

Ch'wichip in South Korean
Female Identity
Untangling the Contradictions
of Finding a Job and Getting
Married

SURF Conference Panel Session 8

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Introduction

- ***Ch'wichip*** (취 집): a gendered compound word for women's "career[missing]" and "marriage[missing]." In Korean, there are two different ways of referring to the word "marriage" depending on the object's gender. For males, it's called *jangga* while for females, it's called *sijip*.
- **Compressed Modernity**: modernization, pursued within a 'compressed' period of time.¹ It is characterized as the dramatic economic growth and democratization mainly during the 1970's and the 1980's.

¹ Chang, Kyung-Sup. "Compressed Modernity and its discontents: South Korean society in transition." *Economy and society* 28, no.1 (1999):30-55.

Among the outcomes of democratization and industrialization in South Korea were the opening of the job market and educational opportunities to South Korean women.

Research Question

Why do well-educated South Korean women who are aware of “second shift” still subscribe to traditional gender roles through marriage despite opportunities for self-actualization?

Hypothesis

The absence of intergenerational value-shift due to the rapid structural shift, like industrialization and democratization contributes to gendered marriage and career decision

Literature Review

Non-Western Feminism

Western feminism and Asian feminism should be approached in different ways because Asian feminism has been unfolded across a different set of historical conditions. While Western feminism closely parallels US civil rights and student movement, anticolonial movements in the 1930s and 1940s had inspired the first women's movement.²

Non-Western idea of Modernity

Discussion on South Korean society must begin with South Korea's compressed modernization.³

Non-Western idea of individuality

South Korean identity as *Kukmin*, the combination of two Chinese characters meaning 'nation' and 'people,' as opposed to Western individuality⁴

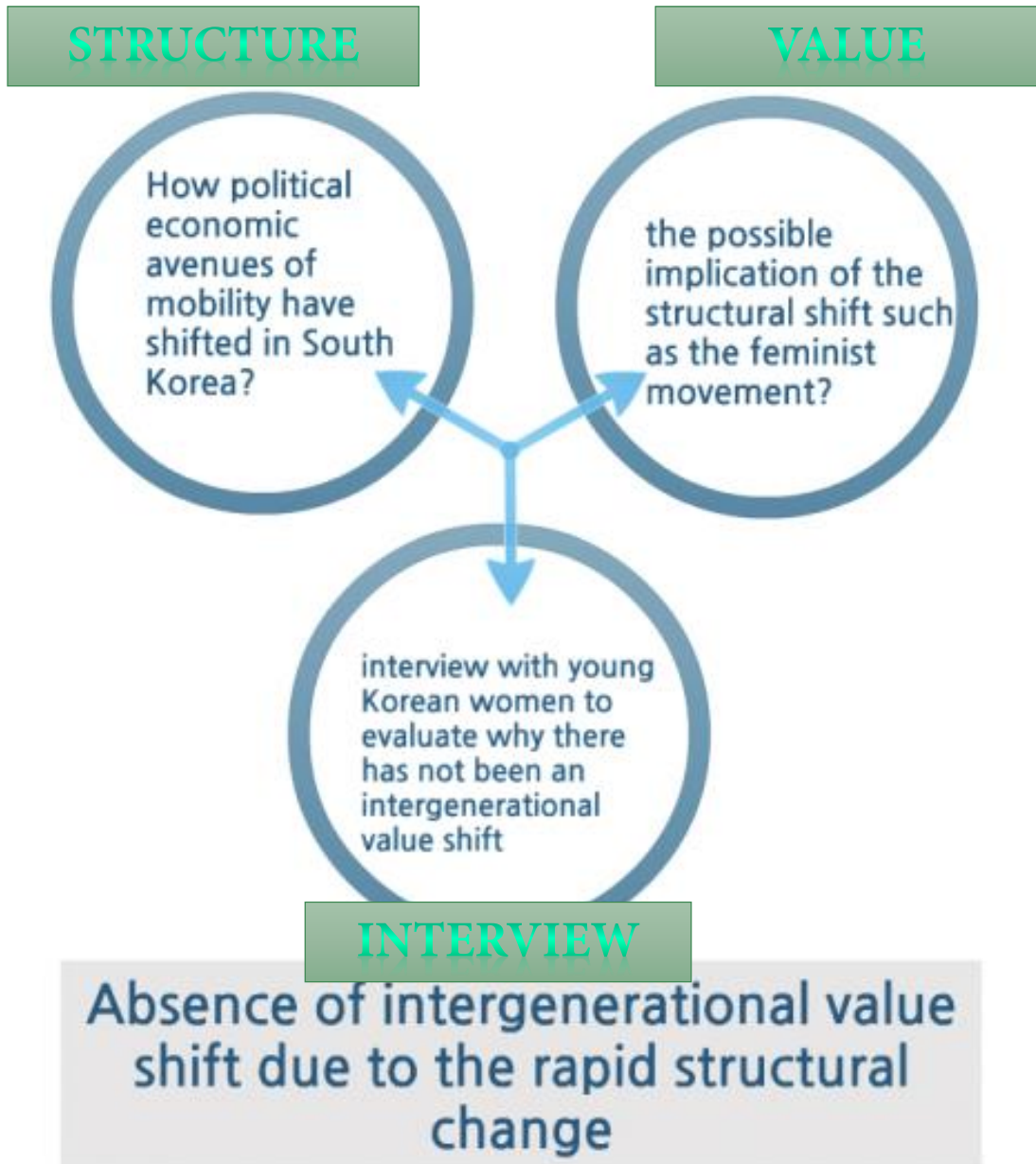
² Yoon, Soon Young. "Women's Studies in Korea." *Signs* 4, no. 4 (1979): 751-762.

^{3,4} Chang, Kyung-Sup. "Compressed Modernity and its discontents: South Korean society in transition." *Economy and society* 28, no.1 (1999):30-55.

Cho Han, Hae-joang. "You are entrapped in an imaginary well: the formation of subjectivity within compressed development – a feminist critique of modernity and Korean culture." *Inter-Asian Cultural Studies* 1, No.1 (2000): 49-69

Methodological Approach

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Structural shift

- GDP (economy) and voter's right and participation of South Korea (politics)
- Based on United Nation's annual Economic and social Commission for Asia and the Pacific statistical profile.

Value shift

- Several trends in ideological movements, such as the feminist movement
- Based on academic literature on policy and practice as well as non-academic literature and expressive works such as poetry
- Based on my work experience in Institute for Gender Research at Seoul National University (June-August 2013)

In-depth interview

- South Korean females who have affiliation with prestigious universities in Seoul, South Korea (Seoul National University, Yonsei University, Korea University and Ewha Women's University)
- Born in the 80's and 90's
- 22 screening survey-> 20 interviews
- Snowball sampling

Structural shift

Women's movement has made progress in securing legal protection against discrimination, increasing access to higher education as well as higher-ranking jobs and political positions, South Korea along with civil activism and a trend towards participatory democracy after the end of the previous military dictatorships in South Korea experienced the shift toward gender equity.

Value shift

However it's still puzzling because Korean women today are attracted to "traditional" gender values as seen in the South Korean marriage matching mechanism that South Korean women in general prefer to be matched with socially and economically higher men and its high demand in the marriage market.⁵

⁵ Kim, Seung-Kyung and Kim, Kyounghee. "Gender mainstreaming and the institutionalization of the women's movement in South Korea." *Women's Studies International Forum* 34, No. 5 (2011).

Materials and Methods

- Interview and survey questionnaires are mainly modeled by ideas from Ann Swidler's *Talk of Love*, Hochschild's *The Second Shift*, and Mary Blair-Loy's *Career Patterns of Executive Women in Finances*, as well as in-depth interviewing tips from Professor Bloemraad.
- Interview structure consisted of three tiers:
 1. How does the younger generation of Korean women perceive feminist movement?
 2. What characteristics describe women's relationship with their parents, who experienced the industrialization and democratization of the 1970s and 1980s? And do their relationships reflect intergenerational value shift?
 3. How do the women view the meaning of marriage within the discussion on *Ch'wichip*?
- Supplementary data: National Value Survey provided secondary information about Korean women's understanding of the social shifts of the 70's and 80's, as well as what effects these shifts had on their daily lives.⁶

⁶ Na, Eun Yeong and Cha, Yu Ri. "Trend of Value Changes in Korea: Based on 1979, 1998 and 2010 Survey Data" *Korean Journal of Social and Personality Psychology*, no. 4 (2010):63-93.

In-depth interview

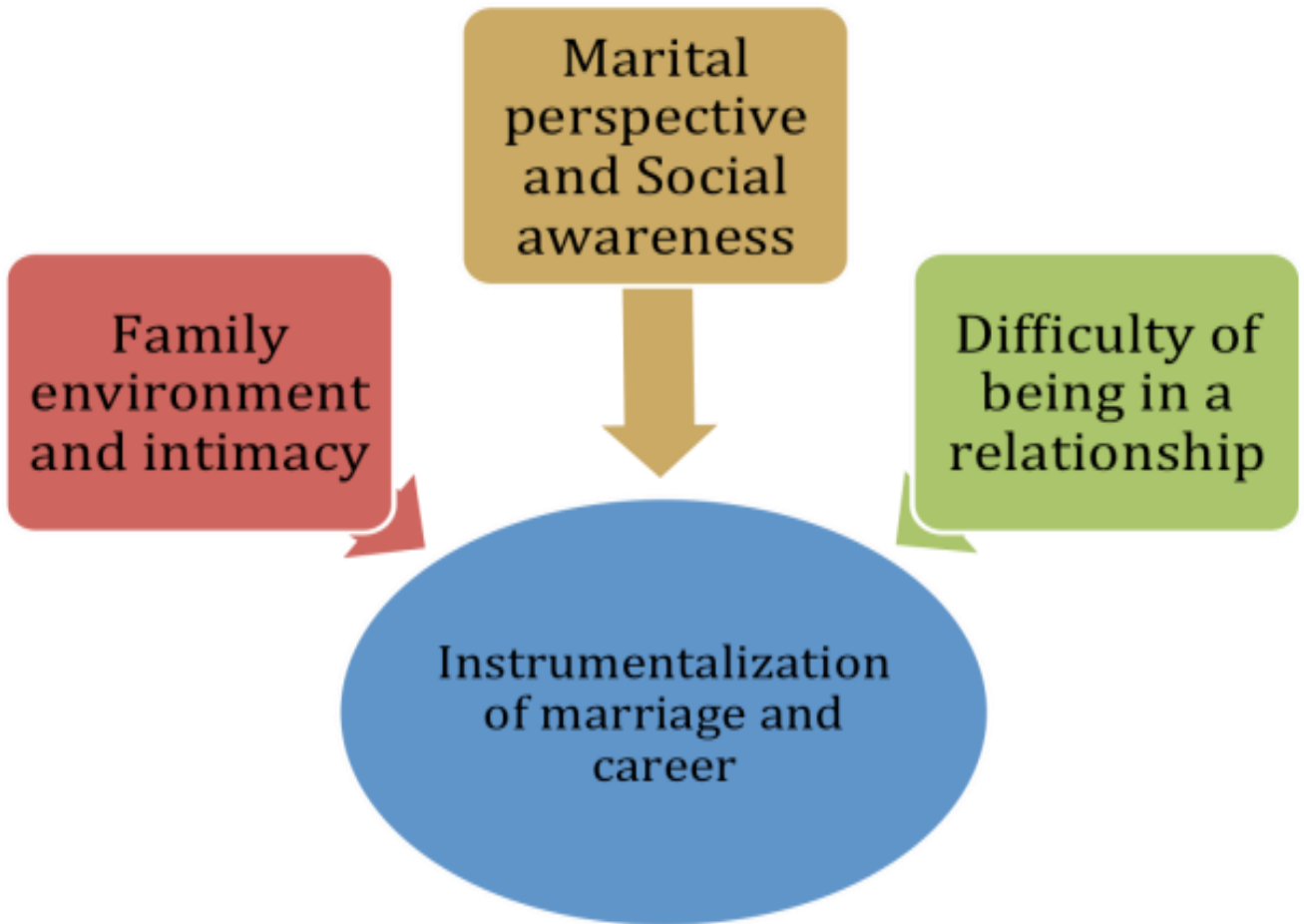
Screening Process

- To select interviewees fitting into the group of 'middle-class' well-educated South Korean women born in the age of 19 to 29
- Recruitment: Facebook group pages of a representative body to serve UC Berkeley alumni in South Korea as well as a Foreign language high school in South Korea-> Email with the SurveyMonkeys link
- Screening survey is written in English
- Screening survey questions: name/age/sex/marital status/educational background (parents and self)/financial background (parents/self)

During the in-depth interview

- Language
 - Interview was conducted in Korean
 - Transcribed in English (simultaneous translation by myself)
- Schedule: after the screening survey, interview appointment is set up through email conversation
 - Mainly at café at the respondents' convenience

Results



- Very dense family environment and strong intra-familial intimacy
- The combination effect of the general value of social conformity and a strong pressure to get married as soon as possible
- Together with family and other social structures, constraints of neo-liberal society impede the natural process of building a romantic relationship

Family Environment and Intimacy

- Strong intergenerational value-shift, reflected through higher desire of career and educational pursuit
- Systematic marital and career influence from parents
 - Direct (through conversation)

“...My dad *was telling me* that “teacher” doesn’t require too much to be smart, so...you need to aim higher...that type of thing... so I was also like...*what type of job would you recommend*...so CPA...CPA, accountant that I have ever heard.” ~ Chae, Jnia.* Interviewed by author. Tape recording. Berkeley, October 29, 2013.

- Indirect (through parents’ occupational status)

“For example, my siblings are both...preparing to become **teachers**. I think it’s because they **listened to my parents** more [because they stayed with the parents longer than I did], and the whole family had that kind of **atmosphere**, and they had more chance to **see and learn**...because **dad works in that area**, I think they got more influence. They had more chances too.” ~ Lim, Minju.* Interviewed by author. Tape recording. Seoul, June 18, 2013.

- Parents’ involvement in social media such as Facebook and a Korean messenger apps (overcoming the physical distance)

*The respondents' names are pseudonyms.

Marital Perspective and Social Awareness

- Marriage anxiety: afraid of being opted out

As South Korean individuality is more group-centered than Western individuality,⁷ they feel more pressured to be in a relationship or to get married as soon as possible if people around them are already going through these engagements.

“Now we have different topics. These days it’s not about career, life, or anything like that...I’m in **the age to marry**...and so they [parents] talk about that [marriage] more.” ~ Lim, Minju. Interviewed by author. Tape recording. Seoul, June 18, 2013.

“Listen, whenever I meet up with **my friends**, we only **talk about the boyfriends or...just basically about guys**. It’s important—I heard that even when you **get older but still remain single**, you **stop meeting your friends** who already have either fiancé or husband.” ~ Kang, Jimin. Interviewed by author. Tape recording. Seoul, June 3, 2013.

- Success anxiety

Values like meritocracy and gender equity carried in Korea’s historical socio-economic shifts derived from the 1970’s industrialization and the 1980’s democratization, have been passed down to the respondents’ generation.

Example: Unlike women in prior generations, the younger generation of Korean women has never been asked to sacrifice socio-economic opportunity for the sake of their male brothers. Rather, women experiencing young adulthood now have been pushed hard to excel in school and achieve professional career status.

⁷ Yoon, Soon Young. “Women’s Studies in Korea.” *Signs* 4, no.4 (1979):751-762

Difficulty of Being in a Relationship

- No time to go on a date: industriousness and other aspects of neo-liberal ideology, institutionalized from the early age

“When I was in middle school, my routine life was just go to school, go to *hagwon* [*cram school*], go back to home...Home is just a place to sleep.” ~ Chae, Jina. Interviewed by author. Tape recording. Berkeley, October 29, 2013.

- Solution: numerous blind dates, as early as upon high school graduation

“I don't completely like the idea of *doing sogeting* [*blind dates*] but I have to do it...and now I feel like I'm a champion of *sogeting* [laugh]. **There's simply no chances other than that** [*sogeting*] to make a boyfriend or somebody for the romantic relationship...so I do it.” ~ Lim, Sohee. Interviewed by author. Tape recording. Seoul, July 7, 2013.

Three main concepts

Instrumentalization (Weber)

- Actions following the means-ends rationality

The second shift (Hochschild)

- Double responsibility at home and at work for married career women

Social Reproduction (Bourdieu)

- Symbolic capital, field of power relations, and habitus

“People have been pushed and shoved in the rush toward colonial modernization to the extent that it has been difficult to create any space for critical reflection or innovation. The realm of daily life has been severely affected.”⁸

⁸ Cho Han. “You are entrapped in an imaginary well: the formation of subjectivity within compressed development – a feminist critique of modernity and Korean culture.” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1, no.1 (2000): 49-69.

Conclusion

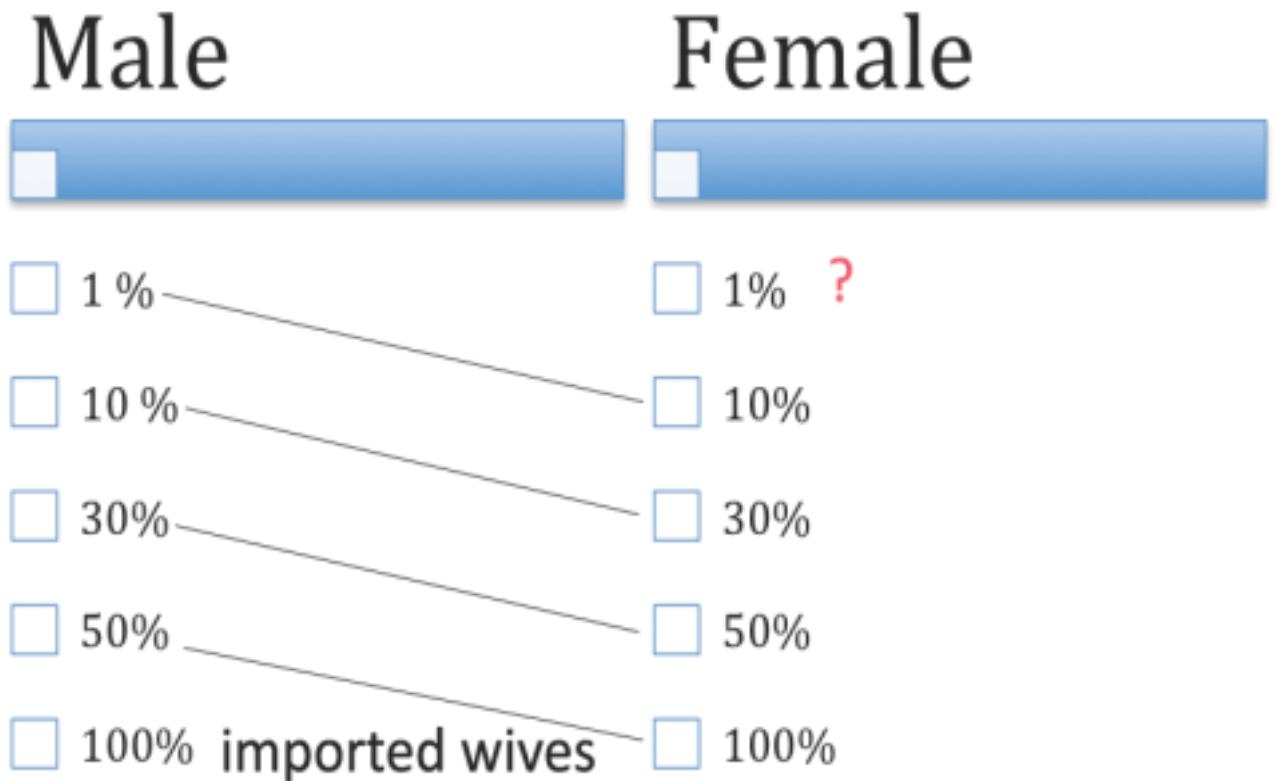
- Korean young women were actively instrumentalizing marriage and career in order to sustain their independence and ambition as reflected through social status.
- In other words, they pursue *Ch'wichip* because it's advantageous for maintaining "successful" position in Korean society.

Potential reasons:

- Busy life, no time to build a civil society, or at best, malfunctioning civil society (Putnam and Skocpol)
- Korean young women are actively reinforcing the conventional social structure by even making the use of [instrumentalizing] the intimate sphere of life, marriage.
- Individualism (people are too inclined to think exclusively of themselves and to withdraw from public virtue) -> Despotism (Tocqueville):
 - South Korea people elected the first female president, however who is the daughter of dictator. Why is that?

Discussion and Direction for Future Research

- Follow-up study starting from October 2013
 - Another side of South Korean female group, “Gold Miss” defined as urban, educated women aged more than 26 but remained single
 - Marriage matching business model



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