

## HAS THE ROLE STRUCTURE REALLY CHANGED BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE IN KOREA?\*

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In response to and because of the forces of industrialisation the Korean family has changed demographically, culturally, and socially. These changes are 'alive' and exerting an influence upon everyday life in Korea - but traditional beliefs still persist. The paper focuses upon these changes with regard to changes in role structure. Role structure in traditional society was strictly differentiated inside and outside the home. It was rigorously dichotomised by sex and by age. The situation has changed in the process of industrialisation during the last a few decades. Four different sorts of role performances will be discussed; housework, childrearing, outside activities, and economic activities. In these areas a strict role differentiation was expected in traditional society, however the idea has greatly changed, meeting the demands of young generations, sometimes with deterioration of women's status.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of the role has been influenced by several intellectual traditions: interactionism, behaviourism, utilitarianism, pragmatism, and phenomenology. All these traditions influenced the behavioural capacity of individuals, crucial to playing roles. Role theory is roughly comprised of the structuralist approach and the interactionist approach. The former focuses on the social characteristics of role assignment, the latter on inter-personal relationships between and among role performers. The two approaches differ by perception of the nature of script guiding role behaviour. The scholars belonging to the former tradition, such as Parsons or Linton, argue that there are norms attached to each status position in a social structure, such that roles are simply the behaviour of people in particular positions following normative script (Linton 1963, p.114; Parsons 1951; Merton 1957; Levinson 1978; Goode 1960, pp. 483-96). The latter scholars, including R. H. Turner, Handel, Colomy, and Blumer, argue that norms are only broad parameters within which individuals make roles confirming self and meeting their needs (Turner 1962, pp. 397-411; Turner 1979, pp. 114-122;

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Turner and Colomy 1987, pp.114-22.; Turner 1988; Turner 1991, pp.18-23; Biddle 1979; Heiss 1981). Eventually, both are the heads and the tails of the same coin but different in their primary emphasis. Both regard the family as individuals interacting with each other.

Microscopically, a role in a family is decided according to familial characteristics. Elements such as sex, age, and generation ascribe to each family member a position, or role, and a certain amount of power in the family (Close and Collins 1979, pp. 31-47; Ericksen 1979, pp. 301-13). Between generations, the parent's role is given to the elder generation, and the children's position to the younger generation. Again, the children's role is different between daughter and son roles. The more children a couple has, the more complicated are the role relations among the children. Even power sharing among children often gets very sophisticated. Role structure becomes more extensive and more tangled when sharing a roof with another generation like parents or grandchildren. The role structure among family members becomes more diversified and more complicated as the number of children and generations increases.

To add to this complexity, role distribution is characterised by its duality (Berheide 1984, pp. 37-55). An individual can have two or more roles within a family at the same time. For example, a woman can play the roles of housewife to her husband, mother to her children, and daughter-in-law to her parents-in-law. The smaller the family is, the simpler each member's position becomes. The bigger the family by generation, the more doubtful role allocation within a family is.

Macroscopically, role and authority in the family are influenced by social, cultural, and environmental variables as well (Conran 1977). Role relations in the family are significantly influenced by the sort of family pattern which is prevalent: by how big or small the average household size is, and by what sort of social norms concerning family life prevail within a society etc. Changes in any of these non-familial factors can have a significant impact on role relations within a family, not only in a quantitative sense but also at a qualitative level.

The same changes of role structure within the family have happened in Korea, both at macro and at micro level.<sup>1</sup> The decline of the three

<sup>1</sup> Many scholars were devoted to the study of role structure in the family in the fashion of social surveys in 1970s and 80s. Among them the below are a few of them, they include, Han, Nam-Jei. 1983. "Role Change in the Korean Family." *Industrial Society and Development of Our Home* (Korea Women's Development Institute); Choi, Jae-Seok. 1969. "The role structure of Korean rural families." *Journal of Chindan Association* 32; Mun, Sook-Jae. 1980. "The Influence of the Culture to Home Management Behaviour." *Journal of Korean Association of Home Economics* 42:21-28.

generational family household made role relations within the family far simpler than ever before. At the same time, the density of relationships has been far intensified. Thus, much of the previous role relations between married couples and their parents have diminished. The relational density of couples to their children has been reinforced, while the increase in families with a small number children has also intensified and simplified the relationship.

These changes are closely connected to the non-familial factors as well. First, the weakening of the stem family principle has changed the position of each member. Next, the rapid increase in urban migration, followed by the increase in the number of separated households has led to changes in the distribution of roles and power. Cultural changes arising out of the feminist movement and individualism have led to similar changes in the role distribution. These changes reached even to the qualitative level. The vertical power relations among family members in traditional society have changed to more horizontal ones. Once strictly differentiated, roles associated with sex and age have now become more co-operative.

#### DATA SOURCE

In order to examine these changes, survey data from The Changing Family Functions and Role Relations in Korea (CFFRR), carried out by the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA) in 1990, have been analysed. Of the 2,923 households in the survey, 1,939 households containing still married women are the target of this analysis. Women made single by the death of their husbands or by divorce are excluded. Three-generation families composed of daughter-in-law and mother-in-law were almost equally distributed by region, but two-generation families were three times more frequent in the urban areas than in the rural areas.

There are a few points about the sample which need to be noted. To begin with, in three generational families, mothers-in-law are partly excluded. This might lead to a misinterpretation of the role structure in the family. The next problem is the exclusion of husbands or children from the analysis. As a matter of fact it is hardly possible to encompass all family members due to the lack of time and research funds. Yet given the Korean domestic situation relying on the housewife, the sample is not wholly misleading. The last problem comes from the lack of comparable historical data. There are many case studies of family roles, but nation-wide surveys on the subjects are very rare. Even the results of the survey contradict each other. To compensate for the lack of historical data, age-cohorts of the interviewee can

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MARRIED WOMEN BY FAMILY PATTERN AND BY REGION

| Age   | Three generational family |       |       | Two generational family |        |       |
|-------|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------------------------|--------|-------|
|       | whole                     | urban | rural | whole                   | urban  | rural |
| Total | 100.0                     | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0                   | 100.0  | 100.0 |
| (N)   | (275)                     | (154) | (121) | (1624)                  | (1195) | (469) |
| 15-24 | 6.5                       | 5.8   | 7.4   | 5.2                     | 5.9    | 3.4   |
| 25-34 | 40.7                      | 44.8  | 35.5  | 41.9                    | 47.4   | 27.8  |
| 35-44 | 28.4                      | 31.8  | 24.0  | 27.                     | 29.5   | 23.2  |
| 45-54 | 20.4                      | 15.6  | 26.4  | 17.8                    | 14.3   | 26.8  |
| 55-64 | 2.9                       | 1.3   | 5.0   | 6.1                     | 2.2    | 16.0  |
| 65+   | 1.1                       | 0.6   | 1.7   | 1.3                     | 0.7    | 2.8   |

be attempted but they do not look wholly convincing. As shown in table 1, the cell size of age-cohorts are not equally distributed, but are greater for those in their thirties and forties. Except for the urban two generational families numbers of each category are too small to be quite reliable. It may as a result, be more plausible to compare traditional society to present-day Korea at a descriptive and holistic level. In spite of all the shortcomings, the data can give some insight into the change of role structure in broad terms.

## CHANGES IN ROLE PERFORMANCES

### Housework

Housework includes preparing meals, cleaning the house, laundry, needlework, production of soy and bean paste, and interior decoration or repair. With the exception of repair of the flat, these were firmly believed to be the responsibility of the housewife. In the case of soy and bean paste, this was one of the most important annual responsibilities for housewives in traditional society. Preparation of a suitable amount and achieving a good taste of the soy or bean to last a whole year long for use in almost every cooking process was very important for female family members. No commercial product was available, and in any case would have been ridiculed. Sometimes a taste of the soy or bean paste produced by bride's family was requested by a groom's mother before an offer of marriage was made. All affairs concerned with food, clothing, and shelter were the absolute domain of women, and male family members could not interfere under any conditions in traditional society. This principle was applied even to children under 7 years of age.<sup>2</sup> A small boy who happened to enter the

kitchen just for a drink would be disgraced and sometimes punished both by his mother and by his father. Housework was not a thing a manly man ought to give any attention to (Han 1989; Choi 1985).

Housework was rigorously differentiated not only by sex but also by generation. The mother-in-law was the supreme commander and supervisor inside the family; the daughter-in-law was expected to be simply a sincere follower (Choi 1985). She could have independent opinions on domestic affairs only after her mother-in-law passed away. However old and however incompetent her mother-in-law was, a woman was strictly expected to ask her direction for every domestic affair no matter how trivial, because of the strong orientation to filial piety imposed by Confucianism. Even the householder could not interrupt a mother-in-law's despotic role in relation to the other female members of the household. An order from a mother-in-law and execution by her daughter-in-law were the typical division of labour in the traditional family.

This situation has changed as a result of industrialisation. The pattern of change can be summarised in a few points (table 2).<sup>3</sup> First, husbands' contribution for the house-work averages ten percent throughout the nation and across different family patterns. This proportion does not mean the husband's role has increased by this amount in present day Korea. Husbands' participation is far smaller than the statistics might suggest. In spite of the contempt of male members participating in domestic affairs, those demanding physically hard labour like house repair or fence mending were always given to men. As these activities were included in the domain of the domestic duties, the actual increase in the proportion of husbands' contribution is far smaller than the statistics appear to indicate. Husbands from the rural stem families contribute more than other husbands, even more than the contribution from their mothers. The reason for this is that their farming situation allows them to participate in domestic affairs more easily than other jobs do. Other husbands in non-agricultural occupations have their workplace separated from home. They are chained to the

<sup>2</sup> Koreans use a unique calculation for age. About one and half years are added more than the Westerners calculate. This is because Koreans calculate age from the beginning of the year while westerners count completed years. In addition, because an infant gets another one year older if it passes over the first new year since the birth. The Korean age seven years old equals the five years old of Western boys and girls.

<sup>3</sup> While the percentage of involvement in each area was measured by time spent on each activity in an area, which was finally summated and averaged. CFFRR asked who were spending the longest time for each activity in each area, gave ordinal numbers in the order of contribution amount, and finally summated and averaged the whole of the ordinal number to find the best contributor.

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE OF DOMESTIC DUTIES AS ASSIGNED TO EACH FAMILY MEMBER BY REGION AND BY FAMILY PATTERN

|                             | Urban areas |         | Rural areas |         |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|
|                             | stem        | nuclear | stem        | nuclear |
| Total                       | 100.0       | 100.0   | 100.0       | 100.0   |
| Housewife (daughter-in-law) | 71.0        | 80.5    | 74.2        | 83.2    |
| Husband                     | 9.1         | 9.6     | 11.6        | 9.7     |
| Mother-in-law               | 13.1        | 2.2     | 9.1         | 1.2     |
| Others                      | 6.8         | 7.7     | 5.1         | 5.9     |

Abbreviation: stem - stem family household; nuclear - nuclear family household

workplace and have not enough spare time to lend a hand in their domestic duties like house or fence repair, and more readily employ a repairman. Farming husbands do not make a strict division between home affairs and farming and more readily participate in domestic matters. Moreover, the value of cash is still too important for farmers to pay for simple labour. Naturally all these things have made rural husbands from stem families contribute to domestic affairs more than other husbands.

The second characteristic of the role distribution in present day Korea is the participation of individuals other<sup>4</sup> than family members in domestic duties. These others comprise roughly two groups: domestic servant or daily maid, and the market. First the role of present day domestic servant or daily maid was in traditional society fulfilled by slaves. Considering the high proportion of slave's participation, the domain of the home help's role has been sharply narrowed. The proportion of households in possession of slaves was 27.5 percent in 17th century, and 37.5 percent in 19th century (Choi 1986, p.493). However, the total percentage of others in the present day does not exceed 7.7 percent of urban nuclear families. The reason for the decrease in the proportion of others' contribution came from the abolition of slavery in the modern era and high expenses for labour charges.

In spite of this, the proportion of others' contributions is still a non-negligible amount. The share in urban areas is bigger than in rural areas, and is bigger in nuclear families than in stem families. This is the result of the increase in the proportion of housewives participating in economic activities outside the home. Domestic servants or daily maids have been needed to make up for the domestic work they can not do while they are at their work place. Even when a mother-in-law is able to contribute to

<sup>4</sup> The percentage of others is a proportion of households with non-family help, including non-resident servants.

domestic matters, the home help was needed to do physically hard labour not fit for the aged woman. In such work as cleaning, laundering, and preparation of meals, a dual career woman is likely to make use of a paid servant.

The other outside contributor is the public market. Particularly for soy and bean paste, many housewives deeply depend on the public market. According to CFFRR, at most 7.3 percent of urban housewives and 11.2 percent of rural wives prepare soy and bean paste for private use solely at home. The rest transfer the role, in terms of preparing soy and bean paste, to the public market. The process of preparing soy and bean paste is quite time-consuming and it is complicated to produce a delicate taste. The paste produced by a factory is much cheaper than that produced domestically, and even the taste is not too bad, so that housewives can substitute the bought commodity for the domestic paste.

The third characteristics of present day role structure is the position of the mother-in-law. The mother-in-law, who traditionally was the leading member in the domestic affairs of the family looks to have given way to her daughter-in-law (Choi 1985; Han 1989). The contribution of the mother-in-law in the stem family either in rural or urban areas is quite small. Of course, the mother-in-law was not the member who physically executed domestic labour. Rather, she was in charge of ordering and supervising. Her physical contribution to domestic matters was quite small, even in earlier times, so there is almost no significant change in her physical contribution. However, she has lost her position as supervisor and has become an assistant to her daughter-in-law. Her decline from the supervising position, of course, resulted from the trend to the democratisation of the society in general. While in traditional society the source of income was monopolised by parents, today a son has acquired economic independence as well. This is another reason for mother-in-law's decline. Thus, their economic power allows the young generation to raise their voice against their parents. Moreover, mothers-in-law are unable physically to successfully execute the whole of domestic management. Harder work is done by a daily maid or by the daughter-in-law herself, leaving her mother-in-law in the role of assistant.

Another interesting point concerning the mother-in-law role is the proportion of households comprised of a nuclear family only. Although these amount to only a small proportion of all households, mothers-in-law nevertheless contribute to their son's life, mainly in the preparation of soy and bean paste. However much it costs, mothers-in-law generally prefer the home-made product. They are unsatisfied with the market paste and soy

full of artificial sweetening. In addition, they can save on their living expenses by supplying home-made soy and bean paste. This is one indication of the continuing existence of the stem family principle. Through this process parents can check from time to time how a daughter-in-law is managing the affairs of their son's family, in spite of their physically separate living.

Lastly, in spite of industrialisation followed by the general improvement in women's position, the housework still remains the domain of female members only. It varies by region and family type. Rural housewives have more housework than urban housewives, as a result of the slightly different way of life. The urban housewife enjoys more modern domestic facilities, while the rural housewife is less well equipped due to the lack of cash. The gap is partly compensated for by help with more physical labour in the rural home. The housewife in the nuclear family household has less help with housework than those from the stem family households. Housewives in nuclear family households share almost ten percent more domestic work. They are paying the cost of the separate life from their parents-in-law. To sum up, in spite of industrialisation followed by the women's liberation movement, the burden of the conventional housewife has not been reduced as much as might be expected. Domestic affairs are still rigorously differentiated domains for female family members.

### Parental roles

Four aspects of parent roles, guiding children's studies, domestic training, consultation and providing children's pocket money are examined. The traditional ideal for parents were the 'affectionate mother and strict father.' Thus, if the mother was expected to play the role comforter, the father was the educator. The father was the most deeply involved teacher, and supervisor in his children affairs (Bernardes and Watson 1984, pp. 18-21; Cronenwett 1982, pp. 63-72.; Haas 1982, pp. 389-412; Helterine 1980, pp. 590-614; Rowe 1977, pp. 169-93; Tivers 1985). This was the prevalent ideal at least until the mid-70s but it has changed very drastically in present day Korea.

The educational role was different according to the sex of parents and children. Traditionally it was only boys who got a formal education. Girls were educated by their mothers in the virtues of domestic life such as tender mind, needlework, and preparation of soy and bean paste. They were excluded from what their brothers were learning. Boys were educated by their father or paternal grandfather from their seventh year and learned

Confucian literature.<sup>5</sup> Thus a father or paternal grand-father was the only educator, and sons the only ones educated at home at that time (Choi 1985; Han 1989).

The situation has changed in the process of industrialisation. The change has occurred both from the side of the parents and the children. First the compulsory education system required girls as well as boys to attend primary school. In addition, even the expected level of education for children has been equalised.<sup>6</sup> No big difference except at the graduate school level is found between sexes in present day Korea. Daughters are expected to attend college or university as much as sons are (EPB 1991). Of course, there are things that have not changed. Some traditional aspects of home education are still very strong. Boys are expected to show more interest in manly behaviour, while girls are expected to conform to ideals of feminine behaviour. However, the demands of gender do not displace expectations about gaining a good mark in the formal education system regardless of sex.

The changes in parents roles are also drastic. A father's role vis-à-vis his children has become relatively small even in respect of other domestic matters. His involvement in his children's lives is less than in any other role

TABLE 3. ROLE ALLOCATION ON THE CHILD CARE BY REGION AND BY FAMILY PATTERNS

|                            | Urban areas |         | Rural areas |         |
|----------------------------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|
|                            | stem        | nuclear | stem        | nuclear |
| Total                      | 100.0       | 100.0   | 100.0       | 100.0   |
| Housewife(daughter-in-law) | 74.2        | 71.2    | 64.6        | 56.7    |
| Husband                    | 8.7         | 6.7     | 7.3         | 8.1     |
| Parents-in-law             | 2.8         | -       | 2.2         | -       |
| Others                     | 14.3        | 22.1    | 25.9        | 35.2    |

Abbreviation: stem - stem family household; nuclear - nuclear family household

<sup>5</sup> Approximately 5 years old by Western calculation. Refer to the footnote 2. The seventh year in Korean tradition was an age for sexual differentiation, and the beginning of formal education. Even brothers and sisters were trained to practice etiquette to each other as a different sex at home. They were not expected to sit at the same table for meals or for chatting. Boys and girls began to learn different ways of behaviour from an early age. The situation was denoted by a saying, "Man and woman of seven do not sit at the same table." It was the first thing they learned from their parents. Then boys began to learn the Confucian literature from their father, grandfather, or patrilineal relatives while girls began to learn domestic skills from their mother.

<sup>6</sup> EPB, Social Statistics Survey (1991). The EPB asked the question to parents of each household. The statistics are parents' normative expectations.

of his family, accounting for less than 10 percent of the children's matters, as Table 3 shows.

A husband and father may almost seem to his wife and children like a lodger who comes home just for sleeping. A father goes to his office early in the morning before his children get up, and comes back late at night when all the rest of the family are asleep. Fathers attend their offices even on weekends. This has been a typical story among many Korean families for the last a couple of decades. While it was one of the most significant factors in the astonishing growth of national wealth, both the father and his children and his wife lost a great deal from the arrangement. Fathers were perceived by their children as merely breadearning machines or boarders or, at best, providers of pocket money. Thus, fathers lost their patriarchal position and children lost the experience of paternal socialisation.

The same happened to grandfathers. Once as influential as a father was to his children, the paternal grandfather lost his position as an educational guide to his grandchildren (Han 1989). Even more than in the nuclear family, in the stem family there is a very weakened role of paternal grandparents in children's lives. The familial position of the paternal grandfather as an educator of his grandchildren may have disappeared from memory. Otherwise, he has remained as a role assistant, such as a baby-sitter or a kindly relative, rather than a strict educator.

The children's upbringing has become almost wholly the responsibility of their mother. She does everything that her husband would have done for the children in earlier times. Mothers train their children in household duties, guide their studies, and give them their pocket money. She has taken over responsibility for the education role to compensate for the absence of their father. At the same time the mother's contribution varies according to region and family pattern. First, her role is bigger in urban areas than in rural areas because in rural areas husbands are engaged in jobs with less rigid time schedules like farming and can participate more in what is happening at home. Urban husbands, whether salaried men or self-employed, are working under far more competitive conditions and thus spend more time away from home than rural husbands do. Working late at night, may make a favourable impression in their place of work, but is at the cost of severe damage to their commitments as fathers. Naturally, their wives make up for the absence of the father so that the urban wife as a result contributes more to her children's upbringing than a rural wife has to. At the same time, the difference in a wife's contribution by family pattern is also influenced by demographic characteristics in particular. It depends on the number of 'others' available in the household.

The others involved in a child's upbringing are mainly other children themselves or, in rare cases, a private tutor. The rural nuclear family shows the biggest proportion of children's own involvement and the urban stem family the least. The difference reflects the age structure in urban and rural families and differences in family patterns. There are more grown up children among nuclear families than among stem families, and rural families are on average older than urban families, so that the proportion of older and grown up children is greater. Thus, according to the CFFRR data, the proportion of housewives aged 45 years old and over in stem families was 33.1 percent in the rural areas and 17.5 percent in the urban areas. The proportion of housewives aged 55 years old and over in nuclear families was 18.8 percent in rural areas and 2.9 percent in urban areas. Children's age goes roughly side by side with their mothers'. Many of the children from the urban nuclear families are already grown adults, and children in rural areas left their homes at marriage or for a job or to study.<sup>7</sup>

However even if it is not the absence of parental involvement so much as the demographic character of the family, the significant role of other children at least indicates the low level of patriarchal influence. In the traditional family, children, young or grown-up, married or unmarried, could not be free from parents' influence and particularly from their father's. However, owing to the growth of industrialisation and individualism, autonomous and independent behaviour by children has come to be highly regarded both by children and parents, which explains the high contribution of the adult children to the upbringing of their younger siblings. What was once the domain of a father or grandfather, has increasingly become the responsibility of other children. This is not a matter of neglect of children's upbringing, but rather that children are exposed to a lack of influence from their fathers.

### Outside activity

By outside activities, we refer to the use of public institutions, such as having a certificate of residence or a copy of the family register, or other formal certificate, attending a relative for matters of congratulation or condolence, or going to a parents' meeting at the children's school.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ehn Hyun Choe et al. (eds.), *Internal Migration and Socio-Economic Development - Secondary Analysis of National Migration Survey*—(Korea Institute for Population and Health, 1986); KIHASA, *30 Years of Population Policy* (KIHASA, Korean edition, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> For references to the outside activities in terms of role structure, refer to the below; Erikson(1979); Berheide(1984); Close and Collins(1979); Yeandle, D. 1987. *Married Women at Mid-life: Past Experience and Present Change*. Macmillan; Udry, J.R., and M. Hall. 1965. "Marital

Outside activities were recognised as exclusive matters for the eldest male of the stem family or husband of the nuclear family in traditional society. There was a proverbial saying in traditional society reflecting Confucian principles. "If the hen cries, family goes to the bad." The wife or any other female member of a family was never expected to express any opinions outside of the family. She was expected to be subservient to her parents' opinion before marriage, her husband's after marriage, and after her husband's death to her first son's opinion. In Confucianism, this principle of *samjong* for the women was praised (Chang 1993, Ch.3). As a result, in all affairs outside the family, the family was presented and led by male members.

Industrialisation has uprooted the once conventional idea. Women are now allowed to engage in socio-economic activity outside the home. Two things have led women to participate in social activity outside the home: first, the general enhancement of women's social status, and secondly the separation of home and workplace, and the demands of occupational life. The workplace in traditional agricultural society was not away from home (Chang 1993, Ch.3). Today's workers, however, work far away from their home, and are expected to concentrate fully at their work until the end of the working day. As a result it is hardly possible for them to engage in any outside activity concerned with their home unless they make use of their lunch time, or risk being unfaithful to their job. As a result, they have handed over their conventional role to their wives.

In spite of this general trend towards women's total dominance of outside activities, husbands contribute a significant amount in a relative sense. Compared to their contribution to the domestic duties or their children's upbringing, the role of husbands in dealing with the outside world is still significant. It is greater among the rural husbands, particularly in stem families, for three reasons. First, in spite of the separation of their occupational lives, both husbands and wives are still active in relation to the outside world in terms of personal contact. The avoidance of the opposite sex is still pervasive. Both sexes still feel it unnatural to communicate with each other, especially in rural areas. The division of labour by sex is still pervasive among present day Koreans. Regional differences also reflect different working conditions. However harsh modern occupational life is, rural husbands enjoy relatively relaxed working conditions compared with

TABLE 4. ROLE ALLOCATION IN RESPECT OF OUT-OF-HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY BY REGION AND BY FAMILY PATTERN (PERCENTAGE)

|                            | Urban areas |         | Rural areas |         |
|----------------------------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|
|                            | stem        | nuclear | stem        | nuclear |
| Total                      | 100.0       | 100.0   | 100.0       | 100.0   |
| Housewife(daughter-in-law) | 62.1        | 76.1    | 46.1        | 58.9    |
| Husband                    | 19.7        | 14.8    | 36.6        | 27.4    |
| Mother-in-law              | 8.8         | –       | 4.8         | –       |
| Father-in-law              | 4.5         | –       | 3.9         | –       |
| Others                     | 4.9         | 9.1     | 8.6         | 13.7    |

Abbreviation: stem - stem family household; nuclear - nuclear family household

the urbanites, who are overtaken. That is the reason a rural husband can afford to keep his conventional position in relation to matters outside the household. Lastly, husbands from the rural stem family are more likely to be engaged in farming than the husband of the rural nuclear family, which permits them to be involved in matters in relation to the outside world.

Nevertheless extra-household responsibilities have generally been transferred to the housewife. Housewives from the nuclear family, regardless of regional differences, are taking on more responsibility than other housewives are. This is due to the structural characteristics of each family, pattern. In the stem family parents-in-law can deal with outside matters on behalf of a busy son at work or a busy daughter-in-law involved with domestic affairs. However, in the nuclear family a housewife is the only person, unless she has grown-up children, who can take the place of her husband.

In terms of the housewife's role, outside responsibilities show the biggest difference of role allocation by region and by family pattern. This is the area in which the sexual division of labour is not yet settled. In other words, the discrepancy between the expected family member and the actual person delivering the role is greatest.

How role allocation, with respect to outside relationships, will be sorted out in the future depends on how occupational life develops. The economic policies of the government push husbands to become more attached to their workplace than before, and the housewife's role is expected to grow bigger as a result. Again, considering the general attack of the women's liberation movement on sexual differences, the responsibilities of the housewife role seem to be getting bigger than ever before.

### Economic activity

In the economic domain, questions on four activities are asked and measured separately. First, who is responsible for savings? Second, who buys daily consumption goods? Third, who has income earning responsibilities? And last, who is instrumental in buying or selling the family house or apartment?<sup>9</sup>

Traditionally, economic activity was basically dichotomised by sex. The husband was the breadwinner, the housewife manager of the domestic economy. To be precise, most activities happening outside the home were the husband's buoyance while the others at home were in the housewife's domain. Economic activity was closely connected to the representative role in relation to people outside the home. Naturally, breadwinning or purchasing or selling the family home was undertaken by the husband or the eldest male member in the family.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the other areas reviewed previously, the economic domain is the most fluctuating field when discussed in terms of detailed activities. Husband and wife both show emphatically different role performances in each area of activity in contrast to the other three role sectors analysed earlier. Extreme fluctuation by sex is observed in each economic activity in the stem family household, as shown in Table 5.

First, the activity of saving is mostly carried on by the housewife. Conventionally, the good housewife was expected to save something from the income earned by her husband. However a meagre salary it was, a good wife and mother was expected to lay something aside for rainy days, and particularly for the educational fees of children entering a school of higher degree. This was unavoidable, with the high value placed on education but without the provision of social security by the government. As a result, the housewife and mother showed up as the best manager of the home economics to make tiny amounts of money grow to a round sum. The

<sup>9</sup> It is very risky and, even contradictory, to analyse whole of activities at once, which are different each other in their attributes. Nevertheless, the table was prepared to show a global trend in the economic activities.

<sup>10</sup> For the reference to the role structure by gender, refer to the below; Evans, M. 1982. *The Woman Question— Readings on the Subordination of Women*. Fontana; Gittins, D. 1982. *Fair Sex— Family Size and Structure 1900-39*. London: Hutchinson; Henwood, M. et.al. 1987. *Inside the Family: Changing Roles of Men and Women*. London: Family Policy Studies Centre; Janeway, E. 1977. *Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology*. Penguin; Keith P.M., and T.H. Brubaker. 1979. "Male Household Work and in Later Life: A Look at Masculinity and Marital Relationships." *Family Coordinator* 28:497-502.; Oppenheimer, V.K. 1977. "The Sociology of Women's Economic Role in the Family." *American Sociological Review* 42:387-406.

TABLE 5. DETAILED ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN THE STEM FAMILY HOUSEHOLD BY REGION.

|              |                          | Role performers |      |         |        |        |
|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------|------|---------|--------|--------|
|              |                          | total           | wife | husband | parent | others |
| Urban areas; |                          |                 |      |         |        |        |
|              | saving                   | 100.0           | 56.5 | 16.9    | 8.4    | 18.2   |
|              | buying consumption items | 100.0           | 85.7 | 12.3    | –      | 2.0    |
|              | breadearning             | 100.0           | 31.8 | 61.0    | 7.2    | –      |
|              | dealing of flat          | 100.0           | 9.7  | 60.4    | 29.9   | –      |
| Rural areas; |                          |                 |      |         |        |        |
|              | saving                   | 100.0           | 43.0 | 19.8    | 10.8   | 26.4   |
|              | buying consumption items | 100.0           | 86.0 | 2.5     | 11.5   | –      |
|              | breadearning             | 100.0           | 35.5 | 57.0    | 7.5    | –      |
|              | dealing of flat          | 100.0           | 8.3  | 68.6    | 23.1   | –      |

Abbreviation: wife - housewife (daughter-in-law); parent - parents-in-law

husband's role in savings reflects the general socio-economic conditions. To accelerate the economic development of the nation, the government launched a savings promotion policy in the late 1970s, when almost compulsory savings were introduced which were deducted automatically from salaries. Only the balance of the salaries was available to be handed over to the housewife. This condition was no different, whether the husband was a government official or a private company employee, so the proportion of the savings activity by a husband denotes nothing but the government interventionism. Children are the second most significant family members in savings activity. The proportion is particularly high among rural families. Living with parents, grown-up children, single or married, could have saved what they earned untouched. Of course, in the traditional period the income was entirely handed over to parents. This was the case at least until the 1970s, and used to be a source of conflict between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. However, owing to the general economic growth and to the expansion of individualism, adult children can save by themselves what they have earned for their own sake, so that the children's role in the savings activity is the second most significant. Sometimes the amount of the children's saving is much bigger than that of their parents. The money saved is used to fund the marriage of unmarried children, or for the purchase of an independent flat for married children. This is more common among rural adult children because of the relative economic poverty in the rural areas. Having poor parents, rural children have to rely more on their own money to marry or to be independent from

their parents.

Buying daily consumption goods is almost entirely the responsibility of the housewife. That was the typical pattern of management in traditional home economics and the activity has changed very little in the process of industrialisation. A tiny change may be observed among urban husbands who show up at the supermarket as a result of the sexual equality movement. In spite of the small increase in the proportion of husbands shopping, they are still viewed as petty fellows and unmanly men among present day Koreans, both men and women. In the rural areas parents-in-law show some participation, but these are almost all mothers-in-law. This reflects the remains of the tradition in which the mother-in-law was the supreme manager of the home, taking care of the keys of the economic resources of the family. It is still not rare to find a married rural son, giving the whole of his monthly salary not to his wife but to his parents. Hence the housewife gets living expenses from her parents-in-law. Over 10 percent of rural parents still enjoy this dominant management role of traditional society. It often creates conflict between young married couples.

Breadwinning is primarily the responsibility of husbands. Husbands have virtually total dominance over the main source of income. However, the housewives' participation in earning activities are never negligible. Roughly one out of three housewives in urban areas and one out of three in rural areas participates in economic activity outside the home. Due to the complexity of farming, it is difficult to regard the statistics of actual participation in economic activity, but the proportion is significant enough to denote the improvement of the social status of women in rural and urban areas. The other major change in the income domain is the decrease in the contribution from parents-in-law, mostly of fathers-in-law, in the stem family household. Fathers-in-law were one of the major sources of earnings in traditional society. However, in the process of changes in the industrial structure and by the introduction of the retirement at the age of 65 age limit, they will have retired from work the main source of income, unless self-employed. As a result the father-in-law's position at home declined with the loss of his income.

Lastly, buying and selling the family house or flat is an area from which the wife is almost totally excluded. It is only male family members, particularly the husband, who are involved. There are two components in the cultural determination of this pattern. The first comes from the chip (house) idea which is deeply rooted in traditional familism. The house was believed to be not simply a place of habitation but the sacred container for its own family and its spirit (Chang 1993). Male members were and still are

believed to be the symbol and representatives of their own chip. Regardless of who paid for the house, it was almost always the male family members who bought the house, at least outwardly. It was the last and most important (or even the only) basis of self-esteem of the Korean man. The participation of his wife in bargaining for the house accounted to the loss of masculinity of a husband. That is the reason women are almost excluded, even in present day Korea, from buying and selling the family house or apartment. It is also why fathers-in-law play a greater role in purchasing or buying the house or flat than among whole of the role allocation reviewed up to now. The second reason for the exclusion of female family members is a quite recent change, rather than a traditional one. To be precise, the change came from the period of the Japanese annexation. Unusually capable women were not rare in traditional society, and they were not disgraced unless they openly offended their husband's authority. However, the Japanese government severely reduced women's status and defined women as legally and customarily incapable persons (Chang 1993, pp. 268-276; Bae 1988). As a result, a wife could not make large transactions. This custom still remains in present-day Korea, and excludes a wife from the purchase or sale of the family house or flat.

In general, domestic economic activity is the area where the conventional division of labour has changed least. The husband is still predominantly, the breadwinner and responsible for dealing with large sums of money, while the wife manages small sums. Her role is limited to the activity of small scale saving and purchasing daily consumption goods.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, a few general points can be abstracted. First, most aspects of the division of labour between husbands and wives is structured to reveal the wife's dominance. The roles are allocated predominantly to the wife range from domestic duties to the children's upbringing, and even to dealings outside the domestic household. The situation looks like an improvement of women's status compared with the traditional family, but it is concerned only with effort-taking, time-consuming or boring areas. Only the most important affairs, in terms of infrastructure, like buying and selling the family house and the breadwinner role is reserved for the husband or male family members. That is the only domain Korean men can maintain their dignity as husbands to their wives, and as fathers to their children. Most other roles concerned with the home are overwhelmingly dominated by the wife. The excuse husbands could give for their staying out of the

home derives from the economic development policies of the last few decades. Both husband and wife have submitted to the loss of fatherhood and of husbandhood, to gain economic prosperity. The situation is more bitter for wives in nuclear families than among those living in stem family households, because they are paying the price of having a life independent from their parents-in-law. If she is sharing a roof with her parents-in-law, a woman's burden of house chores or dealing with outside areas might be lessened. By having a home of her own, however, she gets more work to do and possibly more stress from that than the housewife of the stem family does. Lastly, the rural housewife has a more traditional division of labour. She takes charge of more housework but is concerned with less outside matters and is likely to be involved in less economic activity outside the domestic setting or the farm.

The conventional type of division of labour by sex has changed drastically. However, the situation has brought more burdens to wives than to husbands. If there is one thing that has not changed in the process of industrialisation, it is the division of labour. Role allocation is dichotomised by sex, rather than being harmonised or converging between the sexes. The main reason for this would appear to be the socio-political orientation toward economic development of the last a few decades.

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