4 types based on its usage context and form of structure. The classifications are: 'displaying capability worthiness', 'overcoming adversity achievement worthiness', 'displaying capability achievement worthiness', 'overcoming adversity displaying capability achievement worthiness'.*

*First, 'displaying capability worthiness' is felt by people who are proud of their abilities. Evaluation of one's ability is not an objective evaluation but perceived evaluation, so it is a feeling felt when giving positive evaluation to oneself in the potential or ability one has.*

*Second, 'overcoming adversity-achievement worthiness' is the feeling felt when one goes through a difficult process to earn a small but desired result and eventually, he or she gives a subjective and positive evaluation of the result.*

*Third, 'displaying capability-achievement worthiness' is felt when fully using and displaying one's positively perceived ability, and giving his or her subjective and positive evaluation on the result earned through this.*

*Fourth, 'overcoming adversity-displaying capability -achievement' is felt by overcoming a difficult process, displaying one's ability in overcoming hardships or in things one wants to, and giving subjective and positive evaluation on the result.*

*Situations where ordinary people experience Boram were precisely analyzed to contrive the original form and the original forms were combined to reconstruct the psychological structure of Boram. This research searched and analyzed a new concept through qualitative method and strived to find its function. It has a weakness of not using scientific research methods at all. However, the significance lies on finding the possibility that 'Boram' can be an ingredient of scientific psychology, positive psychology, and cultural psychology through an attempt to conceptualize 'Boram'.*

**[Keywords]** *Boram, Worthiness, Displaying Capability Worthiness, Overcoming Adversity-Achievement Worthiness, Displaying Capability Achievement Worthiness*

## 1. Introduction and Background

Among the psychological papers published in Korea recently, many papers on the power of positive thought of Koreans have been published. In addition to existing positive psychological concepts such as satisfaction, sense of well-being, satisfaction, altruism and commitment, researches on strengths peculiar to Koreans have been made.

Sang-jin Choi and Tae-yeon Jeong(2001) conceptualized Korean psychology on 'endurance', a process of enduring suffering by analyzing traditional fairy tales and symbols[1]. Moreover, Kyeong-ja Hyun(2009) conceptualized the cause of overcoming hardships unique to Koreans as 'optimism'. Also, she produced an 'optimistic attitude' standard consisting of factors such as 'diversification', 'self-affirmation', and 'social affirmation' to measure this[2]. Furthermore, Min Han(2007) structured exhilaration in Korean culture and optimistic emotion as a psychological concept[3]. These research trends followed the limitation of positive psychology by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi(2014) and supplementation of literary psychology on existing psychology. Accordingly, Korean positive psychology emerged as a new field of interest[4]. This trend is a desirable phenomenon in which the main topic of psychology which was originally inclined to universalism and pathological approach came closer to our life and becomes more realistically helpful. Therefore, this research wishes to reconstruct 'Boram' to be more realistic, alive, and deduced from the hearts of normal people as a psychological concept

## 2. Research Method

We conducted our study through qualitative research methods to see in which context 'Boram' is used in our daily life, and analyze its meaning and type. The data to be used in the research were in the context of using the word 'worthy' and the contents were deduced and organized in unrestrained situations like watching TV. Data are classified and organized into time, program name, user, and

context and content of the word 'reward' appearing on TV.

There are many ways to collect data for qualitative research. Methods through open surveys and interviews are generally used. However, the reason for collecting data through TV for this research is that it is judged to be more appropriate for a more strict phenomenal research than data collection through surveys or interviews. It is because data from TV do not give the researcher any control. Surveys and interviews have the possibility of participants being influenced by the questions of the researcher, and intentional answers cannot be ruled out. That is, by collecting data through TV, the state of experience of ordinary people can be described as it is, without being tied to the theory or prejudice of the researcher. To capture the moment included in the consciousness rather than human behavior, the researcher acquired and used TV narration and interviews in which he has no control over.

The data collection period is from January to May 2009, and the total number of data used in the analysis is 20. As mentioned above, 19 cases except case 20 were acquired through TV. Collected data were interpreted based on the similarity of its context and content, and classified into categories. Classification of categories was done through discussion and advice of the researcher and graduate students majoring in culture psychology.

## 3. Summary of Cases

The results of summarizing the TV narration and interviews in which the word 'worthy' is used during the period of data collection are as follows.

[Case #1] 2009. 1. 14(Wed) 16:00, EBS / Extreme Job 'Bottom Trawl fishing boat part 1st' narration

- Context: It describes that there is no commercially valuable fish, but only smaller fishes in the net the sailor pulled up with difficulty.

- Content: "without any worth, without any outcome."

[Case #2] 2009. 1. 16(Fri) 20:00, KBS 1 / Hometown Report narration

- Context: As fishermen fish in the midst of cold winter, a carp is caught after waiting for a long time.

- Content: "There is worth waiting in the cold."

[Case #3] 2009. 1. 18(Sun) 22:55, MBC / MBC Special 'Dinosaur Land', Interview with Dr. Lee(Director of Dinosaur Exploration)

- Context: There are many difficulties in the dessert to find dinosaur fossils.

- Content: "It feels worthwhile finding a new dinosaur unknown on earth, studying and naming it, and making it known all over the world."

[Case #4] 2009. 2. 1(Sun) 16:30, KBS / Three Days '40 years of musician's hometown' Interview with Mr. Ji (Flute 50 year repair craftsman)

- Context: While repairing flutes in one location in the paradise area for more than 50 years, many musicians play beautiful music with the musical instruments he repaired, and come back again.

- Content: "Musicians come running frantically if their instruments are strange. Then, I fix it and enable them to play again. How worthwhile is it."

[Case #5] 2009. 2. 14(Sat) 9:40, SBS / A master of life 'A master of garlic', Bossam house chef interview

- Context: Making food by earnestly cutting onions and providing delicious food to customers, and as a result, customers feel thankful for the delicious food.

- Content: "It is worth it when I hear their gratefulness - Thank you for the food."

[Case #6] 2009. 2. 12(Thurs) 22:50, EBS / Extreme Job 'Stuntman', Stuntman Park Ji-sun (experience for 3 years) Interview

- Context: Has to practice a lot for dangerous action, and continue shooting overnight for over 40 hours

- Content: "Other people thought I am hurt with the action scenes, but I shouldn't be...so,

I practice a lot. It is worthwhile when I manage to pull dangerous action on the set."

[Case #7] 2009. 3. 6(Fri) 22:05, KBS2 / VJs on the Scene 'Close coverage. World of harbor working man', Worker Interview

- Context: Do difficult and dangerous task of building large ships in the port

- Content: "I feel pleased and worthy. It is worthwhile."

[Case #8] 2009. 2. 25(Wed) 23:10, EBS / Extreme Job 'Poaching Observer', Interview with Park Do-won, Gangwon Branch of Korea Wildlife Conservation Management Association

- Context: Poaching surveillance member of Jeongseon-gun, Gangwon-do sweats to go around deep in the mountain and removes traps set by poachers the whole day to catch and bust poaching scene even in freezing weather

- Content: "Even if it is hard to do, it feels worthwhile when I arrest a poacher. I am also proud of protecting wild animals."

[Case #9] 2009. 2. 22(Sun) 19:30, KBS2 / Two Days and One Night '1 night 2 days with viewers', Subtitle

- Context: To fulfill their morning wake up mission, three teams climb to the top of the mountain at the same time as the team wakes up.

- Content: "A morning worthy of hard work."

[Case #10] 2009. 3. 29(Sun) 17:00, FOX / VJs on the Scene, Auto Bike Club Interview

- Context: An auto bike club visits a whole chicken soup restaurant deep in the mountain after spending 3 hours to find it on the map, and eats delicious whole chicken soup.

- Content: "I feel the worth of a 3-hour long journey."

[Case #11] 2009. 4. 18(Sat) 18:20, MBC / Infinite Challenge, The script of the comedian Jung Jun-ha

- Context: It took 5 hours to visit Bo-seong just to drink one cup of green tea, arrive at

the green tea field, and watch over the green tea field with clean air and good scenery.

- Content: "It is a worthwhile five hours."

[Case #12] 2009. 4. 27(Mon) 17:56, SBS / Live Today 'Growing up 7 brother and sister' Male MC's comment

- Context: Life of couple who raises 7 children

- Content: "Although it is hard, it will be worthwhile to raise all of them."

[Case #13] 2009. 5. 8(Fri) 23:00, KBS / VJs on the Scene 'I took my life. Korea Strong heart ingathering'. Large transmission tower construction site staff

- Context: Working in face of danger, depending on just one safety belt at high altitude where it takes 30 minutes to climb. However, I work with a feeling that others cannot feel, and feel a sense of achievement when the transmission tower is completed one by one.

- Content: "It is very fun and worthwhile."

[Case #14] 2009. 5. 8(Fri) 23:00, KBS / VJs on the Scene 'I took my life. Korea Strong heart ingathering'. Amusement park staff

- Context: Checking the rides and collecting reaction data of customers by repeatedly riding scary rides

- Content: "When I ride rides I chose and watch customers feel good, it feels 'worthwhile' and I feel happy."

[Case #15] 2009. 5. 13(Wed) 08:15, KBS / Screening Humanity 'Cho Oh-ryeon's A honeymoon diary part 3rd', Interview with Mr. Cho

-Context: Athlete Oh-ryeon Jo (60 years old) gather community leaders of Haenam region and ask for cooperation to find sponsors while preparing for swimming across the Strait of Korea.

- Content: "Fortunately, the reactions are not so bad, so there is 'worth' in feeling awkward."

[Case #16] 2009. 5. 16(Sat) 12:24, EBS / Extreme Job 'Saltern' Interview with Lee Man-seok(45 years experience, Oldest person)

- Context: Expresses losing left arm when young, and strives only on salt field to raise children well

- Content: "Make my children all study until university, get my son to marry and buy an apartment. It is worthwhile."

[Case #17] 2009. 1. 25(Sat) 17:00, EBS / Extreme Job 'Special Forces in ROK part 2nd', Interview with the Chammae troops staff sergeant

- Context: Reminiscing the most memorable event during special force army time

- Content: "The most worthwhile event was the disaster prevention task during an oil spill."

[Case #18] 2009. 1. 7(Wed) 17:33, YTN / YTN News 'In the middle of winter - Phalaenopsis', Interview with Im Bum-shik(A farmer in the Iwol-myeon, Jincheon-gun, Chungbuk)

- Context: Carefully growing Phalaenopsis seedlings for about 20 months, and watching the flowers in full bloom recently

- Content: "I feel that it is worth it when I see the Phalaenopsis blooming splendidly as much as I worked on it."

[Case #19] 2009. 1. 26(Mon) 00:50, M net / I am a model 'Season 4', Interview with Model Miss Moon

- Context: Unlike the other two teams, the team which practiced a lot get an interview after winning.

- Content: "There is worth in hard work."

[Case #20] 2009. 1. 29(Thurs) 12:00, Korea University Reserve Officers Training Corps' Head outgoing

- Context: There were hardships while fulfilling the appointment of being the school leader at Korea University for 2 years, but I was elected as the best school leader for year 07 and 08.

- Content: I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who gave me generous support, numerous advices and help to finish an important position as a school leader with great worth."

## 4. Results

Based on the examples above, the original type of 'Boram' could be classified into three according to meaning and similarity of context in which the word 'worth' was used. First is worthiness felt when an individual achieves a positive result after finishing something. The researcher named such reward as 'achievement worthiness'. Achievement worthiness is felt by giving a positive meaning to results earned after performing a duty. Therefore, it is a result-oriented reward. Second is worthiness felt after an individual overcomes hardships in the process of performing something. The researcher named such as 'overcoming adversity worthiness'. Overcoming adversity worthiness is earned by giving a positive meaning in experiencing a difficult process of performing something and the process of adversities and overcoming such. Therefore, it is a process-oriented reward. Third is worthiness felt after evaluating that an individual appropriately and effectively displays an ability, potential and skill when performing something. Displaying capability worthiness is earned by giving a positive meaning to one's contribution in performing something. Therefore, it is a capability-oriented reward.

When we look into these three types of Boram, there are cases when one type may not be able to fully explain the meaning of being worthy. That is, in the context of an individual feeling worthy, at least one or more than two forms among the three types of Boram 'achievement worthiness', 'overcoming adversity worthiness', and 'displaying capability worthiness', are combined to make an individual feel rewarded. For example, there is no reward felt just by overcoming adversities. When there is a positive result after overcoming adversities and one looks back to it, he or she feels rewarded. Moreover, there is no worth felt just by displaying capability. One must have positive results following the full display of capability, and when he or she gives positive meaning when looking back to it, he or she will finally feel rewarded. Then as a result, must all worth need achievement, that is, a result? It is not so. If one can overcome adversities and fully display his or her

capability, he/she will feel rewarded. Based on the analysis results, four categories of Boram were determined. They are 'capability worthiness', 'overcoming adversity achievement worthiness', 'displaying capability achievement worthiness', 'overcoming adversity displaying capability achievement worthiness'.

Among them, Boram made of only one form is 'displaying capability worthiness', and 'achievement worthiness' and 'overcoming adversity worthiness' were excluded by the researcher. The reason for this is that there was no case of feeling rewarded from just one positive result in the case analysis. It can be seen that the conditions for feeling worthy becomes clear here. Therefore, feeling worthy must have a process of overcoming difficult ordeal and hardships to earn positive results. If one easily solves a task, one does not feel 'worthy or rewarded'. Moreover, there is no worthiness made of only adversities. If it ends with hardship, a person will feel dispirited. After overcoming ordeal and difficulty, there must be even a small but meaningful result to feel rewarded. This is also known to be a condition to feel worthy [5].

However, among the original types of Boram, 'displaying capability worthiness' is enough on its own for someone to feel rewarded. The reason is the condition that one's ability, potential, and skills are used and displayed in some task already includes an original type of Boram of 'overcoming adversity' in the process until one's capability becomes a usable ingredient, that is, time and effort. Moreover, the ability to display such capability and be able to make a positive assessment on the use of that capability means that it is accompanied by the result of a positive evaluation, that is, the original form of reward as 'achievement'. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the original form of Boram of 'overcoming adversity' and 'achievement' are included in 'capability worthiness'. Therefore, 'displaying capability worthiness' has been classified into a type of reward with just one original form, and 'over-

coming adversity displaying capability worthiness' was excluded from the type of classification due to the same reason[6].

To summarize, application of these four types to previously organized 20 cases are as follows.

First, 'capability worthiness' are cases 4, 13, 14, and 17. These four cases include content that sufficiently display one's capabilities such as one's ability and skill when faced with a task. Looking at case 4, Mr. Byeong-wook Ji, who has been repairing flutes for 50 years, says that he feels rewarded when many musicians come to him when their instruments are broken. In other words, he feels worthy through displaying his skills to fix and tune flutes better than anyone else. This displaying capability Boram is felt by people who are proud of their abilities. Evaluation of one's ability is not an objective evaluation but perceived evaluation[7], so it is a feeling felt when giving positive evaluation to oneself in the potential or ability one has.

Second, 'overcoming adversity achievement worthiness' are cases 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, and 19. In these nine cases, obstacles such as adversity, trials, and difficulties are encountered by individuals who felt rewarded solving or performing tasks. This involves enduring such difficulties or overcoming these, and getting a small but positive result in the process. The evaluation on adversity and achievement found in these cases are certainly not objective evaluations. From an objective point of view, there are results that could be evaluated as minor. For example, a carp, the result obtained from case 2, can never be a valuable result to a person who dislikes fishing. However, a carp caught after waiting for a long time by someone just to catch fish in cold weather is a result more precious than anything else to this person. Therefore, this 'overcoming adversity achievement worthiness' is the feeling felt when one goes through a difficult process to earn a small but desired result and eventually, he or she gives a subjective and positive evaluation of the result[8].

Third, 'displaying capability-achievement worthiness' are cases 5 and 18. These two

cases include content wherein one feels rewarded by displaying capability such as one's ability or skill, followed by positive rewards and satisfaction on results. The chief who cooks garlic well from case 5 uses his garlic cooking skill and the cooking skills he has honed to cook delicious food(capability), and when he hears the compliment, 'Thank you for the food' from customers after they eat the food(achievement), he feels rewarded. Here, garlic cooking skill or cooking skill may not be a great ability or excellent potential in other people's opinion. However, the person who feels worthy uses the ability he has in the task, and by displaying such capability, he earned a small result of gratefulness from customers. Therefore, this 'displaying capability achievement worthiness' is felt when fully using and displaying one's positively perceived ability, and giving his or her subjective and positive evaluation on the result earned through this[9].

Fourth, 'overcoming adversity displaying capability achievement' are cases 3, 6, 12, 16, and 20. Within these five cases, all original types of rewards 'overcoming adversity', 'displaying capability', and 'achievement' are all included. For example, the leader of the dinosaur exploration team Doctor Yung-nam Lee in case 3 is a typical example of 'overcoming adversity displaying capability-achievement'. Exploring a bleak desert to find dinosaur fossils, he confronts obstacles of not being able to fulfill basic needs such as eating food, drinking water and washing. Moreover, there are cases when dinosaur fossils cannot be found at all times. However, the dinosaur fossil exploration team does not succumb to such ordeal and explores continuously(overcoming adversity). Also, dinosaur fossil exploration is not something that anyone can do. It is a task that can be done by people who have the ability to do dinosaur exploration, such as research and experience on dinosaurs(capability). Lastly, through overcoming adversity and displaying capability, we find the realistic result of dinosaur fossil, research is done to name the new dinosaur, and eventually, it will be used in dinosaur research around the world(achievement). Boram is felt as these three original types of Boram are all in har-

mony. Therefore, 'overcoming adversity-displaying capability -achievement' is felt by overcoming a difficult process, displaying one's ability in overcoming hardships or in things one wants to, and giving subjective and positive evaluation on the result. If the degree of feeling worthy could be measured quantitatively, the type that feels the most rewarding among the four types is 'overcoming adversity displaying capability achievement'.

As such, Boram is classified into four categories according to context and structure type. The significance of this result is that the situations which normal people find rewarding were precisely analyzed to bring about the original type in feeling rewarded. Also, it is in reconstructing the psychological structure of rewards by combining the original type of Boram.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

Among the meanings of 'worth' from the 「National Institute Korean Language Korean Standard Unabridged Dictionary」, contents worth discussing in this research is as follows.

"The value of work that gives good result or satisfaction, or pride or self-esteem after doing something"

The definition of worth above shows the value of task which deserves satisfaction, self-esteem, and similar emotions. The word worth is generally used in adjectives such as 'worthwhile or 'worthy'. Its usage context is when the result after doing something is very good, so a person is satisfied enough to have pride and self-esteem. As a result of analyzing and structuring experiences of individuals who experienced feeling worthy, the concept of Boram is one that reflects a person's ability and values. It is a concept that reflects what a person thinks 'I', and is the feeling felt when one confirms a self-portrait about oneself. This is self-construed concept, which reminisces ones' past performances and results, and sentimental concept constructed by giving meaning to it[10].

In this sense, it is different from achievement. Achievement occurs when setting a specific goal and accomplishing that goal. Moreover, results that give the feeling of achievement are objectively evaluated as successful results. However, in Boram, the result achieved may have been set or expected initially. Moreover, by giving a positive meaning subjectively to that result, Boram is felt. In such meaning, Boram can be said to be appropriate for a positive psychological topic.

Sang-jin Choi(2000) said that there are many self-reflective narrations in the conversations of Korean people. There are many lamenting narrations such as 'I was a fool', 'I was insane', and 'I was ignorant', and such lamenting narrations are passed to sorrow[11]. However, this thesis intends to suggest Boram through self-complacent narration contained in conversations of Koreans as a concept countering sorrow. Self complacent narration is ethical narration of being pleased with oneself such as 'This is enough for me' or 'I'm proud of myself', and the psychological state of this is Boram. Self-complacent narration is to see myself reflectively, and Boram is a psychological process of giving positive value to oneself in a reflective state. If positive value is not given, Boram cannot be felt. To reiterate, sorrow is manifested from a self-lamenting narration form, and Boram is manifested from a self complacent narration form, so the contrasting concept of sorrow could be Boram. Therefore, Boram can be a good topic for a cultural psychological research value.

Finally, when data collected for this research are interpreted, circumstantial evidence to feel Boram was deduced. First, it should be a task one chooses to do. Only when performing a task intrinsically motivated and not forced by others can the person feel worthy. Second, one must overcome a problem-solving process, that is, hardships such as desperation, disappointment, worry, and difficulties to feel worthy. This has a similar meaning with persistence and resilience among Character Strength and Virtues(CSV) suggested by Peterson and Seligman(2004), and has a meaning distinct from perseverance. Third, there must be even a small result

to give a positive meaning. This does not necessarily mean an objective result. A positive result perceived by the doer is enough for him/her to feel worthy[12].

The academic definition of 'Boram' concluded in this paper is as follows. Boram is a feeling that results from giving a positive meaning to one's chosen task, going through a problem-solving process, and being satisfied with its result. The cognitive process of Boram is 'post-optimism thinking.' The emotion generated through this cognitive process is Boram, so Boram is a feeling that accompanies when an individual's hope is realized.

This paper reconstructed 'Boram' psychologically to study the daily life of Koreans psychologically and culturally. Although it is partial and insufficient, it explored new concepts, analyzed them, and strived to find their function. Moreover, it has a limitation in not using a scientific research method at all. However, the significance is in finding possibility that 'Boram' can be an ingredient of scientific psychology, positive psychology, and cultural psychology through the attempt to conceptualize 'worth'.

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