

Familist Individualization of Ever-single Korean Youths in Their Late 30s: *Individualization and Transformed Familism in the Neoliberal Era**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explain how the recent phenomenon of individualization among unmarried young people in their late 30s has been unfolding in relation to familism in Korea. For this purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 people of the same birth cohort of 1975 who were victims of the economic crisis leading to IMF stewardship at the end of 1990s and who turned 37 years old in 2012, disembedded from the protective institutions of the first modernity according to the term coined by characterization of Ulrich Beck. The results indicated that the process of individualization in Korea lacking institutional protections under the harsh neoliberalism strongly depends on family and familism as a safety net, showing three types of the relationship between familism and individualization: a type of strong disembedding from and weak reembedding in the family; a type of concurrence of weak disembedding from and strong reembedding in family; and a type of individualization by utter coercion with no family to depend on. Finally, the transformed familism, as the simultaneous cause and effect of individualization, was composed not only of a normative element of filial piety toward parents, but also of multidimensions, such as familism as a relationship, and a reciprocal relationship shown in care provided by the parents.

Keywords: familism, individualization, familist individualization, neoliberalism, patrilineality, intergenerational relationship, disembedding, reembedding

* This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grants funded by the Korean government, NRF-2010-330-B00181 and NRF-2013S1A3A2054579.

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Introduction

At a time when 26.9% of men in their late 30s remain single as of 2010,¹ is the family in Korea—a country with a strong sense of familism—weakening? What does familism mean in the struggling lives of older youths in the neoliberal era? Is the strong familism in Korea a hindrance to the lives of *free* individuals seeking pure relationships (Giddens 1992), or a bolster against a coerced individualization in which risks of the system are transferred to individuals free from protection (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002)? If neither is the case, how are *ever-single youths* in their late 30s transforming familism in Korea, where succession in the patrilineal stem family and rules of filial piety have traditionally been regarded as norms (Choi 1982; Sung 2005)? If we say that familism does not exist in the form of a fossilized norm, this familism could be understood to be reconstituted and transformed by the actors' participation. This paper attempts to answer these questions about the relationship between individualization and familism in Korea by conducting in-depth interviews with 19 ever-single working youths in their late 30s. The subject of research is a cohort of youths who were born in 1975 and turned 37 in 2012.

The reason I chose a group of people who were born specifically in the year of 1975 is because the age cohort, the so-called *curse group of people* in Korea, has particular social and economic meanings. Unfortunately, having entered college in 1994, they graduated and went out into an unstable labor market in 1998 when the financial crisis under the harsh IMF-led bailout programs started in earnest. High school graduates also faced threats from the crisis. Moreover, people in this age group are the very targets of individualism belonging to the cultural discourse of a *new-consumer generation*, a *generation of diversity*, and the *X generation* during the early and mid-1990s just before the financial crisis. They spent their early adulthood enjoying unprecedented political democracy after long years of authoritarian rule under militarism. Also, triggered by the measure for free

1. The marriage age of men rose from 27.0 in 1990 to 31.8 in 2010, and that of woman, from 24.8 to 28.9 during the corresponding period.

overseas travel in 1989, which finally permitted Koreans to travel freely outside of the country, college students started enjoying the *romance* of overseas travel and experiencing the lives of cosmopolitans when Korea's GNP recorded approximately \$10,000 in 1995 (H. Cho 2010; Oh 2007), while many of their parents were of rural origin and had never been abroad. They are also called the first generation of the information society because the commercialization of the internet service system started in the mid-1990s.

Coincidentally, in the early 2000s when people within this cohort became of marriageable age, Korean society started facing the prospect of later marriages as well as extremely low birth rates (1.17 births per woman, the so-called 1.17 shock in 2002). Accordingly, the discourse on so-called *family disruption* drew massive attention from the public. The press tried to connect phenomena (e.g., late marriage, rising divorce, and unemployed breadwinners leaving home) with the weakening of *family values* as well as with the financial crisis.

Consequently, one must ask: Have these young Koreans chosen individualism over family, as suggested in the mass media? In this regard, some scholars in Korea point out that individualization in Korea is not the result of increasing individualism but rather a consequence of worsening labor market conditions and neoliberal uncertainty (Chang and Song 2010; Park, Kim, and Kim 2005). Chang and Song (2010) claim that one of the characteristics of individualization in Korean society is being risk-averse, a strategy to avoid conflicts like the burdens of childbirth and child rearing and the reconciliation of work and family; individualization in Korea, therefore, is *individualization without individualism*. In this context, they construe the family attitude of Korean people as *familist* (Chang and Song 2010, 544).

Even though previous studies had been insightful, is it possible to disregard the influence of cultural upheavals in times of globalization as well as during the tyranny of the neoliberal market? What effects does the patrilineality of Korean familism have, especially on women who have been *baptized*, mainly by democracy and partly by feminism, throughout the 1990s? This paper tries to explain the complex process of individual-

ization in Korea, both as liberation and as coercion, with regard to the strong familism of Korea in the neoliberal era under the tyranny of the market.

A Review of Theoretical Viewpoints for Analysis

The Concept of Familism: The Complexity of Familism in Korea

A patrilineal stem family, the so-called *traditional* Korean family, was strengthened in the late Joseon period from the seventeenth century when Confucianism was positively utilized as the ruling ideology of the Joseon dynasty (H. Lee 2003; Choi 1982). The patrilineal stem family is characterized by both giving priority and responsibility to the oldest son in the succession of property, caring for parents when they are alive, and conducting ancestral rites when they pass away. Thus, filial piety is suggested as the essence of family value in Korea (Sung 2005). However, the patrilineal family system is also criticized as being the ideological basis of patriarchy in Korean society because it was established by rendering wives, daughters, and daughters-in-law as outsiders in the male-centered family system, men being especially privileged regarding the succession of property (H. Lee 2003; E. Cho 2000; H. Yang 2011).

In historical terms, familism has taken various forms in relation to the statism of colonial modernity under Japanese rule during the first half of twentieth century and throughout the developmental state of President Park Chung-hee in the 1960s and 1970s as well, resulting in the introduction of the modern form of nuclear family. However, the patrilineal familism of filial piety centered on the first son has not disappeared. Rather it has often been recalled a *tradition* in Korea, especially by the Park regime in the course of his authoritarian rule in the 1970s, which elevated the extended family as the nation's unique tradition (Kim Hye-Kyung 2009). Therefore, the modern family and modernity in Korea have been constructed not by erasing tradition but by combining with it and have even been confronted by the very complex postmodern condition there-

after. In this respect, the familism of Korea was viewed as having an *accidental pluralism*² of familism, consisting of the Confucian familism of filial piety, the familism of marital affection, the sexual division of labor in the nuclear family, and an instrumental familism for the survival of the family as a group (Chang 2009). However, other studies on familism in Korea emphasize the patrilineal stem-family norm (Ahn 1991), and in statistical studies the operational definition of familism includes elements of patrilineality in common with family-centeredness (Ok 1989; O. Yang 2002; Kim Hyun-Ok 2002).

With development of modernity in Korea on a wider scale, the status of the patrilineal family system gradually faltered. Particularly since the 1980s, the system of patrilineal descent has become less important as more married women obtained jobs, and the instrumental role of networks in the matrilineal side became important for helping in child rearing (Cho 1997; Kim Hye-Kyung 2011). Also, the financial crisis in the late 1990s is viewed as beginning to destroy the norm of the male being the exclusive breadwinner (Bae 2009), but these changes did not go far enough to develop a discourse of gender equity (H. Park 2011).

Nevertheless, the change in the norms of the family did not weaken family ties. Even in the United States, intergenerational solidarity existed strongly at a multidimensional level, including emotional solidarity as well as functional exchanges in assistance, in addition to the normative elements of solidarity (Silverstein and Bengtson 1997; Putney and Bengtson 2001). Especially in the mother-child relationship *close relations* were very common. Moreover, the phenomenon of the *protraction of youth* has appeared recently (refer to section 3 of this chapter). These tendencies could imply that the family relationship is superseding the institutional family in importance. Meanwhile, a recent study on familism in Korea seems to provide a clue for elaborating the concept of familism by including an emotional dimension, where the family is regarded as an “object to think of and to depend on in hardships” (T. Park 2004). Another study also mentioned the

2. The term is the unique concept of the author. It means that various elements of familism coexist at the same time because of the complex modernity of Korea.

emotional aspects of familism, claiming, in the review of psychological studies on relations between Korean parents and their children, that Korean children showed strong solidarity as family members by feeling thankful and distressed or sorry about their parents' devotion and sacrifice (S. Lee 2010, 289).

Individualization, Familism, and Their Interlocking

Western modernity since the mid to late 1960s was said to deconstruct modern family-centered intimacy and instead create *pure relationships* based on individual autonomy, radicalizing the emancipatory potential of modernity (Giddens 1992). During that period of *individualization*, according to Ulrich Beck's vocabulary, for the first time in history, neither class nor family, but rather the individual became the unit of social reproduction (Beck 1992, 130). However, as his concept of individualization was criticized as biased and centered around the white middle class, he pointed out that his concept of the individual within the idea of individualization was misconceived as a concept of "autarkic human self," that is, a self-sufficient self, and as a concept of freedom of choice (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, xxi-xxii). In the twenty-first century when globalization became prominent, blurring the boundaries between nations, the concept of individualization is refined as being constructed by complex elements: detraditionalization; institutionalized disembedding and reembedding; forced pursuit of a life of one's own and a lack of true individuality; and the transfer of risks in the system to individuals and internalization (Beck and Grande 2010, 420). Other scholars also point out the multidimensionality of the concept of individualization, while Mills put together previous theoretical points of view on individualization and subdivided them into three: individualization of detradition and increasing diversity, as Giddens showed; anomic individualization caused by uncertainty and a risk society, as Beck mentioned; and adaptive (mechanical) individualization by loss of personality due to the spread of consumer society (Mills 2007).

In a society like Korea where the labor market and welfare system are insufficient, studies tend to place emphasis more on the risk side of the

individualization rather than on detraditionalization (Shin 2013). In particular, Nahm and Namgoong (2012) emphasized that destandardization and individualization in men's life course were characterized by involuntary *neoindividualization*, linked to unstable school-to-work transition caused by the financial crisis. Moreover, in a Korean society that emphasizes educational background, women high school graduates statistically show a severely forced side of individualization (Kim and Lee 2012).

However, to fully understand individualization in East Asian society without taking into account the axis of *familism* is quite hard. Shim Young-hee (2010), analyzing international marriage in rural communities in Korea, argued that the phenomenon of Korean bachelors facing a coerced individualization (i.e., being permanently single) and reembedding into the marriage system could be interpreted by using a concept such as *family-oriented individualization*. Through this phrase, she emphasized that individualization not only involves disembedding, but also has a dimension of reembedding. Moreover, Kim Hye-Kyung (2013) researched the IMF generation in Korea and suggested that patrilineal familism is deeply connected with individualization but proved to be a *failed* tradition because sons in this generation could not guarantee the succession of the family as an institution. In the case of Japan, Ochiai interpreted Japan's individualization as "empty" in content because the retrenchment of welfare policy in the 1980s put the responsibility of care on to the family based on "the familist" strategy (Ochiai 2011, 2012). Meanwhile, another study on the individualization process in Japan indicated that with the burst of the bubble economy from the 1990s, the hope of lifetime employment disappeared and so had filial duty for one's parents due to the weakening in economic efficiency (Suzuki et al. 2010).

The Living Arrangement of Youth and Intergenerational Relationships with Parents

With the recent phenomenon of late marriage, attention is being paid to youth delaying moving out of their parents' home regarding the protracted transition to adulthood (Furlong 2006; Jones 2005; Newman and Apteker

2007). While it is said that in Central and Northern Europe and the United States, young people in the middle and upper classes tend to move out of their parents' houses at an early age to enter college, long cohabitation between parents and their offspring is prominent in Italy, Spain, and Greece, which are the "Mediterranean models" for transition to adulthood, and such lengthy cohabitation has increased since the mid-1990s (Leccardi 2006). A new term, "continual family" or "long family" was even coined instead of nuclear family to explain the new types of family in Italy in which two adult generations live together, thereby postponing the establishment of the family of procreation (Rossi 1997).

As many studies suggest, the reasons for the delay in moving out are very complex, including not only economic reasons but also many multi-layered reasons, such as psychological aspects, changing intergenerational relationships, and a new emotional attitude between parents and children (Newman and Apteker 2007, 224–225; Scabini and Cigoli 1997; Galland 1997). Household arrangements, however, are different between classes. For example, in Italy and Spain with a low proportion of separate dwellings, highly educated youth tend to have a relatively long unemployment period because they are concerned about the *scarring effects* of the first job and are therefore cautious about choosing a job. During this period, their parents and family take care of them (Mills et al. 2005, 426). In a similar context, the working class is said to make a fast-track transition to separate, compared to the middle class, which can choose a track of extended transition (Jones 2005, 44).

Similarly, in Korea, statistics show that a high percentage of youth live together with their parents, 69% of men and 67% of women aged 30 to 34 as of 2005.³ Also, the concept of *independence* among young adults must be understood in a cultural context. A Korean researcher criticizes the notion of independence, meaning living separately from the family home, as a Western bias, proclaiming that the concept of an *adult* is more complex in Asia. For instance, in China where *filial piety* is considered important, the youth could be considered more adult by staying with their par-

3. Population and Housing Census, 2010.

ents rather than by moving out (Kim, Lee, and Lee 2013). Moreover, in an effort to overcome the dichotomy of dependence and independence in care, the alternative concept of interdependent reciprocity has been suggested in the relationship between parents and children (Sung 2013, 58).

Research Method and Characteristics of Cases

In-depth interviews were conducted for 19 still single working youth who were born in 1975.⁴ Since this study was based on a *life course approach* (Heinz and Marshall 2003; Dannefer 2003; Bruckner and Mayer 2005), information on incidents at crucial moments in their lifetimes was obtained in a way similar to making a life history calendar (Ma and Lee 2012).

The selection of interview cases was given careful attention. The project team of which I was a member tried not to fall into the trap of overrepresenting young people with a high income and metropolitan locality, as one might find in recent portrayals by the mass media. Interviewees were composed of people selected by a theoretical sampling method, and a research company conducted quota sampling for each gender, academic background (college graduates/high school graduates), region (Seoul/large cities in Jeollanam-do and Gyeongsangnam-do provinces), and employment status (regular/irregular). Coworkers of the project team and I conducted interviews intensively from March to May in 2012.

For the analysis I read the transcripts together with team members and discussed the meaning of the characteristics of the cases. Moreover, in the process of writing, the narratives of each case were read carefully so as not to damage the wholeness of the narrative regarding the individual cases (Riessman 1993; McAdams 1993; Denzin 1989; Lieblich and Josselson 1998). Also, efforts were made to gain a contextual understanding of

4. The 19 cases of ever-singles were selected among 50 in-depth interviews originally conducted with support from a project by the National Research Foundation of Korea for the same target group born in 1975.

the history and society in which interviewees' experiences were located.

As shown below in Table 1, regardless of gender and the academic background of cases, the proportion of regular workers was small. The economic condition of the people comprising the cases was not far different from the statistics of preceding studies (Kim Hye-Kyung 2007). Most of the irregular workers in these cases had unstable work histories.

Table 1. Occupation and Income of Ever-single Women

Case No.	Academic background	Current occupation and work status	Monthly income (US\$)
1	College graduate	Web designer (regular worker)	Mid to high
2		Financial company worker (regular worker)	Medium
3		Freelance translator	\$2,600 - \$3,500
4		Counselor at civic group (regular worker)	\$1,700
5		Graduate student (Currently not working)	No response
6		University lecturer	Low
7	High school graduate	Bookkeeper at a subcontractor for a public enterprise (regular worker)	\$3,000-\$3,500
8		Call center operator	Mid to low
9		Various part-time jobs at a convenience store, coffee shop, etc.	Low
10		Part-time jobs, now parking-fee collector	Lowest

Table 2. Occupation and Income of Ever-single Men

Case No.	Academic background	Current occupation and work status	Monthly income (US\$)
A	College graduate	Banker (regular worker)	\$6,000
B		Temporary web programmer	Low
C		Guard at security company	No response
D		Technician at oil company (regular worker)	\$3,900
E		Consultant at communications company & sale of goods using Internet	\$1,700-\$2,600
F		Factory worker, presently not working	Next needy class
G	High school graduate	Health club trainer (regular worker)	\$1,700
H		Laborer at construction site	\$870
I		Delivery man at restaurant	\$1,500

Results of Analysis

Based on the result of the preceding theoretical discussion, the present study will define individualization as the state in which individuals *free* from the institutional protections of the market and the state must get on as directors of their own lives. From this point of view, the unmarried people in this study can be considered as cases that meet the minimum requirement of individualization though each case is different in terms of spontaneity or coerciveness. In the meantime, while familism in modern Korea is provisionally defined, according to prior research, as having a norm of patrilineality, instrumental survival strategies centered on the fam-

ily, and a model valorizing the male breadwinner as central components, I attempt to concretize and enrich the definition through the case analyses in the present paper. It is because this familism does not exist in the form of a fossilized norm (Van Oorschot 2007), but rather is reconstituted by the actors' reasoning and practice in everyday life (Finch and Mason 1993).⁵ The types of individualization among cases are divided into three according to the relationship with the family as analyzed subsequently.

Individualization as Detraditionalization, and Reembedding in the Family

1) Typical Stories but with Some Complexity

The narratives of individualization as detraditionalization were found stronger among women, especially Cases 2, 3, and 5. Among all the cases in this study, Case 5 presented the strongest individualist narrative, that "marriage is not a duty" but is rather can be chosen as a "process of enriching her life." She felt strongly disillusioned with a Korean society that forced her into a mold to the extent she felt "choked." More details needs to be described for this case.

Regarding her early life, she was born as the youngest daughter from a not-so-affluent family in Seoul, graduated from a commercial high school, and was equipped with a degree from Open University, earning income for herself. For her the work had to be "more than just a means of living, even if the income was small." Moreover, she expressed a preference for becoming freelancer without "getting tied down." Her free and open career may have been a slightly lavish dream considering her family background, but she tried to overcome it through self-discipline. Her dream of personal achievement was, admittedly, a part of neoliberal identity, but nonetheless, her obsession with self-development was beyond average.⁶

5. Moreover, state policy changed and supported it, thus leading to what can be called state-sponsored familism (Hahm, 2013). The term familism in my study is used to encompass the macro and micro levels of norm/experience and institution/relationship.

6. Case 5, interview by a coworker, Hannam-dong, Seoul, April 27, 2012.

When I was working at***, I didn't want to waste the lunch break, so I just ate a burger and took piano lessons. For self-improvement, I need to do something. . . it's not a matter of building my resume, but I need to save time and do something. During lunch, I need to eat and I also need to rest my brain because I'm a student who has to always read and study. . . . I need to keep improving and keep expanding my knowledge. . . (emphasis added).

With some money saved from the hard work of wandering through various jobs, she then consummated a dream to study abroad in France, a dream she had had "since she was 20 years old, captivated by the chansons," where, she said, she learned a lot about the value of freedom and individuality, as well as the welfare system. However, it ended in just two and half years because she became really sick through overexertion. After she came back to Korea, she frequently changed jobs, such as working for the immigrant center and a care center for the elderly. Recently, she decided to be a student again at a graduate school for literature, designing herself as a writer in old age. Her entire life trajectory seems to just qualify as model of the notion of being *the director of one's own life* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995).

Now, she is temporarily not working and is back at her parents' home. Since she started studying again, her parent's home, where she was used to getting help as a "sweet youngest daughter," provided a space in which she could take a rest and depend on for her future. Although this case was situated at the extremity of the scale of individualization as choice among ten women, her mind-set of self-seeking was not so unfamiliar compared to other cases of college graduate woman either (Cases 2 and 3).

Moreover, that the location with regard to the order of siblings had an intriguing effect on family attitudes among women cases is noteworthy. It may be coincidental, but in the cases in this study the youngest daughter being last born among five or six siblings seems to have provided a condition for her forming herself as an individual free from the expectations of family norms (Cases 3 and 5). In other words, the status of being a daughter *outside* the patrilineal family system unintentionally led to that experience determining the person as an *individual*. Furthermore, the case of a

fourth daughter out of five daughters and a son could be free from parental expectations because “parents did not have much interest in me” (Case 3). The previously mentioned Case 5 recalled her childhood, saying, “Because I was the youngest, I was an easy child to bring up and the situation was like I was ‘freeloading,’ so I was never told to study like my brother” (Case 5).

Meanwhile, regarding the cases of men, though the motive of *self-seeking* was seldom claimed, some showed an individualist attitude in saying that they did not want to have babies even after marrying (Case E), or wanted to put no special effort in getting married despite a high income and an age comparably older than the normative age for marrying in Korea (Case A). Among the men, Case B exhibited the most individualist story. Since he entered junior college in a computing department, Case B led an independent life in terms of housing and finance while living with his friends and doing web design. He professed an extreme dislike for depending on his parents though his father had an educational background of graduate study and a career as a bureaucrat of high rank. Despite this background, he expressed only a meager expectation about marriage. But his narrative was different from those women who took into account work, family, and life. Instead, his narrative was centered on working and making money. His choice of being single seems to result from the gloomy prospect of being a breadwinner in an overly competitive web design business.⁷

Dating is a bother, and getting married and having kids are also bothersome. In other words, it's too much for me to handle. I need a stable basis in order to get married and fend for my wife and kids, don't I? Without even that, it's not like anyone will help me if I jump into marriage.

This person kept trying to start a business and continued to live apart from his parents, but recently faced with financial difficulties and a lack of funds, he had no other choice than to return to his parents.

In the meantime, while the cases of women tended to show a more

7. Case B, interview by a coworker, Seongnae-dong, Seoul, March 25, 2012.

individualist attitude than those of men, they also seem to share the familist attitude of responsibility for supporting one's parents. Such an attitude was coincidentally related to birth order as in the individualist cases mentioned previously and was conspicuous among the eldest daughters, and this tendency became more prominent when the mother was left alone after the father passed away (Cases 2, 6, and 7). A woman who was assertive enough to quit a job to travel abroad had a strong sense of responsibility as a breadwinner for her mother (Case 2). When she was forced to quit a job for months because the company she had worked for went bankrupt, she wired living expenses to her mother as usual, so her family did not know about her joblessness.

Moreover, the daughters' sense of responsibility was sometimes related to a strong emotional sympathy with their mothers (Cases 6, 7, and 10). Among them, Case 6 was so independent that she never stopped making money after entering college and lived alone after moving out of her parents' house. In fact, she had a deep-rooted sympathy for her mother, who returned home after her husband's business failed and lived a hard life, supporting her parents-in-law there. At this point, Case 6 wanted to get married to a man "who was capable of taking care of her left-alone mother." These strong feelings of emotional sympathy among daughters are in stark contrast to those of sons with normative responsibility for parents (Cases G, E, and F).

2) Gender Difference Intersected with Class: The Experience of Overseas Travel

Differences in gender among the cases also seem to be connected to other conditions. The biggest one, which was unexpectedly found in cases in this study, was in the experience of overseas trips. Four out of six college graduate women experienced travel abroad while only one among the six male cases did. Moreover, only one of seven high school graduates had an experience of traveling abroad.

While reasons for this gap between the genders cannot be construed as the same as those cases of overseas migration among women, according to a study of young Korean women's overseas migration, one of the motives for

migration was to resist authoritarianism and gender discrimination in Korean society (Y. Kim 2012). Though these motives were not clear among the cases in this study, overseas travel seems to have great meaning for developing their lives. Case 3 among others decided to go abroad for freedom and to broaden her experience after quitting a high-income job because she thought that her life “should be happy” and she should be satisfied with the work she does. Thus, she suddenly resigned from her job of seven years in consulting, spent all of her severance pay through a half year of traveling in the United States and Canada, and returned home.⁸

[Traveling] was the time to do what I have never done. . . it didn't have to be a fancy study abroad, but I just wanted to travel freely. My dad called me crazy. ‘You're insane. You have that much money to burn?’ he said. For the first time, ‘Dad, is money the most important thing in the world? I don't think so,’ I told him that for the first time. . . . Everyone called me crazy, but I quit *without any plans* (emphasis added).

Meanwhile, gender differences in overseas travel experiences intersected with class differences in family background and also with the norm of divisions in sex roles. In fact, men in Korea in the past could have a college education not because their families were better off but because they were sons, and they tended to concentrate on their career in contrast to women with self-seeking narratives who have a mixed life course of work, family, and leisure. A representative male case of this type endured a harsh career of doing day and night shift work, without even refusing to work on weekends (Case D). His parents had an elementary school education but he graduated from junior college. He prepared for marriage in haste while meeting women dozens of times through matchmakers and boasted of saving 100 million Korean won (US\$ 100,000) through hard work.⁹ However, behind his economic achievements lay his thoroughly work-centered life.

8. Case 3, interview by the author, Buan, Jeollabuk-do province, April 23, 2012.

9. Case D, interview by the author, Amsa-dong, Seoul, May 6, 2012.

*Individualization Concurring with Embedment in the Family Home:
Coresidence and Intergenerational Solidarity*

Of the 19 cases of ever-singles in the interviews, 14 cases lived with their parents. While the high rate of co-residence in the family home results partly from the Korean cultural taboo of cohabitation before marriage, it also has to do with the long working hours and competitive market environments. A ever-single woman (Case 1),¹⁰ who had grown up in a very large, close-knit extended family and at the same time pursued a life as a *career woman*, completing a graduate course and switching jobs continuously to enhance her career, confessed her mixed feelings about her work-centered life as follows:

[Web] design companies have *no closing hours*. There is opening time, but no closing time. They say 9 to 6, but it's really until 9. . . . (Interviewer: What does work mean in your life?) I work because it is enjoyable. . . . Really, through working, I meet people and become financially independent. . . . But I don't believe in remaining single. I never did. I thought *marriage is a must* but I realized one day, upon looking back, that all I did was work from daybreak to night. . . (emphasis added).

This case once commuted a distance of 100 miles to Seoul every workday by express train because she did not want to live alone, away from her family. Her father even volunteered to be her *chauffeur*, always taking her to the station at daybreak and bringing her home at night, since his daughter went to work with the first train and came home with the last train. Based on this family support, the case could constantly develop her career after finishing graduate school and work as a professional. Though she was an extreme case showing characteristics of familialized individualization, her attitude toward family was not exceptional among the women cases (Cases 2 and 7 also exhibited this attitude).

On the other hand, men who lived together with parents also received psychological and instrumental support from their family. A man who

10. Case 1, interview by a coworker, Gangnam, Seoul, April 26, 2012.

graduated from a prestigious local college and had a somewhat progressive attitude toward politics, led the life of an individualist in transcending the marriage norm and work-centered life, having disqualified himself as a male provider in marriage (Case C). He once had difficulties finding a job as a direct victim of the financial crisis and now works for a security company at a low wage. However, he regarded quality of life as important and thus, he preferred shorter working hours to having a high salary. In the meantime, he had the closest relationship with his parents, living together with them without intermission except for his years of military service. Moreover, he emphasized that he was “an eldest son in the family.”¹¹

I'm the eldest in both my father and mother's sides of the family, so I had a sense of responsibility and also expectations from my uncles on both sides of the family, and such, so even when I was young. . . . I'm the eldest in both sides of the family. . . so my parents have always supported me, and even now, in some ways, look after me. They tell me to get married, but it doesn't work out that easily. . . (emphasis added).

Just as he said, it might have been impossible for him to pursue such a quality of life without his parents' support of housing and housework. Accordingly, he “relaxed motionless after he came home from work.” Still, he expressed not only the instrumental relations he had with his parents regarding their housework and care, but also deep attachment to and emotional solidarity with them, as in feeling pity about his aging parents. Consequently, he took getting married for granted to so much that when he parted from the girlfriend he had seen for seven years, he was determined to marry, even if it had to be a foreign girl. This compromise in his preference seems to reflect his life as both individualist and familist at the same time, considering that filial duty to one's parents in Korea often means that the eldest son in the family should get married and succeed in the family. However, the strategy of embedment in the family home to avoid risk from the market and life course, as seen in previous cases, was unavailable to the less privileged and will be discussed subsequently.

11. Case C, interview by the author, Geumjeong-gu, Busan, April 21, 2012.

*Individualization by Utter Coercion with No Family on which to Depend:
The Complexity of Unhappy Conditions in Job and Family History*

Living in a society that stratifies through education, the less educated cases in this study went through difficulties in gaining an appropriate income. What is worse, many high school graduate cases incidentally showed poor resources in family relationships (Cases 8, 9, 10, and Cases G, I). Therefore, it was hard for their families to be a comfortable shelter for them when they were in transition between being employed and unemployed. In some cases, they moved out from early on because of the conflicts between family members, often caused by the father's violence in the past (Case 10 and Case I).

Among these instances, a few cases were notably suffering from a miserable impoverishment. A story of a high school graduate woman was a terribly unfortunate combination of poverty, disability, and an unhappy family history. Case 10, who was diffident about her appearance due to her slight physical disability and health issue, narrated her nightmare of being fired. She had a part-time job as parking fee collector and said, "I always have a nightmare of hearing 'Stop coming anymore!' I am so scared."¹² Actually she was often worried about her meals. The family history of this case suggests that her moving out unprepared and her independence from the family were mostly related to her father. Her father suffering from a hearing impairment developed a seriously delusional jealousy toward his wife and beat her up. Thus, she felt pity for her mother and had a strong sense of responsibility for supporting her after her parents divorced in spite of her own economic difficulty. Her mother was closely connected to her daughter and even sometimes said, "I can't live without you." A kind of unhealthy codependence seemed to exist between the mother and the daughter.

However, a few unique cases demonstrated that they saw their jobs as coming from their own free choice even though they had gone through a variety of unstable part-time jobs with low wages. For instance, Case 9, a

12. Case 10, interview by the author, Suyu-dong, Seoul, April 8, 2012.

high school graduate, belongs to a type that carves a more independent path than other cases. When she was in the second year of middle school, her father passed away and her elder sister was strict about her behavior. Thus, upon graduating from high school, she left home. Afterwards, she lived with her boyfriend for a considerable period of time but was unable to marry due to financial reasons. She had to wander through various jobs to earn a living and her view of an occupation was as follows:¹³

I tried to enter another career, but because I didn't graduate from college, there were limits after all. I thought it was better to work comfortably, part-time, and like I said, the wages then were very small. . . . So I think *I made the call myself*. Rather than getting a proper job, *let's just work part-time comfortably at the times I want*. That was how it was... when I didn't want to work, I rested and played around; then, when I ran out of money, I worked again (emphasis added).

However, with limited opportunities, their *choices* of various jobs can be called exemplary cases of literally coerced individualization. Among male subjects, a few cases with health problems were leading miserable lives at the periphery of a society with poor protection for the less privileged (Cases F and H). One case was unable either to marry or to obtain work because he was found to have a critical illness after long years of work in various factories (Case F). In another case, though his staying unmarried was partly because of a separation from a longtime girlfriend, a slight alcohol problem also seemed to have contributed to restricting him to this category (Case H).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explain the complex process of individualization both as a liberation and coercion along with the strong familism of Korea in the neoliberal era under the tyranny of the market.

13. Case 9, interview by a coworker, Yeungdeungpo-dong, Seoul, March 25, 2012.

For this purpose, in-depth interviews with 19 cases of ever-singles from the same birth cohort of 1975, who turned 37 years old at the time of this research in 2012, were conducted. The major findings of this study are as follows:

Firstly, individualization in Korean society, lacking protection from the market and support from the state, requires family and familism as a safety net. According to the present study, the unmarried older youth group of Korea under harsh neoliberalism at the turn of the century is driven to overcome the danger of the risky side of individualization by depending on the family of orientation as the high proportion of coresidence with parents and intermittent returning to the family home in this study demonstrate.

Secondly, the relationship between familism and individualization can be divided into diverse types based on the ways of combining individualization and familism in each case. These types include a strong disembedding from and weak reembedding in family, a weak disembedding from and strong reembedding in family, and individualization by utter coercion with no family to depend on. The first case features detraditionalization and a life of self-pursuit, which are frequently seen among female college graduates, but instability of the market resulted, though intermittently, in a reembedding in family of orientation. Meanwhile, life as a self-pursuing individual in the second type coexists with the familist way of living, as shown in the long time coresidence with parents, in which this group enjoyed emotional care and services from parents for housing and housework, as well as providing some financial help for parents. The third type of cases involves literally forced individualization by the very uncertainty of employment. This type can often be found among groups with low education overlapping weak resources in the family relationship in the past. This type demonstrates the reality of a marginal life in which survival itself is unstable.

Thirdly, the process of individualization intersects with various conditions, including gender, class, birth order, and prior family relationship. First, cases that seem individualistic in terms of detraditionalization and spontaneity were more frequent among women than men, and men's narratives showed traditional responsibility toward parents as sons, as well as

the modern norm of the husband's role as breadwinner. However, discussing gender difference in simple terms is difficult because other conditions impinge on it.

For high school graduate cases of women, finding narratives of self-realization is hard, which indicates a strong process of nonspontaneous individualization. Meanwhile, the female cases who were first in birth order, and especially those whose father passed away, showed a strong sense of responsibility for supporting their parents comparable to that of men, but their responsibility demonstrates more of an emotional commitment rather than carrying out the norms of filial duty. This emotional dimension of intergenerational relationship could be better categorized as familism as a relationship rather than as an institution. Moreover, what was interesting was the unintended consequence that paradoxically resulted from a patrilineal familism centered on the son, as shown in several cases involving the youngest daughter, who had no burden of expectation from parents as their older brothers had. Meanwhile, among various family backgrounds, unhappy family experiences in the past proved to be deeply related to a forced individualization. Domestic violence and a history of family conflicts were revealed to be important causes for prematurely leaving home unprepared.

Fourthly, the following theoretical implications of this study on the relationship of individualization and familism might be suggested. A preceding study by Ochiai (2011, 2012), referring to the experience of Japan as "familialistic individualization," also seems to be pertinent to Korea though Ochiai's language is more characteristic of a policy regime than one of multidimensional familism combining a micro-level usage like mine. Furthermore, this study indicates a difference from Kim Hye-Kyung (2013), which implied that familism had failed but through overemphasizing the normative side of the family as an institution. The result of the present study found an interconnection between individualization and familism by taking into account the changing aspects of familism, composed not only of a normative level of filial piety *toward* parents, but also of multidimensions, such as *relational* familism and the reciprocal relationship between parents and children shown in the care provided by the

parents. *Transformed* familism found in the intergenerational relationship is, therefore, both a structured consequence of marketized individualization and also a structuring force of individualization itself.

Finally, the characteristics of the cases in this study deserve additional comment in order to clarify the meanings of the study results. The stories suggested here may be much different from those widely represented in the media, including those individuals of high income living in the metropolitan area of Seoul, who focus on their lives as *free* individuals or real self-seekers. The cases in this study, in contrast, are those recruited through a theoretical sampling of people from diverse backgrounds in gender, class (education), employment status, and region. Hopefully, this diversity in selection may help tell a truth hidden by the media. At the same time, however, the individualism of people younger than the cases in this study should have been growing, hence further research should be carried out about them as well.

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