

# Cultural Values on Marriage and Work Roles and the Intention to Terminate Employment: A Study of Female Factory Workers in Korea\*

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## I. Introduction

As the number of women in the labor force has increased in the process of worldwide industrialization, a greater degree of attention has been given to the issue of female labor force participation. Outstanding among the issues dealt with in the social science literature are: the role of women in the national economic growth(Boserup, 1974; Tinker and Bramsen, 1976); the concern over the various aspects of disadvantages and discriminatory practices against working women, in the social institutions and economic organizations(Pavalko, 1971; Almquist, 1977); the problem of role conflict caused by women's employment(Holmstrom, 1972; Safilios-Rothschild, 1972; Skolnik and Skolnik, 1980); the demographic impact of female employment (Oppenheimer, 1973; Birdsall, 1976); and the cultural values and socio-psychological images of working women in society(Helson, 1972; Bernard, 1975; Blumberg, 1976; Hunter, 1976; Laws 1976; Eber, 1976).

The focus of this study is on the last item listed above, that is, the cul-

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tural values and personal attitudes of working women and their inclination toward employment. Bluntly stated, the main question of this study is: "Why do young women leave the labor force upon marriage?" The significance of this question may be viewed from different angles. For instance, one may be interested in the negative effect of high turnover of a particular age group of female workers, viewed as an advantage to the company for maintaining low wages. From the viewpoint of the individual workers, however, entrance into the labor force, in the first place, may have been motivated by economic considerations. If this is true, then the decision to terminate employment at marriage needs explanation. Especially, considering the increased opportunity for labor force participation on the part of women, created by the rapid process of industrialization, the fact that women tend to end their working career with marriage seems to be worth exploring.

Our main interest is in the effect of cultural values and social psychological pressures felt by the working women on their decision to discontinue employment upon marriage. No doubt, there are other factors operating in the decision-making, such as various discriminatory and disadvantageous practices against married working women, or for that matter, against all women. But in a case study of a multinational corporation in Seoul, which boasts the opportunity that "dramatically exceeds that available to most workers with similar skills in Korea" (Control Data Corporation, 1976:7), it was reported that only nine out of 715 female employees chose to remain at work when they got married. Moreover, one could also expect the girl to retain employment if her husband is out of job. Again, however, another study has indicated that the marrying girl does give up her regularly salaried job even when, or especially when, her prospective spouse is out of work or has no stable job. The explanation given for this move was that she would have to quit the job especially when the boy is jobless because they have more danger of upsetting the husband-superior wife-inferior structure of the couple relationship (Chung, 1977:98). Of course, later on, by the realistic pressure, she would have to seek employment, but this time in a

more traditional, irregular, self-employed type of work.

The general assumption underlying this study is that the more tradition-oriented the woman is in her attitudes toward work and marriage, the more likely she is to leave the work force upon marriage. In order to examine this assumption in more detail, we have formulated several working hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 1.* The more strongly tradition-oriented the woman is with respect to her conception of woman's status as dependent on a male figure in the kinship context along her life course change, the more likely she is to discontinue employment upon marriage.

As a corollary to the above assumption, but as a strong reflection of the Confucian ideology supposedly prevalent in Korea, the traditional conception of woman's status used to be that she is always to depend upon a male figure in the kin group, which changes along her life course stage. In her youth, she is to be a dependent of her father; after marriage her supporting pillar is the husband; and after her husband passes away she should rely on and follow the way of her son (Kim, 1964; Choi, 1966). Thus, if the woman still maintains a strong sense of female dependence on male in this particular context, she would feel uncomfortable remaining in the labor force after marriage. Even though work in itself may not operate as a factor boosting the status of woman in the family, a regularly paid, stable employment could enhance the bargaining power of the woman *vis-à-vis* her spouse (Heer, 1963; Safilios-Rothschild, 1970; Lee and Kim, 1977). And in a male oriented society like Korea, employment of this type by the woman can hurt the ego of the man in the house. This would be a situation a traditionally oriented woman would like to avoid.

*Hypothesis 2.* The more tradition-oriented the woman is in her sex role image of working women, the more likely she is to terminate employment at marriage.

Differential aspirations by women have often been noted by many authors

(Pavalko, 1971; Laws, 1976). Not only the society in general expects of women lesser extent of educational and occupational aspirations, women themselves have been found to have relatively low mobility aspirations in Korea (Koh et al., 1963; Kim, 1979). In fact, the opportunity structure in the larger society is usually less favorable to women than men, and the incentives for work are comparatively poor for women (Harvey, 1975; Laws, 1976). Under the circumstances, the woman would be likely to seek her status mobility in marriage.

*Hypothesis 3.* The more strongly the woman perceived marriage as the most important life goal and as the most significant channel for status mobility, the more likely she is to terminate her employment status.

This particular hypothesis is a derivative of the above two hypotheses. The woman who considers marriage not only as an important life goal but as a channel for status mobility, with a dependency syndrome, a negative sex role image of working women, and a low level of aspiration, would tend to value marriage over and above work career.

*Hypothesis 4.* The more strongly tradition-oriented the woman is in terms of her "image of happy woman," the more likely she is to leave the work force after marriage.

In most societies, the traditional image of a happy woman entails woman's role as housewife and mother whose right place is the home (Pavalko, 1971; Helson, 1972; Bernard, 1975; Blumberg, 1976; Hunter, 1976; Eber, 1976). Therefore, she would look upon her employment status as necessarily temporary (Harvey, 1975) until she gets married and settled down as a "happy woman."

*Hypothesis 5.* The less committed the woman is to working life and more to family role, the more likely she is to suspend her employment after marriage.

Role conflict as a working wife and mother can be a keen problem for

employed women (Holmstrom, 1972; Safilios-Rothschild, 1972; Harvey, 1975; Skolnik, 1980). But as long as she manages to keep this conflict within limit, it may not be as painful as it seems. Insofar as the woman's aspirations remain with her marital-familial roles due to the limited opportunity structure in the place of work and due to the relative attraction of marital life, she will be likely to resolve this conflict by leaving her employment (Heer, 1963).

## II. The Data

The data reported in this paper constitute a small portion of materials gathered in a sample survey of female and male factory workers in Korea conducted in the fall of 1979. For the female sample, two firms, one in textile and the other in electronics industry, were selected, and for the male sample, two companies, one in textile and the other in automobile industry, were chosen. This paper analyzes only the female workers' data. Due to practical difficulties, we had to rely on the cooperation of the local union leaders to conduct a sort of group interview in the factory or in the dormitory in which the individual respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaires at their leisure. The profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 1.

Since there were no married women included in the sample, in fact, because there are very few married women employees in either of the selected firms, we had to concentrate on the intention to either continue or discontinue employment after marriage as the dependent variable. In doing so, however, we have used four different items. The first item asks if she would continue working after marriage with no qualification. The other three involve various conditions under which she still would remain in the work force after marriage. These conditions are: 1) to improve family's economic situation; 2) only if working conditions are equal to those of men; and 3) only if leave for child birth or facilities for child care are availa-

Table 1. Summary of Personal Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	N	(%)
Total	606	100
<i>Industry</i>		
Textile	310	51.2
Electronic	296	48.8
<i>Age</i>		
-19	81	13.4
20	94	15.5
21	89	14.7
22	118	19.5
23	94	15.5
24	63	10.4
25~29	67	11.1
30~34	—	—
35~39	—	—
40+	—	—
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	606	100.0
Married	—	—
<i>Residential Background</i>		
Rural farm	336	55.4
Small town	42	6.9
Medium city	35	5.8
Large city	193	31.8
<i>Sibling Order</i>		
First child	139	22.9
Second child	149	24.6
Third child	120	19.8
Fourth child	87	14.4
Fifth child	48	7.9
Sixth child	38	6.3
Seventh child	17	2.8
Eighth child	6	1.0
Ninth & over	2	.3
No information		
<i>Self-evaluation of Family's SES</i>		
Upper-upper	3	.5
Lower-upper	13	2.1
Upper-middle	189	31.2
Lower-middle	251	41.4
Upper-lower	107	17.7
Lower-lower	35	5.8
No information	8	1.3

ble. These conditional statements are added with a view to controlling for the economic motivation, discriminatory practices in the work place, and the family obligation, in the female worker's decision to continue or terminate employment after marriage.

This variable of intention was then analyzed in relation to five attitudinal variables each dealing with the aspect of the respondent's attitudes toward work and marriage specified in the five hypotheses mentioned earlier. These five variables were measured in terms of attitude scales constructed on the basis of factor analysis of 26 items originally included in the questionnaire. Out of these 26, twelve items were selected for the present purpose.

**Table 2. Attitude Scales with Factor Loadings**

Scale (Variable)/Item Dimension/Description	Factor Loading
I. Female Dependence	
(1) Women should follow "Old Three Ways" of father, husband, son	.593
(3) Success for woman is to help husband succeed	.487
II. Negative Sex Role Image of Women	
(7) There is no need to educate women who anyway should stay home & take care of housekeeping	.303
(16) Since there is no future for women in work, she'd better get married	.475
(17) It is right for women to be in lower status & obey men's order	.329
III. Importance of Marriage as Life Goal & Channel for Status	
(9) Women's channel for upward mobility is through marrying man of higher status	.323
(13) Marriage is the most important life goal for women	.355
(25) "Happy woman" is one who marries a man of high status & economic comfort	.805
IV. Image of "Happy Woman" in Career	
(11) "Happy woman" is one who self-realizes through career free from marriage bond	.296
(22) "Happy woman" is one who leads family life while enjoying career	.770
V. Emphasis on Career for Women	
(19) Women should be devoted to family life, for husband dislikes career for wife	.366
(20) Equal opportunity for working life should be available to women with ability	.688

Note: (1) Numbers in parentheses indicate the item number in the questionnaire.

(2) For item 11, the factor loading .296 was considered satisfactory.

(3) For item 19, the score was adjusted or reversed to indicate the higher score as less traditional in nature.

The procedure followed for the scale construction was to select only those items that clustered together in one factor each with a factor loading of .30 or larger. The factor analysis of 26 items yielded eight factors, out of which the twelve items used in this paper clustered together in five separate factors. The score for each scale was obtained in the following fashion: first, scores 1 through 5 were assigned to the Likert-type response categories, the higher score representing a less traditional attitude; the scale score for each item then was calculated by this original Likert score with a factor score obtained through factor analysis; since there were variations in the number of items included in each scale (or variable), ranging from 2 to 3, the final scale score was to be the average score of items contained in each scale. Three of the five scales had 2 items each, and the other two scales, 3 items each. The items and the result of factor rotation are summarized in Table 2.

### III. Findings

#### A. Intention Regarding Continuation of Work after Marriage

According to our survey, 89.1 percent, or 540, of the 606 girls intend to quit their job when they marry, while only 10.9% (66) would like to remain at work after marriage. This indeed is a great majority. When asked to give their own reasons for intending to continue working, a majority of them indicated non-economic reasons, such as self development, concern about rotting in grinding housekeeping, activities for working women, and contribution to society by offering skill and ability. About four out of ten gave economic reasons which are not exactly sheer economic necessity but rather which have to do with improving the comfortable financial situation in the family. Thus, even the economic reason represents largely some form of improvement (See Table 3).

Then, what about the reasons for intending not to remain at work after marriage? In this case, as shown in the lower panel of Table 3, the tension



**Table 3. Reasons for Intending to Continue or Terminate Employment**

Reasons for Intending	(N)	(%)
<i>To Continue Employment</i>		
To help improve comfortable economic condition for family	24	36.4
To continue social participation for self development	19	28.8
Out of worry that one may rot by housekeeping only	10	15.2
Out of desire to engage in activities for working women	8	12.1
To offer skill and ability to society	3	4.4
Out of economic necessity	2	3.0
Total intending to remain at work	66	99.9
<i>To Terminate Employment</i>		
Too hard to maintain dual life-marriage & work	181	33.5
To devote completely to child bearing & rearing	179	33.1
Too hard & tired on job	85	15.7
Simply because of marriage	55	10.2
Because husband may not like it	11	2.0
Because workplace dislikes married women	11	2.0
This workplace not appropriate for married women	7	1.3
Other	2	.4
No information	2	.4
Total	540	99.9

between marriage and work, the need to concentrate on family life, especially child bearing and rearing, and the marriage itself are the crucial considerations. Only a very small proportion of the girls indicate the adverse conditions at the workplace as the reason for quitting the job.

Anticipating some of these conditions, we have in fact provided four different questions regarding their intention. In addition to the straightforward question of whether or not they intend to remain at work, we have suggested three different conditions under which they are asked to make the decision. And they are as follows: to improve family's economic condition for a comfortable life; if working conditions become equal between men and women; and whether they would work after childbirth, if leave for childbirth or care facilities are available. When these conditions are given, the number of women wanting to continue employment after marriage has increased to a great extent, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Intention to Continue Employment after Marriage(%)**

Conditions	Would Continue	Only until Childbirth	Would Quit	Total (N)
Unconditional intention	10.9	—	89.1	100.0 (606)
Intention to Continue only to improve family economic condition	34.2	—	65.8	100.0
Intention to Continue only if conditions equal to those of men	36.9	27.3	36.7	100.0
Intention to Continue after childbirth only if leave for childbirth & child care center available	36.3	—	63.7	100.0

At any rate, it is interesting to note that these young women would change their mind if certain conditions are met. And these conditions of course indicate some of the factors affecting their decision to either continue or discontinue employment after marriage. To reiterate, these conditions have to do with family financial situation, childbirth, and working conditions.

### **B. Working Hypotheses Tested**

Now, we will examine our findings to see if the five working hypotheses may be rejected. For this purpose, we have presented Table 5 summarizing the results. For each of the five attitudinal dimensions, mean scores for each of four intention categories were computed and they are compared by analysis of variance method. Those scores in which no significant differences were found by F-test were left out of the table.

*Female Dependency.* In the case of Hypothesis 1, we posited that the stronger the traditional dependence on male figures in the woman's attitude, the more likely is she to quit the job upon marriage. According to the data, a significant difference is found in this attitude score only with respect to the female worker's intention to discontinue her work career, under the condition that childcare provisions are available at the workplace. Those who are more dependent (lower score) in their inclination tend to express intention to terminate employment after marriage, even if such provisions are given. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is not to be rejected off hand.

Table 5. Intention to Remain at Work, Related to Attitude to Work and Marriage

Intention	Attitude Scale Dimensions(Mean Score)				
	I Female Depend- ency	II Negative Sex Role Image	III Import- ance of Marriage	IV "Happy Woman"	V Emphasis on Career
1. Unconditional Intention					
Would continue	—	—	—	1.57	1.34
Would quit	—	—	—	1.44	1.24
F-test	—	—	—	$P < .05$	$P < .003$
2. Only to Improve Family Economy					
Would work	—	.61	.94	1.56	1.31
Would quit	—	.59	.88	1.40	1.22
F-test	—	$P < .006$	$P < .03$	$P < .001$	$P < .005$
3. Only if Conditions Equal to Men					
Would continue	—	.61	—	1.55	1.32
Until childbirth	—	.59	—	1.42	1.24
Would quit	—	.58	—	1.38	1.19
F-test	—	$P < .003$	—	$P < .001$	$P < .001$
4. Only if Leave for Child-birth, Childcare Available					
Would continue	.89	.61	—	1.56	1.31
Would quit	.83	.59	—	1.39	1.22
F-test	$P < .03$	$P < .003$	—	$P < .001$	$P < .001$

*Negative Sex Role Image.* Hypothesis 2 may not be rejected, on the basis of our findings, because on three out of four intention statements, those who hold negative conceptions of woman's status and work role (lower score) consistently show a disposition to discontinue their working career with marriage. In other words, regardless of their need to improve the family economy, leveling of working conditions for women, or availability of childbirth and childcare provisions, the female workers with a more traditional image of women tend to opt for marital life over career.

*Importance of Marriage.* For Hypothesis 3 which deals with the women's idea of marriage as the most important life goal and as a status channel, in connection with their intention to continue their career, a significant

difference is found only with regard to the intention to remain at work to improve the economic situation of the family. In this case, too, the stronger the traditional conception of the importance of marriage, the greater is the likelihood that the girl would quit the job, even under the condition that there might be a need to improve the family's financial situation.

*Image of "Happy Woman" Pursuing Career.* It is in the case of Hypothesis 4 that statistically significant mean score variations are found on all four intention statements. Whether certain conditions are given or not, the female factory workers who are less inclined to find work as an element of the image of "Happy Woman" show a tendency to suspend their working life upon marriage.

*Emphasis on Career for Women.* Here also, the mean score differences are significant on all four intention statements, strongly suggesting the plausibility of the assumption made in Hypothesis 5. Those female workers who value career for women despite the objection of their husbands or those who stress equality on the job between sexes tend to express a stronger inclination to continue employment after marriage without regard to various conditions posed.

In summary, the findings consistently indicate that our assumptions regarding the traditional orientation toward work and marriage and the intention to remain at work after marriage are plausible.

#### IV. Discussion

Despite the increased opportunity for labor force participation by women, due to the changing labor market conditions created by the process of industrialization, and despite a rather high rate of labor market participation by women, the fact remains that most of the young female workers terminate their working life upon marriage. We were primarily concerned with this phenomenon in this study. It is a fact that many of these young girls seek employment for economic reasons. But when they enter marriage

bond, they decide to leave employment, often regardless of the economic ability of their husbands. No doubt, there are various conditions in the workplace which are unfavorable to women and sometimes discriminatory against married women. But if they are really pressed by circumstances, they would still continue working.

It is in this context that we have assumed that the cultural values and attitudes toward work and marriage must be an important factor to be considered. Thus, we have postulated that the more traditionally oriented the woman is in her attitude to work and marriage, the more likely she is to discontinue work at marriage. We have suggested five separate working hypotheses to deal with different aspects of such attitudes. And then, we have examined whether or not differences in these attitudes are reflected in the intention to continue or discontinue employment upon marriage. The data were drawn from a sample survey of 606 female workers employed in a textile firm and electronics factory. Analysis of the data has rendered support to all of the five working hypotheses by failing to reject them.

Our tentative conclusion based on the data analysis is that the stronger the traditional orientation to work and marriage, the more likely is the woman to quit the job after marriage. This holds true even after certain conditions are posed to sharpen the woman's intention. Financial considerations, working conditions favorable to women, and provision for childbirth and childcare are those conditions. Therefore, we surmise that cultural values prevalent in Korean society plays a very significant role in the decisionmaking about continuation of participation in work force after marriage.

In the larger report (Lee and Lee, 1982), we have made more extensive analyses of various other factors related to the intention. But in this limited space, we have confined ourselves to the attitudinal factor. Of course, we should have compared those who remain at work even after marriage with those who have left the job in order to relate attitudes to actual behavior, instead of another attitudinal variable. Nevertheless, we have found so few married factory workers in the first place. Even asked about

their future intention, more than eight out of ten girls expressed a desire to quit the job when they get married.

No claim is made as to the representativeness of the sample, but the present study seems to offer an important insight into the significance of value orientations and attitudinal dispositions in the decision-making behavior of human individuals. Especially, in a rapidly industrializing country like Korea, the role of traditional values should not be overlooked lightly. This not only has important policy implications but also sheds light on the role of the traditional element in industrialization and social change.

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