Cleavage between Reality and Expectation in a Rapidly Changing Society: The Case of Korea*

Seyoung Kang** and Doo-Seung Hong***

Abstract

This paper explores people's perceptions of the political, economic and social situations of Korea. Korean society is rapidly changing. Particularly, during the last three decades we have witnessed drastic changes in social and cultural spheres as well as in political and economic domains. Due to changes within a short period of time, Korean society has been experiencing conflicts between traditional and modern elements. Such conflicts can be found in various social settings.

Since the new civilian government took power in 1993, ordinary people have become more satisfied with the political situation than in the past. Politically more satisfied attitudes seem to reflect a confidence in the new government. However, considerable dissatisfaction with the economic and social situations indicates that society has much to be done in these spheres.

In general, Koreans believe their lives will be better in the future. However, they turn out to be considerably pessimistic about the social problems they face now and may face in the future, especially about environmental and traffic issues. In

addition, attitudes on regional sentiments suggest that relative deprivation will remain an important social issue in the future as now.

Overall, younger people tend to hold more liberal attitudes and to be more pessimistic about the future than older people. Significant differences between younger and older generations are found in family values and individualistic attitudes. The young generation is more liberal and individualistic, and thus seems somewhat rebellious. There are many cleavages in this society; cleavages between sexes, generations, regions, etc. Assuming the whole social change as a process of acculturation, and that the society is experiencing cultural crises, these cleavages need to be overcome or adjusted in order to embrace the twenty-first century successfully.

Introduction

Korean society is one of the most rapidly changing societies in the world. Since its emancipation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, it has undergone rapid and extensive industrialization, which during the last decades brought about many changes in social and cultural spheres. In addition, the political turmoil, which can be seen in the six constitutional amendments, has influenced the lives of Koreans profoundly. Due to a short transition from agricultural to industrial society and to the foreign influence on its transition, Korean society has been experiencing a conflict between traditional, modern, and foreign aspects in terms of behaviors and attitudes. Such a conflict can be found in various forms of social settings; at home, at work, in organizations, and at formal or informal gatherings.

There has been much research about the change in Korean society with respect to economic development and its impact on society. A great portion of the research is based on modernization theory, not without some criticisms on the theory (e.g., Kim, 1983; Yim, 1987; Koh, 1993). Contrasting

perspectives, such as dependency theory and world system theory, have been also appropriated to understand social change. Although each perspective sees Korean society in a different way, the changes this society has experienced can be explained as a process of acculturation by foreign influence (Lim, 1988). This way of understanding social change helps recognize conflicts between and among generations, genders, regions, and classes, as cultural phenomena in a broader sense.

A useful framework suggested by Yim (1983) is to understand this society in terms of three dimensions of cultural structure: relevancy, identity, and integration. The conflicts that Korean society has encountered are seen as cultural crises in each of these dimensions. Relevancy concerns whether the relationship between cultural system and social structure is harmonious. Relevancy crisis occurs because reliance on personal connections in everyday life and fatalism are still prevalent in this society. These are not relevant to the structure of industrial societies which requires rationality and universality. Identity crisis in this culture results from the loss of cultural continuity due to Japanese colonialism for 36 years and a flood of foreign culture during a short period of industrialization. Integration crisis comes from the cultural differences between regions, classes, and generations as well as from cultural lag (Yim, 1983).

These three levels of cultural crisis are interconnected and they reinforce one another. The integration crisis, however especially between generations, seems more visible recently relative to conflicts between other social groups. In some ways, moreover, the generation differences of attitudes override other differences such as class, gender, and regional ones. This paper examines the cleavage between reality and expectation in Koreans' perceptions of the changing society and their lives in it. This paper also focuses on the generation difference that has recently become an important subject of social discourse. In this paper, we use the survey

data collected from 1,529 adults aged 20 or older in early September, 1993, by the Population and Development Studies Center, Seoul National University.

Some Demographic Signs of Social Change

There have been many signs of structural changes in society during the last decades, which suggest that Koreans have become more individualistic and independent than ever before. The family is a major social institution that has experienced rapid changes in this sense. Family planning and economic development has been successful in reducing the crude birthrate from 41.7 per thousand persons during 1960-1965 to 22.5 per thousand during 1980-1985 (Kim, 1991: 389). Accordingly, the average size of households shrank from 5.57 in 1960 to 3.71 in 1990. The percentage of single-person households doubled over 25 years, from 4.01 in 1966 to 9.00 in 1990. Also, the percentage of extended families constituted of a couple and at least one of their parents decreased sharply from 21.4 in 1966 to 12.5 in 1990 (National Statistical Office, 1993: 17, 20).

In addition, households with elderly couples and a single elderly constituted 2.0% and 1.7% respectively in 1990, which had increased from 1.5% and 1.2% in 1985 (*Chosun Ilbo*, May 14, 1994). These statistical results imply the collapse of traditional family-oriented values in this society which emphasize cohesion, mutual support, and respect to the elderly in extended families. Moreover, the divorce rate increased about 10% every year for the last 20 years, and it quadrupled in 1992 as compared to 1972. In 1992, it appears that approximately one out of seven couples ended their marriage with divorce, while in 1972 only one out of twenty-one couples had turned out to be divorcees. Among divorced couples the majority (36.3%) reported less than 5 years of marriage (*Chosun Ilbo*, May 14, 1994). As seen in the increasing divorce rate, conservative traditionalism seems to have weakened.

People's Perceptions and Attitudes

As the society has encountered many difficulties and fluctuations, it is expected that Koreans' perceptions of social situation might reflect these changes. In general, the way they view various aspects of social reality is more favorable than before the emergence of the new civilian government in 1993. This study investigates their views on the three facets of social reality: political, economic, and social situations. As the same questions were asked in a nation-wide survey in 1989 (PDSC, 1989), the responses for this research are compared with them (see Table 1). First, about the political situation, 16.7% of respondents are satisfied while 35.8% are dissatisfied. This shows that politically dissatisfied people are nearly double the satisfied. The same question derived more depressing responses in the past. In 1989, the early period of Roh's regime, only 3.2% of respondents said they were satisfied with the political

Table 1. Perceptions of Social Conditions (%)

Social Conditions	Responses	Year	
		1989[1)	1993
Political	Satisfied	3.2	16.7
	So-So	26.4	47.5
	Dissatisfied	70.4	35.8
	Total	100.0 (1,535)	100.0 (1,529)
Economic	Satisfied	6.2	5.5
	So-So	30.5	43.0
	Dissatisfied	63.3	51.5
	Total	100.0 (1,535)	100.0 (1,529)
Social	Satisfied	3.0	5.2
	So-So	26.7	49.2
	Dissatisfied	68.3	45.6
	Total	100.0 (1,535)	100.0 (1,529)

Note: 1) The Population and Development Studies Center, 1989.

situation while 70.3% said they were dissatisfied. These responses, ranging over 5 years, contrast sharply and reflect people's gratification with the new government. In other words, it seems to resonate people's trust in it. The government carried out a series of political and economic reforms, which the two previous regimes had been unable to do due to resistance from people and the lack of legitimacy. Major reforms include expunging corrupted government officials and introducing the real name policy in all financial transactions, all of which have a profound impact on people's assessment of whom the new government serves.

By contrast, the popular perception of the economic situation has not changed much in 1993 as compared to 1989, when more than half of Koreans (63.2%) perceived that the economic situation was not satisfactory and only 6.2% of them were satisfied. The responses in 1993 show a similar pattern: 51.1% say that they are dissatisfied with the economic situation while 5.5% are satisfied. Although the level of satisfaction has not changed much, we can see that the percentage of dissatisfied people did fairly decrease in 1993 relative to that in 1989. Third, 5.2% of the people responded that they were satisfied with the social situation while 45.5% of them were dissatisfied in 1993. In 1989, 3.0% said they were satisfied and 68.4% said dissatisfied. It shows that the satisfaction with the social situation has risen slightly but dissatisfaction decreased considerably in 1993 as compared to in 1989. In general, Koreans became more favorable to aspects of social conditions in 1993, especially to the political situation, relative to in 1989 suggesting that political circumstances have changed most since the new government started in 1993.

Since perceptions of the political situation showed a remarkable change, it is worth examining them in terms of characteristics of respondents. When we look at the degree of satisfaction with the current political situation by different groups, age and education level distinguish the responses clearly. With respect to age, people in their twenties and

thirties, especially those in their twenties, appear to be much less satisfied with the political situation than the older age groups. Highly educated people also tend to be less satisfied with politics. For instance, 50.4% of people with a 4-year college education or over are not satisfied and they are the group showing the least favorable attitude to politics. This can be attributed to the fact that the young and the educated are traditionally critical of politics.

More favorable attitudes toward the political situation in 1993 relative to those in 1989 are also seen in the responses to other questions. When asked to point out an aspect of the society that has changed most since the new government took control, about 45% mentioned "no noticeable change" (22%). The rest of them said that "economic stability," "improvement in structure of distribution," and "improvement of the relationship between North and South Korea" had changed most. In the same vein, they chose "political stability" in another question as the most crucial problem to be solved over others for Korea to become an advanced country.

Regarding their perceptions of the quality of life, Koreans tend to see that their lives are improving. On the average, they assessed it at 57 on a scale of 100 in 1993, which suggests a medium quality of life. When asked to look back, they evaluated it at 51 seven years ago, which also indicates a medium quality of life. It shows that they do not seem to believe their lives have improved very much. They do, however, expect their lives in the future to be much rosier than in the past or the present, predicting that it will be 74 seven years later in around 2000. This suggests that Koreans tend to think they will have a better life in the future.

In general, more people prefer jobs with more spare time (61.7%) to jobs with higher earnings (38.3%). Specifically, younger people and those who have higher educational attainment and higher household income living in bigger cities than their counterparts prefer more spare time to

higher earnings when they choose jobs. This shows that people tend to be more concerned about time for themselves as the society becomes more affluent in economy, and it reflects the social trend that increasingly more people want to enjoy leisure activities these days than in the past.

Then, how do Koreans view their own behavior and that of others? It is an interesting question because people often show contradictory attitudes. We may expect to see contradiction in the whole society which is in transition so that people do not apply the same rule to themselves as well as to others. We look at this issue in terms of people's attitudes on traffic rules, as the traffic problem becomes one of the most concerned issues in this society (see Table 2). When asked if they believe there are many people who do not observe the traffic rules, most (86.5%) agree. However, when asked whether they feel that they observe the rules well, considerably more people (89%) respond that they do, while the rest (11%) admit that they do not. The same pattern of response is consistently found in socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, education, age, household income, and region. According to these responses, Koreans seem to see the behavior of others more critically than they see themselves upon the same issue.

Are Koreans liberal in terms of sex-role attitudes as the society changes? Our survey suggests that they seem liberal in general, and will become more liberal (see Table 3). More

Table 2. Attitudes on One's Own Behavior and That of Others (%)

Behavior of Others	There are many people who do not observe the traffic rules		
	Agree	Disagree	Total
	86.5	13.5	100.0 (1,529)

Own Behavior	I observe the traffic rules well		
	Agree	Disagree	Total
	89.0	11.0	100.0 (1,529)

people disagree with the idea that married women employed outside need to do housework: 57.8% disagree while 42.2% agree. However, the gender difference on this issue is quite Substantial. Overwhelmingly more women disagree on this matter (71.2%) than men (45.1%). Specifically, those who are young and highly educated with high household incomes tend to be more liberal.

Similarly, a considerable number of Koreans believe that women will be elected as mayors or governors in the year of 2000; 73.4% believe this. There is no difference between women and men in this respect. Moreover, in every level of socio-demographic characteristics, people tend to be favorable to have women in public office. The gender-role attitudes of Koreans, therefore, seem liberal — except for men doing housework. Therefore, it may be said that a strong social norm still exists for the division of labor

Table 3. Sex-role Attitudes (%)

Socio-demographic Characteristics	A married woman needs to do the housework even though she is employed outside home		
		Agree	DisagreeTotal
Total	42.2	57.8	100.0 (1,525)
Sex			
Men	55.9	44.1	100.0 (752)
Women	28.8	71.2	100.0 (773)
Age Group			
20s	36.4	63.6	100.0 (481)
30s	37.1	62.9	100.0 (407)
40s	52.5	47.5	100.0 (258)
50s and over	47.8	52.2	100.0 (380)

Women will be elected to public offices (mayors or governors) in 2000			
	Agree	Disagree	Total
Total	73.4	26.6	100.0 (1,529)
Sex			
Men	73.3	26.7	100.0 (756)
Women	73.4	26.6	100.0 (773)

between sexes at home although much evidence suggests persistent sex segregation at work (Kang, 1993; Women Study Group of Korean Society, 1993). Nevertheless, men may not be able to resist having women in public office as they have seen several women ministers in the new cabinet, not as mere tokens in men's world.

What do Koreans expect for the future? They are asked if they believe some social problems will disappear around the year of 2000. In general, they are pessimistic about most issues for the future and much more pessimistic about pollution and traffic issues.

First, a small majority of Koreans believe that regional antagonism will not disappear: 52.7% vs. 47.4% (see Table 4). This pessimism is salient among the residents in Cholla province, which is alleged to have been structurally deprived as compared to other provinces (Chun, 1990; Moon, 1990). Sixty-two percent of people in Cholla province believe that regional antagonism will not disappear in the near future.

Second, most Koreans believe that they will never have clean air in big cities (86.5% vs. 13.6%). This question was posed in order to see people's attitudes on environmental problems in general. Upon a series of incidents related to the environmental pollution, especially water pollution, they became to be aware of the issues and thus, seem quite pessimistic about the future.

Table 4. Forecasts on Regional Sentiments (%)

Regions	Regional antagonism will disappear		
	Agree	Disagree	Total (N)
Total	47.4	52.7	100.0 (1,528)
Seoul	48.1	51.9	100.0 (387)
Kyonggi	45.5	54.5	100.0 (293)
Kangwon	56.6	43.4	100.0 (57)
Ch'ungch'ong	53.0	47.0	100.0 (147)
Cholla	37.9	62.1	100.0 (193)
Kyongbuk	43.8	56.2	100.0 (178)
Kyongnam	52.2	47.8	100.0 (274)

Third, a large number of people also believe that traffic jams in big cities will not disappear in the near future. Similar to the issue of air pollution, 88.8% think the traffic problem will be as serious around the year 2000 as now, while only 11.2% forecast an improvement. This response shows how serious the traffic problems are now in Korea.

Fourth, people feel that neither labor disputes nor educational malady will vanish by around 2000: 57.6% are pessimistic about the resolution of labor disputes and 57.2% about the future of education. In the same vein, 51.9% do not think it will be any easier to have their own homes in 2000.

Finally, unlike other forecasts, most people believe that democracy will be established in Korea (75.4%). As mentioned before, this political optimism seems to come from people's confidence in the direction of political reform which has been launched and facilitated by the new government.

What do Koreans think about the unification of the country? First, the majority of Koreans (69.9%) believe that the unification of this country will be made possible in 25 years while 21.1% feel either that it will take longer or that it is totally impossible. Thus, many Koreans do not abandon the possibility of unification sooner or later. Nevertheless, they worry about the aftermath of unification such as chaos or disorder in society (87.2% expect it) and conflicts between people from South and North (82.7%). Moreover, some people do not think it is necessary to unify the country if we have to pay a great deal of financial costs (11.7%). Others believe either that the country should be unified at any cost (33.2%) or the country needs to be careful to minimize the economic cost of unification (55.1%). Koreans seem realistic about the unification in terms of economic costs that they, not the people in north Korea, may end up with paying even though they are much eager to be unified.

The New Generation

During the last few years there has been much discussion in Korea about the young generation, often called the new generation, and its culture. Those born in the 1960s and 1970s have become the center of social discourse. Every society experiences a kind of generation gap and goes through adjustment periods because the social settings within which each cohort grew up are dissimilar. Often the gaps exert an enormous impact, especially in rapidly changing societies where a capacity to adapt to the changes has not been fully furnished.

The emergence of this new generation to the front stage of social discourse seems to be a consequence of a series of changes that took place in Korean society. In December 1992, there was a presidential election in which people chose Kim Young Sam, who had long been a political dissident. Kim's election as the new president implies many things to the people in Korea. First of all, it put an end to the government affiliated with the military, and thus people anticipated a government more democratic as compared to the previous ones. At the same time, it helped turn people's interests away from politics, which had been a prevalent social issue in Korea. The culture of the new generation drew attention in this social context.

Some factors other than dilution of political interests are referred to the context of the emergence of the new generation that is unlike the young generation of the past. Since they grew up in a nation where the preceding generations had experienced poverty and achieved economic development, they are the generation of abundance. The new generation need not refrain from what they want, rather they seek it actively. They are the generation of self-regulations, symbolized in free hair styles and no school uniforms, etc. This allows and accustoms them to express themselves freely. They are also the generation who encounter the

current of globalization that is opening the country to foreign culture more actively than ever before.

In many ways the new generation is distinguished from the old, characteristics, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. They are direct and specific in expressing what they want and what they do not. They are individualistic and independent, thus not much concerned about what the group wants. And they actively pursue their own goals. They have more democratic and liberal attitudes than the old generation so it is difficult for them to obey their superiors such as their fathers, teachers, superordinates at work without due explanation. They are realistic, sensual, and impatient. They use condensed words to communicate and they emphasize feelings over thoughts. They are not only open to foreign culture and new technology but actively embrace it. By contrast, the old generation has relatively more group-oriented values and are loyal to the group. They are socialized to suppress their needs or express them indirectly since the group is often more important than the individual. In the same vein, they allow and exercise authoritarianism, which has been a major part of traditional culture in families, workplaces, and organizations.

There is no doubt that the gaps between the new and old generations cause conflict in various social settings. In the workplace the new generation includes those who newly entered and those in assistant manageral positions. While they are the ones who actually do business at working level, they do not share the same work culture with those at the level of decision-making. Thus, traditional ways of controlling and managing a work force are not efficient because they are simply not accepted by the new generation workers. In addition, the new generation is often seen as rebellious in the eyes of the old generation in the companies. Thus, adjusting the organization to the new generation members has become a major task for companies to maintain the work force and survive in competition (Kim, 1993).

By the same token, they bring about changes in a family. A recent survey of adolescents aged 13 to 24 shows that they do not always comply with traditional family norms (see Table 5). More than half of them (58.5%) did say they felt they do not have to obey their fathers when they disagree over an issue, while only 8.1% disagreed. The remainder did not commit themselves either one way or the other. On another question, fewer agreed than did not about the idea of extended family life with all its potential inconveniences. Only about half said they would feel an obligation to quit doing something they enjoy for the sake of the reputation of their family, and more than half indicated that their own desires would come before the family name. However, 44.3% felt that the first son should live with his parents when he gets married. Although women tend to be less supportive of this idea, both sexes have similar attitudes (ISS, 1993). As shown above, the younger generation has somewhat ambivalent attitudes towards the traditional family values. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that they do not always submit to their fathers, as they showed quite a clear-cut opinion on this question while they did not on the other questions.

The gap between the new and old generations is well captured in their responses to some questions in our survey. In this study we define the new generation as those who were in their twenties in 1993. The questions we refer in this

Table 5. Adolescents' Attitudes towards Traditional Values (%; N = 1,600)

Questions	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Total
Should obey father upon disagreement over issues	58.5	33.4	8.1	100.0
Prefer extended family in spite of inconvenience for each member	33.9	25.5	40.6	100.0
Should quit doing what I want to do for the reputation of family	52.3	19.4	28.3	100.0
First sons should live with their parents	44.3	29.3	26.4	100.0

Source: The Institute of Social Sciences (1993).

paper describe concrete social circumstances where attitudes of the new generation differ sharply from those of their elders. In general, the younger and the more liberal their attitudes are, the less they are concerned about others, and the more pessimistic about the future. Often the generation differences are more salient than other differences such as those of gender, educational level, class position, and the size of the place they live.

The new generation shows substantially more liberal attitudes towards family values (see Table 6). They are the only age group more likely to oppose to the opinion that they must have sons while other age groups are more likely to agree. Regardless of education, class position, and the size of the place they live, the majority feel that they must have at least one son. The new generation also tends to believe more than the old that they need not get married if they are satisfied with their lives (58.8% vs. 41.1%). Overall, more people (51.8%) believe that they do not have to marry than that they must (48.1%). People with higher education and higher income and those who live in bigger cities are more likely to believe they need not marry. However, there are bigger generational differences than any others on this issue as seen in Table 6.

People are more likely to tell a 14 or 15 year-old boy smoking on the street not to smoke (57.5%) than just to pass by (42.5%) (see Table 7). The same pattern of response is found regardless of education level, household income and city size. However, women are less likely to scold him than men are. Perhaps men may feel more offended by seeing a young boy's behavior against the social norm than do women. Youngsters are not supposed to smoke or drink, especially in front of adults. People who have a more striking attitude than do other groups are those in their twenties, who said they are more likely to pass by (55.5%) than to chastise the boy not to smoke (44.5%), while all other age groups have similar attitudes to the whole group. Less tolerant attitudes on the part of men are found consistently

Table 6. Generational Differences in Family Values (%)

Socio-demographic Characteristics	(a) Should have at least one son		
	Agree	Disagree	Total (N)
Total	64.8	35.2	100.0 (1,520)
Sex			
Men	66.4	33.6	100.0 (747)
Women	63.3	36.7	100.0 (772)
Age Group			
20s	47.2	52.8	100.0 (479)
30s	63.2	36.8	100.0 (404)
40s	73.2	26.7	100.0 (257)
50s and Over	83.1	16.8	100.0 (379)
Education			
Elementary	82.6	16.4	100.0 (266)
Middle School	67.6	32.5	100.0 (167)
High School	62.1	37.9	100.0 (629)
Junior College	56.0	44.0	100.0 (108)
College or More	56.6	43.4	100.0 (347)
Class			
Upper Middle	64.3	35.7	100.0 (129)
New Middle	63.3	36.7	100.0 (435)
Old Middle	64.4	35.6	100.0 (319)
Working	58.5	41.5	100.0 (229)
Urban Lower	61.4	38.6	100.0 (86)
Independent Farmer	70.8	29.1	100.0 (187)
Poor/Tenant Farmer	96.9	3.1	100.0 (71)
Size of Place			
Seoul	59.6	40.4	100.0 (383)
Big Cities	60.2	39.8	100.0 (336)
Small and Medium Sized Cities	61.0	39.0	100.0 (410)
Eup	73.4	26.6	100.0 (112)
Myon	79.6	20.4	100.0 (278)

Socio-demographic Characteristics	(b) Do not have to marry if satisfied		
	Agree	Disagree	Total (N)
Total	48.1	51.8	100.0 (1,524)
Sex			
Men	36.8	63.2	100.0 (750)
Women	50.1	40.9	100.0 (774)

Characteristics	Agree	Disagree	Total (N)	
Age Group				
20s	58.8	41.1	100.0	(481)
30s	52.2	47.9	100.0	(407)
40s	44.8	55.2	100.0	(258)
50s and Over	32.5	67.4	100.0	(378)
Education				
Elementary	36.4	63.6	100.0	(266)
Middle School	45.6	54.4	100.0	(166)
High School	49.9	50.1	100.0	(632)
Junior College	54.7	45.3	100.0	(108)
College or More	53.1	46.9	100.0	(349)
Class				
Upper Middle	56.1	43.9	100.0	(130)
New Middle	49.1	50.9	100.0	(436)
Old Middle	49.7	50.3	100.0	(319)
Working	50.6	49.4	100.0	(231)
Urban Lower	57.4	42.6	100.0	(86)
Independent Farmer	37.0	63.0	100.0	(188)
Poor/Tenant Farmer	22.6	77.4	100.0	(46)
Size of Place				
Seoul	53.8	46.2	100.0	(385)
Big Cities	49.0	51.0	100.0	(337)
Small and Medium Sized Cities	53.7	46.3	100.0	(412)
Eup	34.0	66.0	100.0	(112)
Myon	36.8	63.2	100.0	(277)

Table 7. Attitudes toward a Young Boy's Smoking (%)
(What do you do when you see a 14 or 15-year old boy smoking on the street?)

Sex/Age	Tell not to smoke	Pass by	Total (N)	
Total	57.5	42.5	100.0	(1,529)
Sex				
Men	68.5	31.5	100.0	(756)
Women	46.7	53.3	100.0	(773)
Age Group				
20s	44.5	55.5	100.0	(480)
30s	57.9	42.1	100.0	(407)
40s	62.5	37.5	100.0	(260)
50s and Over	69.9	30.1	100.0	(382)

in all age groups. However, the majority of men who would pass by, again, are those in their twenties (40.8% of all the men who said they would pass by). Women show a similar pattern to men with respect to their ages. The majority of women who would pass are those in their twenties and they constitute 41.1% of all women with that same attitude.

On the one hand, this result can be interpreted that the new generation may be somewhat rebellious to authority. Traditionally, the old are granted authority over the young in Korea and it is still a strongly conformed social norm to respect one's elders. Moreover, for a younger person to smoke a cigarette or to drink alcohol before his elders is considered disrespectful. Smoking is still reserved for adult men. In this sense, the new generation seems to be saying that, for them, age hierarchy is not as important as it is to older people. On the other hand, it would seem that the new generation is more individualistic so that they care less about others than the old.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, since the new government launched in 1993, Koreans have become more satisfied with the political situation than in the past, while their attitudes on the economic and social situations have not changed much. Politically more satisfied attitudes seem to reflect a confidence in the new government. However, dissatisfaction with economic and social situations indicates that society has much to be done in these spheres.

In general, Koreans believe their lives will be better in the future, which seems to reflect an optimistic national character. However, they turn out to be considerably pessimistic about such concrete social problems as environmental and traffic issues. In addition, attitudes on the regional antagonism suggest that relative deprivation will remain an important social agenda to be solved in the future.

Korean men and women have strikingly different sex-role

attitudes although most Koreans tend to be liberal. Men are very conservative in doing housework, which will become a battleground for couples as increasingly more women are employed.

Overall, younger people hold more liberal attitudes and are more pessimistic about the future than do the older. Significant differences are found between younger and older generations in family values and individualistic attitudes: especially attitudes of those in their twenties are noticeable. The young generation appears to be liberal and individualistic, and thus seems somewhat rebellious to the old generation.

Korean society is undergoing a transition toward the 21st century. There are many cleavages, however, in attitudes and perceptions of society at present and in the future between sexes, generations, and regions. Assuming the whole social change as a process of acculturation, these cleavages are to be overcome or adjusted in order to embrace the twenty-first century successfully.

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