7 LIVING WITH CONFLICTING SUBJECTIVITIES: MOTHER, MOTHERLY WIFE, AND SEXY WOMAN IN THE TRANSITION FROM COLONIAL-MODERN TO POSTMODERN KOREA

cho haejoang

You probably are familiar with the celebrated story of south Korea's miraculous economic transformation. You may not have heard the terrible story of its cultural transformation—a story about regressive changes in the roles and images of women in late twentieth-century south Korean society.

When I came to the United States to do my graduate study in 1971, I was shocked by certain forms of women's behavior. During my first semester at a Midwestern state university, I lived in a dormitory for female graduate students. On Friday nights at the dorm, inevitably one saw students looking as depressed as if they were at a funeral. They were the "leftover" girls who did not have dates. One of those girls, who considered herself unattractive and shy, told me, "I envy you because you can marry by parental arrangement!" Her comment puzzled me because I had been teased recently by a "sexy" undergraduate female student, " How barbarian you Koreans are! I've heard that you people marry someone with whom you are not in love."

I felt uncomfortable seeing a nice girl so depressed just because she did not have a date, and another girl who behaved so arrogantly, as if she could do whatever she wanted, just because she was sexy. I was annoyed by young women who tried so hard to present themselves as sex objects. The sight of older women who struggled desperately to look young and sexy depressed me. The American rule that one should never ask a woman's age puzzled me. A male American classmate told me repeatedly, with anguish on his face, that I must realize what was in the heads of American people: "Their minds are filled with sex, Haejoang—you'd better realize that."

In my opinion, the United States was a terrible place for women. Of course, in south Korea there were also girls who wanted to be sexy and

who thought of romantic love all the time, but they were the minority. Most south Korean girls cared much more about their female friends than about boyfriends. I remember thinking to myself, "You are lucky to be a Korean woman. You do not have to adopt a self-conscious pose to attract other people's attention, men's in particular. You say whatever you want to say without worrying about losing your femininity, and you are not preoccupied with your external appearance."

It took me a long time to realize that I came from a homo-social culture, a culture that values same-sex friendship and social interaction over heterosexual relationships and romance. Through anthropological studies, I learned that traditional culture is not an unchanging essence and that cultural particularity cannot be understood ahistorically. I came to see that my image of women was a product of an agrarian cultural tradition and, at the same time, of the particular style of south Korea's (colonial) modernization. In spite of my pride in the powerful individual Korean women who surrounded me in my youth, I came to realize that these women were not collectively empowered. That is, in spite of the homo-social circumstances that appeared so laudable to me, south Korean women's power was not institutionalized and consequently was limited to their immediate social relationships.

This realization leads me to the first question that I raise in this chapter. Why could south Korean women appear to be so powerful when they are structurally so powerless? My second question is intimately related to the first; that is, why do women appear to be more "modern" than men in south Korea? This question begs other issues: how "modernity" was constructed in south Korean history, how the formation of the middle class was tied to that construction, and what colonialism had to do with it.

I have an image of my society as a grand conspiracy that is reproduced by conservative, inflexible, and extremely self-defensive men and their super-adaptive women. The image is a reflection of modern Korean history, an informal backstage version of history, the history that has been hidden behind official history without which no one can properly comprehend how modern Korean society came to be. I believe that feudalistic authoritarianism (*ponggŏnjŏk kwŏnwijuŭi*) in East Asia is not just a phenomenon of culture lag. Rather, authoritarianism has been actively reinforced and reproduced within and through the experience of colonialism. Guha calls this "aborted" modernity: "the historic failure of the nation to come into its own, a failure that is due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie, as well as of the working class, to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism through a bourgeoise revolution of either the classic nineteenth century type or a more modern type" (Guha 1985, 7).

It must be difficult for the patriarchs of "aborted" modernity to maintain flexibility and a sense of reality. It must have been and must still be difficult for the Korean male ego to recall its defeat in modern history. Over the past century's experience of colonial modernization, the image of the enormously strong and eternally self-sacrificing mother took on a particular cast in the expectation that invincible women should compensate for men's weakness, for their "emasculation" under colonialism.[1] Women were expected to have boundless fortitude in the face of men's shortcomings. The weakened agency of the Korean male subject forged a peculiar gender relationship: an over-protective mother and her feeble but noble son.

If Korean men in leadership positions failed to maintain their own autonomy and thus were fiercely defensive and self-conscious,[2] women also struggled to make their own space amid the frustrations of modern history. What did they get? They produced three generations of daughters who flatly refuse to live like their mothers. With this refusal, women also deny the wisdom transmitted from the mother's generation. Women of the daughter's generation have no ideal role models, only conflicting roles and images against which to measure themselves: that of mother, motherly wife, and sexy girl. Interestingly, women do not seem to feel conflict while going through such contradictory transformations. Does living with conflict become the rule, not the exception? Or are these women all schizophrenics?

This chapter describes the process of "housewifization," the transition from a mother-centered to a wife-centered patriarchy during the period of economic takeoff in south Korea beginning in 1960. Housewifization is a nearly universal phenomenon that accompanies modernization. As Lipman-Blumen (1976, 31) has phrased it, women as housewives, confined to individual households, are systematically excluded from the "male homo-social world" of territoriality, exclusivity, dominance, and resource accumulation. Women have had to utilize their capacity for sexuality, motherhood, and service to be allowed to share in the men's world. At this stage of modernization, a woman is represented more as the wife of one man than as the mother of another. Within half a century in Korea, the dyad of sexual partners and marital couples has gained precedence over that of mother and son.

The first transition of postcolonial south Korea from traditional patriarchy to modern patriarchy began in the 1960s and extended through the 1980s. Although the history of modernization in south Korea is much longer than that, the most visible transition from the extended family and from the rural collective family enterprise to the urban nuclear family occurred during these years. As the principal managers of the nuclear family

in urban industrial settings, most Korean women now occupied the newly created "modern" domestic/private domain, while men occupied a vastly expanded public domain. The rise of consumer society marks the second transition. Korean women's vision and subjectivity have been greatly transformed by Korea's economic success and through their own related experience of a global culture united by capitalism. A drastic shift occurred between the 1980s and the 1990s, sweeping middle class housewives into consumerist postmodernity in their desire to be "charming" and "sexy." I use the term "postmodern" to emphasize the difference and discontinuity between the earlier stage of modernization, with its strong emphasis on economic production, and this late stage in which consumerism becomes the central focus of sociocultural production.

I have lived through these two stages of cultural transformations in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century south Korea. These circumstances made for confusing and conflicting experiences for most women; they were particularly baffling and distressing for feminists like myself. The recent changes make one wonder if women in the future will be no more than the postmodern world's floating signifiers. Because these cultural transformations have occurred in such a compressed time span, feminists who would advance feminist projects that are relevant to Korean women must first grasp the historical experiences of women of different generations. That is what I attempt in this chapter. My data is drawn from popular culture; from novels, television dramas, and movies; from participant observation of everyday life over many long years; from intensive interviews in various settings including feminist circles, housewives' health clubs, high school alumni lunch meetings, traditional dance classes for elderly women, and all manner of everyday encounters; and from students' homework assignments produced in 1993 and 1994.

I must emphasize that the picture I present is based on major trends or ideal types in the Weberian sense, not on any statistically verifiable reality. In truth, class position, temperament, and educational background have produced deviations in the roles and subjective experiences of women within each generation. Also, I look primarily at the women of the middle class who define themselves as "housewives" (*chubu*) or, in the case of the "new generation," who see themselves as prospective housewives. Given the extreme emphasis on uniformity and class mobility in south Korean society, these are the women who have established cultural distinctions in Bourdieu's (1984) sense by being actively engaged in "modernity projects," shedding their countrified ways and creating new lifestyles to match new class identities. While media idealizations of a modern, urban lifestyle

accord closely with the lived reality of the middle and upper-middle classes, they have also constituted cultural models and ideologies that are pervasive throughout the whole of Korean society.

Three Generations: A Path from Colonial-Modern to Postmodern

In this chapter, I describe the lives of three generations of middle class south Korean women—"grandmother's generation," "mother's generation," and "daughter's generation," terms I employ loosely and symbolically. A middle class woman of the grandmother's generation who might now be 75 years old would have been born in 1920, come of age during the Japanese colonial era, and reared her family after the Liberation (1945). She might have had young children during the Korean War (1950–1953). Women of her generation are described as motherly women, the stronghold of the disrupted society. Her daughter would now be in her mid- to late fifties. She would have been born around 1940, acquired her most vivid memories after the Liberation, and experienced the Korean War as a child. She would have reared her family during the period of Korea's sudden economic growth, working as hard as her husband in the maelstrom of the Korean economic "miracle" (see Abelmann and June Lee in this volume). I characterize women of this generation as aggressive modern wives, the backstage managers of rapid industrialization.

Now imagine a 30-year-old woman, the daughter and granddaughter of the two women just described. She would have been born in 1965, come of age under the military regime in the period of economic development, and started her family in the late 1980s. Hers is the first generation to enjoy the fruit of the economic miracle without the effort of sowing and harvest, although many women of her generation are well aware of their parents' past hardship. At the same time, she was exposed to student activism in her college years when she would have experienced first-hand the prodemocracy and feminist movements of 1980s Korea. Her participation in or sympathy with a highly moralistic student activism would have prevented or at least postponed her full acquiescence to consumer capitalism. As a woman, she is thus caught between her mother's materialist ambitions and her own self-realization. The women of this generation are divided into two groups: working women and housewives. This femininity is encapsulated in the word "Missy," women who look like *agassi*, like independent "unmarried young women." Younger sisters, women who were born in the1970s, are

now in their late twenties and early thirties. Critics of popular culture frequently refer to them as *sinsedae* (new generation) because they are the children of an absolute consumer society.

The Grandmother's Generation: Motherly Women, the Refuge of a Disrupted Society

Traditional Korean society often is described as an extreme form of Confucian patriarchy. Women held no public positions and were forced to obey men who were structurally central figures in families, lineages, and the larger society. There were, however, aspects of Confucian patriarchy that supported women's rights. Confucian familism was founded on values of filial piety and gender codependent models of social harmony symbolized by yin-yang dynamics (Park Yong-ok 1985; Kim Yong-ok 1986; Choi Jae-sok 1983; Yoon 1973; Lee Hyon-hee 1979; Yim Dawnhee 1986).

A popular Confucian idiom reads, "A man can be a true public leader only after he cultivates himself and regulates his family in harmony" (*Susin chega; chiguk pyŏngchŏnha*). Because this was a family-centered social order, women, through their maternal identity and role, could receive considerable respect not only in the family but also in the larger kinship groups and among the neighbors. If a son succeeded as a high official, his mother also was given an official title (Chŏng Yang-wan 1985; Chŏng Yo-sŏb 1973). Filial piety applied to both sexes indiscriminately. The strict division of gender roles within the household made women indispensable. Moreover, separated from the men's domain, women maintained their own social space and spiritual life (Kendall and Peterson 1983; Kendall 1985). Korean women who metamorphosed from powerless daughters-in-law to formidable mothers-in-law developed a sense of strength and fortitude, personal resources that would be demanded of them during the vicissitudes of modern Korean history.[3]

During the Japanese colonial era, many families were pulled apart when men emigrated as voluntary or involuntary laborers, or joined independence movements. Women assumed heavier responsibilities as family heads in their absence. The Korean War again separated many men from their homes. With family survival at stake, women assumed the burden of feeding and housing their families. In this context, assertive, aggressive mothers were accepted, appreciated, and even socially encouraged. The women of the grandmother generation spent their active years in a time and place where most of the population was rural. Radio and newspapers were the major channels of mass communication. Many women of this

generation received some modern education, some up to middle school or high school (if they were both lucky and privileged). In school they were exposed to notions of history as a progress toward modernity. Although they lived with poverty and socioeconomic instability, they firmly believed that they would secure a bright future by sending their children to school. Those with middle class aspirations struggled to send their children to the university. Hope and deferred gratification sustained their miserable lives. If a woman was greedy in the pursuit of material resources, no one could blame her, because it was for the survival of her family in destitute times. In this generation, it was a lucky and an enviable woman who could live on her husband's income. Women were expected to be wise, hardworking, and competent in taking care of the extended family and orchestrating communal living, but their self-sacrificing was recognized and appreciated. In their social universe, the old patriarch was a distant figurehead; the mother was at the center of the family, taking care of everything from supporting the family to educating her children, all while preserving her husband's face.[4] The patrilineal principle was faithfully maintained as a cultural ideal, providing an ideological center of stability amid a reality of social disintegration.

Lee Sun's (1981) novel, *Our Children* (*Uri dŭl ŭi aidŭl*), describes the ideal family of these times as a tightly knit survival group. The image of a wise and competent grandmother who managed a large extended family, its fortunes in decline, is one of the most cherished and powerful images held by south Koreans, even today. The grandmother as earthly goddess remains a popular image among novelists and literary critics, both male and female. Such well-known novels as *Toji* (*The Land*) by Park Kyŏng-ri (1973), *Honbul* (Spirit fire) by Choi Myŏng-hee (1983), or *Surado* by Kim Chŏng-han (1988) have as central characters dignified grandmothers of immense insight, ability, and devotion. In a book review, Choi Won-sik (1995) commends a short story for its "typical portrait of 'our mother,'" a story that begins at the woman's deathbed:

> An old lady from the countryside who had raised seven children with no help from her totally incompetent husband, a life-long peddler who would walk eight kilometers in the early morning with the heavy load of vegetables she had picked even earlier in the morning to sell at the Pohang market, a mother who, despite her sons' attempts to keep her from working, would not stop peddling until she fell sick and was put to bed, this woman is not special but merely average, all too average a portrait of "our mother" (Choi Won-sik 1995).

The picture a woman from this generation most cherishes is that of her sixtieth or seventieth birthday, when all her offspring are gathered together to express their gratitude for her lifelong motherly endurance and nurturing. Her feminine identity is as a mother. Women of this generation think of themselves as mothers and organize their recollected life experiences around this identity. A woman who had assumed rough, assertive, "masculine" (*namsŏngjŏk*) behavior in the defense of her family's interests was not stigmatized. She was, simultaneously and without contradiction, a "womanly woman" (*yŏja daun yŏja*), so defined by her familial, caring, and managerial roles as the female head of an extended household.

Mother's Generation: Aggressive Modern Wives, Backstage Managers of Hustling Industrialization

Women of this generation were born in the 1940s and grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. They came of age with the slogan, "Economic growth first by all means!" In this period, rapid urbanization brought a third of the population to the cities within twenty years.[5] The women of this generation experienced Park Chung-hee's 5.16 (May 16, 1961) coup d'état in their youth and subsequently lived most of their young and active years under an authoritarian military dictatorship. Driven by statist economic planning and favorable international market conditions, the south Korean economy suddenly expanded. Both blue-collar and white-collar men labored through one of the world's longest working days, and, as Korean enterprises expanded, they began to work overseas, first in Vietnam, then in Saudi Arabia, then all over the world.

Living in urban settings, women of this generation had more education[6] and were exposed to Western culture through movies and television dramas. The women of this generation idealized a happy married life with a successful husband and two children, a life they glimpsed in countless Hollywood movies. Although many women in this generation dreaded the idea of an arranged marriage, most of them married by arrangement in the end. Although they might never experience a real romance or realize a love marriage, they could dance with Clark Gable's Rhett Butler privately, in their dreams.

Once married, many of them moved into the newly built apartment complexes where they began nuclear families. Although women of this generation grew up in relative poverty, they could raise their children in relative affluence. A wide informal economic space opened up for women whose ability to manage and invest family income made it possible to buy

a better apartment, educate the children, and arrange advantageous marriages for their daughters and sons. In sum, they could do all of the things that would provide their family with a secure identity as modern and middle class. These modern wives pushed their children to play the piano and engaged in various other activities appropriate to their lifestyle (as described by Abelmann in this volume).

The nuclearization of the family and the women's own related housewifization are the two most visible changes experienced by this generation. Of course, ideological support for housewifization is not a totally new phenomenon in Korea. Early modernists of the colonial period offered a new narrative on the role and status of woman as the domestic partner of a man who worked in the newly created modern public sphere. Their most explicit model can be found in the "good wife, wise mother" of Meiji Japan, constructed through explicit national policies as the appropriate helpmate of the new modern man, who devoted himself to nation building (Nolte and Hastings 1991; Smith 1983).[7] Women's magazines from 1930s Korea include essays and articles on the ideal wife that parrot the Meiji ideal. The ideal wife was the woman who took care of all the domestic chores, economized on the family budget, kept the house clean at all times, knew her husband's every thought, and when conversing with her husband, maintained a smiling face like a blossoming flower.

Although Korea had possessed an ideological narrative for women as "good wives" (*yangch'ŏ*) from the 1930s, it was not until the 1960s that large numbers of women began to define themselves as wives who orchestrated nuclear households rather than as mothers who were embedded in a larger family collective. With economic growth and rapid urbanization, large numbers of young men finally could pursue secure and well-paying jobs in the modern sector that would sustain young wives who busily set about managing their husbands' income and orchestrating their children's education. Many terms were coined to describe the new wives of the newly emerging middle class. They are "frugal housewives" (*alttul chubu*) who negotiate to save pennies while shopping, avid participants in informal rotating credit associations (*kyekkun*). "The swish of a skirt" (*chimaparam*) describes housewives who try to influence people in the public sphere through the power of informal relationships. "Mrs. Realtor" (*pokpuin*) engages in buying and selling houses and land for pure speculative investment, "big hand" (*k'ŭnson*) deals large sums of money in the informal sector, and "Madame Procuress" Madam Ttu, makes a large sum of money by professionally arranging marriages for the rich and well connected. The era conjured images of wives who exhibited naked ambition and greed: women who bribed teachers to

have their sons elected as class representative, forced their husbands to make money by any means, or, in their later years, abused those daughters-in-law who failed to bring extravagant dowries.[8]

Women who managed homes of their own in the city were transformed into "modern wives." Even in the countryside, some courageous women began to talk back to their mothers-in-law. On average, the women of this generation had been educated through middle or high school and also had experienced city living before they got married. Many did not show respect for their uneducated, rural-identified mothers-in-law. Some even refused to live with the "ignorant" mother-in-law on the grounds that her presence would be detrimental to the children's education. Concern for the children's well being was a weapon that these modern women frequently wielded. In the 1970s, "super modern" mothers began to read Dr. Spock's guide to child care and, on the basis of his professional authority, rejected the mother-in-law's old-style practices. In the 1980s, one of the major battlegrounds between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law in middle class homes was whether to lay the baby on its stomach or on its back. The young wife wanted to have the baby laid on its stomach so that its skull would not be flattened. The skull would remain more round and Western in appearance, a new mark of beauty and distinction in Bourdieu's (1984) sense, in contrast with a flatter physiognomy, now associated with the backward social practices of uneducated people. The mother-in-law worried that the baby could suffocate in a facedown position and would feel very uncomfortable.

Young husbands began to think that their first loyalty as household heads was to their nuclear family. As the nuclear family system became established firmly in this rapidly urbanizing society, wifely power gained a foothold over motherly power. The husbands of this generation appreciated their wives for their hard work and began to take the wife's side in domestic conflicts. Young husbands suffered for their divided loyalties and called themselves the "sandwich generation" because they were torn between mother and wife. Even so, a modern man knew that it was his wife, not his mother, who would manage his life. He credited her accordingly, yet he often felt deserted by a wife who focused her attention on her children. A man told me that the best part of the fish was no longer his share; once his son turned three or four, it went onto his son's plate.

The family was still as tightly united as ever, but it was increasingly nuclearized and smaller, an attribute explicitly linked to "modernity" in the rhetoric of the successful family planning campaigns of these years (Kim Eun-Shil 1993; Moon 1994). The women of this generation had insisted

repeatedly that they would not live their mothers' lives, but they did. They made their own identities through their children and distanced their husbands by accepting the distinction between the public and domestic domain. Women thus continued to perceive the family as matrifocal, or "uterine," composed exclusively of mothers and children (following Wolf 1972). Marriage was just a fact of life. In their hard work and aggressive devotion to their families, and in their lack of intimacy with their husbands, they were the faithful daughters of their mother's generation. The husbands worked hard and played hard after their work outside the home. The drinking and sex industry expanded during those years to cater to their needs, fostered by the social expectations of the white-collar world and sustained, to some degree, by feelings of alienation at home (Janelli with Yim 1993; Elaine Kim 1998; June Lee in this volume).

The mass media, women's magazines in particular, revived the 1930s image of the modern housewife but for a vastly expanded new audience. *Yŏwŏn*, the forerunner of women's magazines in the 1970s and 1980s, promoted the slogan "Beloved Wife, Successful Husband." The journal implanted "wife-consciousness" among women, instructing them in how to behave as modern wives. These modern middle class wives were given every encouragement by the media to be "Mrs. Realtor" and "aggressive education mamas" so as not to be left behind. They worried about their husbands' extramarital affairs while grabbing after opportunities to marry their daughters into prosperous families. These middle class wives built a highly competitive and status-conscious culture that was as hastily and coarsely constructed as the Korean economy that made their maneuvering possible.

The eminent female novelist Pak Wan-sŏ has written several novels and short stories about the housewives of this newly emerging middle class. In her 1985 short story, "The Identical Rooms" (*Talmŭn pangdŭl*), Pak Wan-sŏ depicts typical middle class wives competing against one another for the purchase of commercial products in same-sized apartments in a grand apartment complex:

> How frugal and in what good taste she was running her household! It was just like a room in a fairy tale. . . . I tried so hard to make my room fancier than hers but ended up with nothing so special. The color of the curtain and the placement of the furniture all turned out to be just the same. . . . I wore the pretty apron and cooked rice and delicious dishes. . . . I asked about neurosis. She did not ask about my symptoms but said that she was suffering from neurosis and then listed all the names of other wives whom she knew to be receiving treatment for neurosis. . . . Just as my apartment resembled

> Cholhee's, all the other apartments in our neighborhood, on the left and the right and up and down were alike. Of course, there were some differences in that some families had the washing machines that others did not have, and some had the pianos that others did not have. However, their self-satisfaction would not last long. Soon others would buy them and imitate the others. I was so sick and tired of this sameness, but I saved money to buy the washing machine which Cholhee's mother had. I cooked only with bean sprouts, bill fish, and artificial flavoring as Cholhee's mother had taught me to do (1985, 350–351).[9]

Pak Wan-sŏ is highly critical of the vulgarity of middle class housewives' culture as it took shape during this period of rapid economic growth. In her writing, the housewives' culture is characterized by sheer materialistic competition and conspicuous consumption. In Pak's short story, the middle class wives of this period are represented as full of selfish desires and competitive spirit. In fact, Korean wives were notorious for aggressively advancing their children and their husbands, with little concern for the larger community. Unlike middle class wives in Western societies or in Japan, Korean women have little interest in charitable works or community welfare programs (Tinker 1980, 4). They invest their time solely in immediate family matters or for their individual pleasure. By the 1980s, classes in aerobics and swimming were fully registered and expensive restaurants were mostly booked by housewives for weekday lunches, but few would participate in a more general communal gathering, regarding it as a waste of time. This lack of public consciousness in middle class housewives' culture is, in a sense, a symbolic representation of the anomaly of Korean modernity of the 1960s and 1970s, a consequence of women's hard work and constant, endless sense of relative depravation as they lived through the years of the rough and bustling economic boom.

I regard women of this generation as the main source of the Korean economic transformation's vitality. With such a strong yearning for modernity, refusing to live like their own mothers who struggled for mere survival, disregarding their incompetent fathers and husbands, they have transformed their society as well as themselves. As Nancy Abelmann describes them (in this volume), it was women's endless motivation for achievement, their *yoksim*[10] and competency (*nŭngryŏk*) that made a family succeed economically, the impulses that led to successful matches for their daughters. Abelmann highlights the *yoksim* of these women as a driving force in the formation of this new middle class through their desire or pursuit of upward mobility. They are now addressed as *samonim*, a word liter-

ally meaning "the honored wife of a teacher," but now broadened to connote any woman who has money and taste. The term is opportunistically employed by realtors (mostly men) and other shrewd sales persons to distinguish the middle class woman, who has buying power, from the poor *ajumma* (an ordinary married woman). *Ajumma* thus has come to connote not young, unsophisticated, and not rich women.

The media and mainstream male culture often have criticized the *yoksim* of the wives, leveling disapprobation at wifely power. Social critics blamed women for the many vulgarities of Korean modernization. Mothers could be valorized, with sentimental hindsight, for their strength and determination, but the assertiveness of wives was not so positively valued. Men in their fifties express ambivalence toward wifely power and often viewed their wives as utterly materialistic, vulgar, and selfish. In the work of such prominent poets as Hwang Ji-u or Kim Chi-ha, the wife is described as a limited woman, constantly calculating or indulging in vulgar snobbery.

These formidable women create grim jokes about their husbands, asserting with tongue in cheek that the luckiest woman is the woman who is widowed in her fifties. More explicitly, there is the one about the widow who asked the coffin carrier to carry her husband's coffin gently so that he would not awaken, or the one about the widow who whispered joyfully near the coffin, "You are the dearest charming person." This black humor may be understood as a measure of the degree to which aging women find their old husbands burdensome. These women have dutifully lived their married lives by running asset-type families, families structured around their common material and social assets. Now that their children are grown, the women want to retire. In their fifties, they express this openly.

In 1995, there appeared a series of jokes regarding the old man "who has an 'enlarged liver'" (*kank'ŭn namja*, equivalent to the English 'gutsy man'). The man with an enlarged liver is the husband who dares to ask his wife how she spent her money, where she spent her day, and what she talked about over the telephone. He is the man who asks her to prepare dinner for him when he comes home late. This humor was so much in vogue that the popular singer Kim Heyon wrote a song on this theme.

Like women of the grandmother generation, the women of this generation did not worry about femininity as long as they were successfully performing the roles assigned to them. It is difficult to imagine a woman with *yoksim* and *nŭngryŏk* as feminine in the Western sense of gentle and sexy. Although the women of this generation were able to use their new economic resources to advance family interests and to strengthen a distinctively matrifocal family culture, the subculture they made was not in serious

conflict with modern Korean patriarchy, whose values they reproduce by ultimately identifying themselves, like the women of the grandmother generation, as the mothers of sons. Their daughters discover that the modern mother and the conservative mother-in-law are often two faces of the same woman. The daughters are, like the third world women of Mohanty's account (Mohanty 1991, 10), caught between the simultaneous oppression imposed by colonial modern, modern, and postmodern.

The Daughter's Generation: Women Caught between Mother's Yoksim and Self-Realization

Women of the daughter's generation were born in the 1960s and grew up in the 1970s under a strong military state and the equally strong influence of the mass media, particularly the television. A majority of these girls lived in urban settings and grew up in nuclear families. Their childhood memories are not of hunger but of going to piano lessons and martial arts classes. They had to struggle through an intense university examination war, more competitive for their generation than in the past, while endlessly exposed to the enticements of consumer capitalism.

On average, the men of this generation received 11.78 years of education, while women received 10.37 years (Kang 1996, 594). Daughters of the middle class went to college where, in the 1980s, many of them joined or sympathized with student activists, sometimes under the banner of the Nationalist–Democratic Movement (*Minjok minjung undong*). A new image of women emerged: They became the brave partners of patriotic men engaged in student activism. Korea's women's liberation movement was also launched at this time. Undergraduate and graduate programs in women's studies were set up in several women's universities and the Association of Women's Studies was founded. Women's studies courses became the most popular courses for both female and male students on university campuses. Various women's groups were formed to deal with such feminist issues as women's labor, feminist literature, domestic violence, and sexual harassment in the work place. The movement spoke in many voices, from Marxist feminist to socialist to liberal feminist. Liberal feminism gained great popularity as the mass media disseminated the idea of women's rights. Liberal feminists received attention because their agenda was appealing but also because they sounded less radical and threatening than the Democratic Movement activists. Although feminism was largely confined to an elite circle of activists and intellectuals, their demands became loud and persistent, and some of their goals were achieved: The demand for equal pay for equal

work led, in 1988, to the passing of a legal guarantee of equal rights in employment. A special law prohibiting sexual violence also was chartered. An art film based on an actual rape incident, *Just Because You Are a Woman* (*Tanji kŭdaega yŏjaranŭn iyu manŭro*), attracted much attention and even succeeded commercially.

The image of independent and self-sufficient women was propagated widely. Women began to talk about "self-realization," asserting that they wanted to be defined not by familial relations but as individuals. In 1984, 76.7 percent of all female college students responded to a survey by indicating that they wanted to have a job after graduation (Lee, Kim, and Kim 1995, 195). The number of women in the labor market had steadily increased. Many young women worked in the public sphere, and while most quit work upon marriage, the number of career women who remained in their jobs, regardless of marital status, also increased. A slogan, "pro is beautiful" attracted the mass media. The buzzword, "self realization" (*cha-a silhyŏn*) was so loudly proclaimed that housewives felt depressed and frustrated. They felt overshadowed by working women, who were portrayed as enjoying social recognition and economic rewards. Subtle conflicts between housewives and working women surfaced.

The desire for self-fulfillment was high among the women of this generation, but society was not opening sufficient space to satisfy their desire. In this second generation of "modern wives," those women who gave up their careers usually did so because there was little support for child care. Not only did they lack institutional support, these women also lacked the support from other women that the previous generation had enjoyed, support from mothers, mothers-in-law, or domestic help. Women of the grandmother's generation had fully supported their professional daughters' "self realization." As dedicated mothers, they identified with their daughters and, where daughters had determined to work outside the home, their mothers had supported them by taking care of grandchildren and managing their daughters' households. Housewives of the mother's generation were reluctant to take this on, and domestic help had become prohibitively expensive. While mothers wanted to see their university-graduate daughters become successful career women, they also wanted their daughters to be suitable brides for upper-middle class families. These conflicting demands often confused their daughters when they were growing up, and, once the daughters were grown, their mothers were unwilling to provide the support they needed to sustain careers.

Women in their fifties, saying that they had already worked too hard, now wanted to relax and travel freely. Those women who had stayed in the

domestic domain expressed their desire to make full use of their last opportunities for self-realization and personal enjoyment. In alumni meetings, one often heard women in their fifties say, "Children are no use!" Mothers of this generation had no intention of supporting their daughters so that their daughters could continue to work outside the home. Many daughters felt betrayed by their mothers and, at the same time, said that it was perfectly understandable. Since they wanted to assert their own individuality, they recognized that their mothers had the same right to do so.

Here we see the emergence of a third generation of "modern wives," women forced to give up a career because there was no support system for child care. *Go Alone Like the Rhinoceros' Horn* (*Musso ŭi ppulchŏrŏm honjasŏ kara*), a popular feminist novel by Kong Chi-yŏng (1993), tells the story of three college graduates who failed to become self-realized women because of the problem of child care and their egoistic husbands (So-Hee Lee in this volume). Unlike wives of the mother's generation, most college graduates of the daughter's generation seriously considered careers but were forced to be housewives. These young modern housewives are inclined to be individuals first and are determined to live a life free from the constraints of traditional patriarchy. Many women of this new generation, of course, have been raised by intensely achievement-motivated mothers with unlimited aspirations. The newly transformed social climate in which they were raised and their own mothers, who were the most active agents of this transformation, forced them to be independent on the one hand, and spoiled and perpetually dependent on the other. Living in nuclear families in urban settings, the young daughters had some measure of private space and individual voice. Interactions in this confined family setting, with its emphasis on individuality and self-reliance, tended to cause more direct intergenerational conflict. The daughters did not see themselves as owing filial respect to their mothers. They did not want their mothers to interfere with their lives, and planned to leave home as soon as possible. They sought their own private time and space and took their peer culture as a primary referent.

In this context, heterosexual relations came to the forefront as boyfriends and husbands became more intimate partners than mothers or female friends. Just as they did not turn to their mothers for child care support, many women of this generation did not turn to their mothers and female friends for emotional support. In Korea today, homo-social space is receding while heterosexual concerns are gaining in intensity. In this climate, young wives have begun to talk about postpartum syndrome. Postpartum syndrome is not just an imported western construct that sophisticated and sensitive wives have begun to emulate. A woman who

gives birth in a maternity ward does not feel overjoyed just because she has become a mother, the experience of her mother's generation. New mothers today endlessly desire their husbands' personal attention and support, and demand that their own "private feelings" be satisfied by their heterosexual partners.

In spite of their strong rejection of their mothers' lives, women in their late twenties and early thirties share their mother's desperate desire to conceive sons. These modern young women once regarded the idea of son-preference as absurd but became seriously concerned about the baby's gender once they got pregnant. Many women exert tremendous efforts before conception and during pregnancy in order to bear a son. Significant numbers have even aborted female fetuses (Kim Eun-Shil 1993).

Their contradictory attitudes reflect a trend toward neoconservatism as Korea's economic growth slows down and the society becomes more stable. The feminist vision of enlightenment lost its vitality as the utopian movements of the 1980s died down. Neoconservatism is regaining popularity, while a sophisticated consumerism rapidly expands. Many young and educated women who once had progressive ideas seemed to change their minds: They now seem to think that it is wiser to adapt to the existing system than to resist it. These women realize that money derived from a husband's income is crucial and that a son is the source of power in the male-centered family structure. The hegemony of patriarchy is reinforced through compulsory motherhood.

Women of this second generation of modern housewives feel most empowered when they can monopolize child rearing, emotional resources, and services to husbands. "Beloved Wife, Successful Husband," once a motto propagated in a women's magazine in the 1970s, has become a reality. Men have finally recovered their lost sense of empowerment after long years of marginalization in modern Korean history. Young men who, in their college years, wanted to overturn the feudalistic patriarchy of their fathers, which oppressed both women and the young, have claimed the confidence of the moment and assumed primacy of place in both society and the household. Women now find their major source of empowerment as the wives of these successful men, not as mothers. The victory of wifehood over motherhood, ambiguous in the previous generation, is now fully realized. The modernization project that began with rapid economic growth in the 1960s has run its course.

The women of this generation glided into the consumer world, making themselves into attractive objects to be gazed at and purchased by desirable men (Kendall 1996, ch. 4). Young housewives, whose main playground

is the department store, were particularly vulnerable to the carefully orchestrated consumer system and have been trapped by the desires it creates. South Korea became a genuine consumer society where the force of advertisements in the mass media accelerated. In the name of individuality and self-expression, the image of the feminine as embodied in a lovely and sexy woman was being constructed. Women bought the image, partly out of a desperate striving to escape their mothers' hold, to fashion themselves in their own style as promised by the new opportunities for consumption. Ironically, these newly feminine daughters were manufactured by the ambitious women of the previous generation, who encouraged them to undergo cosmetic surgery on their eyes and noses, believing that an improved appearance would change their daughters' life chances in marriage and employment. Mothers were the ones who raised these young girls to be coquettish, forced them to play the piano, and gave them a taste for luxury. Mother power still lingered on.

Choi, a sociology graduate student, used her own self-reflection to analyze why her generation cared so much about external appearances:

> I refuse to eat when my mother tries to dominate me. My mother has identified herself with food. Refusing to eat means utterly rejecting her entire being. It is so symbolic and powerful. In a way, I may be playing a game with my mother. I put on heavy makeup to tell her that my face belongs to me. Subconsciously, I want to tell her that my face is my own private matter.

Choi fasts and puts on heavy makeup because these are the only spaces she controls. She dreams of living alone, but, because she is economically dependent, she feels powerless most of the time. For young women like her, having sex with a man is also a declaration of independence and self-affirmation, at least to themselves, since they dare not disclose their secrets to their mothers.

The streets of Seoul are now filled with girlish women. Some look fragile, as if calling for protection. Women of this generation say that they want to be protected rather than to protect. Young girls who used to favor gentle "mama's boys" now turn their backs on them. They are anxious to fall in love with "tough guys" who look strong and even violent, like Choi Min-su and Lee Chong-jae, who played tough gangsters in the explosively popular 1995 television drama *Sand Clock* (*More sigye*) (*Han'guk Ilbo* 11 March 1995, B-1). Besides having a "tough guy" as a boyfriend, the women of this emerging generation want a pet. A pretty and coquettish girl, with a tiny, cute dog, beside a tough guy is part of this emergent new image.

The increased interaction between men and women, and the images propagated through the mass media, are producing young women who have a constant yearning to be sexy and attractive. The change is most noticable on university campuses. The mood that coed students create today is radically different from that of the 1980s. In the 1980s, the dominant female image was of a patriotic and intellectual woman. By the mid-1990s, campuses had filled with fashionable girls who imitated the styles of *Vogue* models or Sharon Stone in the movie *Basic Instinct*. Discovering their subjectivity away from their mothers and the weight of history, young women literally remade their faces with heavy makeup, plastic surgery, and sessions in private beauty schools. Campuses and streets became filled with model-like women with bright red lips and high heels. Some were hunting for handsome men but many claimed they were just looking for self-satisfaction.

This is the advent of narcissism. The phenomenon is noteworthy for the suddenness with which nearly every young woman has become extremely self-conscious about her looks. I may be overreacting, but I cannot but be surprised when young women spend their time and energy scrutinizing their faces and bodies, making a language out of them. Consider these student reports on the theme, "my opinion of my appearance," a topic assigned in women's studies classes:[11]

> My forehead is too narrow and there is too much fat around my eyes. My nose is too flat and my cheeks are too wide. I have big hands and thick fingers. My legs are fat and not straight, my hips are like a duck's. Women became more pressured about their physical appearances as heterosexual interactions increased.
>
> I went through an identity crisis when I gained weight. When I went shopping and found that the clothes I tried on did not fit me, I felt depressed and said to myself, "you are a fat girl." Buying clothes became a stressful event for me. I did not feel like going to meet boys. I lost my self-confidence and built a very negative self-image.
>
> I have a bad habit that I don't approve of. Whether I walk on the street or study in the classroom, I look around and compare myself with other girls. Sometimes I feel that I am better than they are, and other times, I feel that I am less attractive than they are. More often I feel bad about myself and do not want to even look in the mirror. It is really painful for me to be on this campus which is full of pretty, sexy women.
>
> My mother always tells me one thing, to diet so that she can take me out on the marriage market. She says that if I am fat, I will not have commercial value. So I diet every vacation.

It is not just college students, but also housewives who pay so much attention to their physical appearance. Consider this interview with a 32-year-old housewife:

> Stroll around the street and you will see all the girls who look like fancy fashion models. Think about my husband who strolls around these streets and comes home. Will he think I am a woman? If I have money and time, I want to take body fitness classes. Even if I don't have money, I want to take care of my skin, at least. If you don't have wrinkles and have good skin, any clothes will look good and makeup is also easy. Some people ask why I want to do such stupid things, but they do so out of jealousy. Give them money. . . . Nine out of ten would do exactly the same things I do. When married women (*ajumma*) like me try to attend physical fitness classes and tend to their beauty, we do so thinking that if we just made an effort, we could look as attractive as the young girls in the street.

Young wives are intensely interested in their appearance for at least two reasons: to attract their husbands' attention, and to not look like (*ajumma*), like middle-aged married women. They also know that money makes beauty. Their preoccupation with external appearances is not just a consequence of increased heterosexual interactions. Women describe social pressures from peer groups, mothers, or bosses. Among university students, a core group of women are determined to be successful professional women, but they, too, are pressured to look good. The following quotations are from interview conversations with two work-oriented women:

> When I was a sophomore, I was on a serious diet. I was not fat, but not that slender either. When I heard that competent seniors failed in their job interviews, it didn't sound like some other person's business. If you do not look reasonably good, you dare not ask for a recommendation letter from the teachers (23-year-old working woman).
>
> I have to diet. I am round like a plum and my boss keeps telling me to lose weight. They say it influences sales (24-year-old saleswoman).

Desire for an attractive appearance is a rational reaction on the part of women who know that good looks are one of the most crucial criteria for hiring women. This preference is not limited to specific jobs but applies to any regular office work for high school graduates or even college graduates. In the early 1990s, the employment document of major enterprises that was sent to women's commercial high schools specifically requested that appli-

cants be at least 160 centimeters tall. This ignited a protest by school teachers and women's groups. School teachers were particularly upset because students were not concentrating on job training but on improving their external appearance through cosmetic surgery and crash dieting. Parents felt terrible, assuming that their own genetic make-up was responsible for their daughters' unemployment. Representatives of the personnel departments who made these requests, on the other hand, felt that this policy was reasonable insofar as attractive young women were good for the company's image and improved the atmosphere of the workplace. Many men considered this policy merely a "matter of taste" or even joked about it, saying that it was a fair policy because attractive women with no brains could have jobs too.[12]

These attitudes are pervasive. Young men joke that "a woman with a past can be forgiven but an ugly woman cannot be forgiven." Women of this generation sense that changes in the social structure leave them less and less social space. Only young and attractive girls can have power, so women find new ways to be powerful. Of course, the clothing industry also has a role here in making women more concerned about their looks. A 25-year-old working wife said this: "There are no clothes which really fit me. They must at least be right for my body, mustn't they? I just can't find them. All the stores seem to carry clothes in the recent fashion. They are made for young girls who are confident in their bodies. All the skirts are as short as four inches above the knee." Once a woman goes shopping for clothes, she feels that she has to diet. It is usual for a high school graduate to receive a cosmetic gift from female relatives and to be encouraged to do "beauty care." Following the television commercials, women believe that shiny skin is crucial to being popular and successful.

I discussed my analysis of the newly emerging generation with one of my feminist friends, Elaine, who is a Korean-American. Elaine Kim agreed with me by telling me her story. She visited Seoul about twenty years ago as a college student. At the university, all the young women tried so hard to behave like innocent ladies. Moreover, the ladies' space was severely limited. Elaine was naturally attracted to *ajumma*, who were free and powerful. She looked forward to going back when she became an *ajumma*. Elaine finally visited Korea in 1991 and found that the whole system had been changed. *Ajumma* were no longer so powerful. It was now the era of the attractive, sexy, unmarried young woman. We laughed when she said, "I missed it both times."

In this climate, the "Missy," (*misi-jŏk*) housewives, who look like young misses, has gained explosive popularity. This new image of femininity was produced by the consumer industry from its reading of the psychology of middle class housewives anxious to live active and independent lives

(So-Hee Lee in this volume). The story behind the Missy-driven marketing campaign is that a copywriter had an image of "a young housewife who is somewhat independent, reasonable, and who knows how to make herself look like a college girl, not a middle-aged *ajumma*." A washing-machine commercial based on this image was a big hit (So Chung-sin, *Chung-ang Ilbo* 14 October 1994). In the commercial, the behavioral principles for the Missy were specified as follows:

> 1) Never give off the air of an *ajumma*. 2) My husband and the children are important, but I invest in myself. 3) I am a professional at housekeeping. 4) I know how to save money by shopping during the sale season.

Since the early twentieth century, the image of the diligent wife who puts on makeup neatly competed with the image of the frugal wife who would not spend money on decorating herself. Now wives are asked to be both attractive and budget minded. The *ajumma* who does not take care of her appearance and does not spend money on herself is condemned. The new patriarchy of consumer capitalism and postmodern culture finds these women a nuisance and demands that women try to be ever young and attractive *agassi*. Why don't we see a similar shift in the men's world? *Chong'gak*, the term for unmarried young men, has never been favored over *ajŏssi*, a term for married men.

The Missy syndrome is here to stay, having been adopted by the media and then perpetuated by the housewives themselves to indicate both homemakers who manage to look like misses and housewives who lead active and independent lives.

Despite young women's expressed enthusiasm for careers, do we now have a new group of full-time housewives who accept the position of wife and mother as naturally as their grandmothers did? What will be the social implications of this change? What of the daughters of Missy housewives who will be raised from childhood to be fundamentally concerned with external appearances and who will grow accustomed to being "gazed" objects as a matter of course?

Discussion: Gender, Class, and Generation

The image of the powerful Korean woman is the product of an aborted and colonized modernity. This image could be applied properly to the grandmother's and mother's generations but not to the daughter's generation.

When the family unit was the most crucial social unit and women, as mothers and wives, were central to its survival and advancement, women were powerful. But the image of the powerful woman is changing rapidly as south Korean society embraces consumer capitalism. To most women of the daughter's generation, the image of the powerful woman belongs to the age of their struggling mothers and grandmothers who lived through Korea's unfortunate modern history. It is not an attractive model.

The image of modern women needs to be assessed in relation to the image of defensive/nationalistic men. As private persons, middle class housewives could transform themselves into modern women while doing the work of status reproduction. In the public domain, men maintained face while the white-collar workplace bred conformity and conservatism. At the same time, women in the private domain of domesticity and informal economic transactions transformed themselves out of necessity in their struggles to be included in the new middle class.

As middle class women become the major target of the mass media, while men remain at the economy-driven work place, the cultural and emotional distance between the modern woman and the feudal man will continue to grow. Transformations of women's role and image have taken place swiftly as Korean society has regained self-confidence with rapid economic growth over the last several decades. As old patriarchs have been replaced by new, modern ones, their female counterparts have had to change their clothes twice, once from motherly clothes to wifely ones, and then again to those of attractive, sexy young girls.

The transformation from mother to wife signified that the transition from feudal/rural society to industrial/urban society had been completed, at least in form. The second transition appeared much more suddenly as the women of the mother's generation were perceived to be too aggressive, oppressive to both men's and daughters' individuality. At the same time, the job market has not expanded to meet young women's high aspirations for employment, a situation compounded by the financial crisis of 1997. In such a gloomy situation, young women attempt to secure their own space and new resources for power. They are back in the domestic realm but they have discovered the power of their female bodies. Women of the new generation no longer identify themselves as mothers and wives but as individuals. They try to make the family home a site of self-realization through consumption.

In this age of advertising, it seems normal that competency in the presentation of self is crucial for both men's and women's social success. However, it is women who have jumped, full force, into image management. Young

women, who are desperate to be different from their mother's generation, have finally found an outlet in images. Young women now want to be psychocultural beings, not hardworking laborers like their mothers. As in John Berger's description, Korean society is approaching the point where "men act and women appear" (1977, 47).

Possible Sites for Feminist Intervention in the Era of Postmodern Femininity

What does this recent change mean for a feminist? Throughout the 1980s, feminists had been making gradual progress in the family and in the workplace, but in recent years we find ourselves at a loss. However different they might appear, the women of the three generations discussed in this chapter know that the world they inhabit is male-centered, and most of them believe that it will be so for quite a long time to come. The roles and images of women were transformed in the bustle of modernization without any accompanying change in the deep structure of gender relations: Women exist for men's everyday living and to cater to the male ego. Modernity, understood as the birth of the individual, is for the male gender, while modernity, expressed in status and materialistic display, is for the female gender. Moreover, the homo-social world of Korean women is rapidly disintegrating.

I do not fantasize about an era in which motherly women of the grandmother's generation struggled for survival. While I do not like the image of aggressive, managerial mothers, I cherish the homosocial world of the *ajumma*, the ordinary married woman. The distinctively materialistic and instrumental culture animated by the middle class women of the mother's generation has been, in fact, oppressive to women of other classes and to their daughter's generation. The image of Missy wives is just another variation on the *samonim* culture, causing many other women to suffer in relative deprivation. While the patriarchs are busy restoring the nation's glory after long years of foreign domination, women are divided along several lines: housewives and professional women, *samonim* and *ajumma*, Missy wives and professional singles, and aggressive *samonim* and their passive daughters. The antagonism among them is rising. While the women's liberation movement produced a group of independent and able women active in the public sphere, this seems only to have compounded the frustration of housewives and to be irrelevant to the confused, sexy young women who appeared on the streets of 1990s Korea. It is in this context that feminists need to find a new means of intervention.

There are several areas where south Korean feminists must be attentive. First, motherhood requires a critical reexamination. Feminists need to be engaged in an intensive discussion about compulsory or institutionalized motherhood. Modernization, with only minimum change in the domestic-public dichotomy, has resulted in a large number of able women who instrumentalize their children, deploying them in competitive status games. Motherhood, as an institution of caring and communication, is superseded by instrumentality which, in turn, reinforces the materialism and instrumentality of society in general.

Modern patriarchy's ability to reinforce itself by maintaining the woman's identity as child bearer is an area that demands critical examination. Unless this fundamental definition can be changed, feminists' attempts to make any changes will fail. Why is south Korean society such a difficult place for unmarried women to live confidently? How long does a housewife without a son have to tolerate harassment from relatives and neighbors? In order to achieve the minimum space for a Korean woman to live on her own, one must understand the cultural and political technology of compulsory motherhood. It is not enough to change the family law; we must also change patriarchal life patterns, learn to accommodate ritualistic visits to both sets of parents equally for *chesa* (ancestor veneration) and at other ceremonious occasions. Secondly, feminists need to pay more attention to generational differences in experiences among Korean women. We all know that there is no one fixed space from which all women speak in a sovereign voice. Women have stood in "a variety of generational and class positions which have been discursively articulated in history"(Rofel 1994, 248). The three generations of women who experienced condensed modernization use totally different cultural premises and language to organize their lives.

While many women of the mother's generation in south Korea seemed to be aware of the gender contradictions in their lives, they tried to solve them not by confronting the patriarchal system but by merely climbing up the social ladder. Their efforts have contributed to the formation of a peculiar class structure in south Korea. Moreover, it is a tragedy that the shift of a woman's image from the industrious and resourceful *ajumma* to the indolent and private *agassi* has been accelerated in part by the desires of these domineering and pushy women of the mother's generation. Mothers' toil did not improve their daughter's lot.

Women of the younger generation find that they have more in common with Western women of their generation than with older women in south Korea. When I assigned Harriet Fraad's (1990) article, "Anorexia

Nervosa: The Female Body as a Site of Gender and Class Transition," female students responded with enthusiasm. They said that the paper dealt with their own experiences. The students seemed to be somewhat relieved to discover that many American women were obsessed with their bodily beauty for reasons similar to their own, and to recognize that they had been made to objectify their own bodies, to make them desirable to someone else (cf. Fraad 1990, 83).[13]

As global capitalism expands its pervasive power, there is a trend toward homogenizing women's status and images. Can discovering the body and sexuality be a new outlet for resistance? Will having a site for self-affirmation lead to a new naturalization of oppression? I ask this kind of question these days and try to come up with a postmodern solution for these postmodern girls. Fortunately, we realize "the experience of co-suffering," to use Ashis Nandy's(1987, 54) term, which has brought the modern world close together. In this space, women of the mass-media generation—both East and West—can work together. Here, I see the importance of generational politics, which must begin with a clear recognition of the experiential difference of each generation. Different issues and strategies need to be explored according to different generational experiences, which transcend national boundaries. I see now the increasing importance of media activism on a global scale.

Afterword: After the Financial Crisis of 1997

As might be expected, young women who had found their jobs with such difficulty were the first to be laid off. As a consequence, the divide between family and profession that bisects the community of women has become even more acute. On one side of the division, women are even more deeply invested in marriage, while on the other, women are preoccupied with honing their skills and succeeding on the company entrance exam. Also, as opportunities for professional women have expanded with the transformation of the nation-state, competent and talented women aspire to work in the global sector. But when one looks at the dominant culture, one sees the gathering strength of a new conservatism under the banner of "Let's protect our fathers who have lost their vitality" or "Let's restore the authority of the family head." In opposition, new women's subcultures are stubbornly taking shape. At the heart of these developments is a new independent lifestyle that has emerged in response to a growing number of divorced and never-married women and the lifestyle of the younger generation. The

emergence of diverse social groups, the rise of class polarization, and the feminization of poverty place marriage under siege, intensifying the polarization of the community of women. We must heed the direction of these trends as they unfold.

Notes

I am grateful to Laurel Kendall and Nancy Abelmann, who read this chapter carefully and edited it. Once I was back in Seoul, it was painful to write a chapter in English. Without Laurel's patience and understanding, this chapter would be still in an utterly disorganized file box, ever incomplete. I told Laurel that this might be the last piece I write in English. My brain does not function properly when I think in a foreign language, I said. Korean studies needs to have excellent translators who are bilingual. I await them anxiously.

1. The image of Yi Sang, a patriotic poet in the 1920s, drunkenly weeping over the loss of his beloved nation, has been the archetypal image of Korean male intellectuals. Henry Em's an insightful reading of Yi Sang's "Wings" (1995) suggests that it can be read "as an allegory of how an entire generation of intellectuals sought to survive in a colonial setting by becoming entirely private, shielding themselves with self-deceptions until even that became impossible" (106). The narrator of the short story, according to Em, puts on an idiot-child mask (representing the emasculated intellectual), which allows him to exist within the pervasive and alien colonized culture without being assimilated by it. To Em, "Wings" should be read as a national allegory that is counter-hegemonic, that is, anticolonial and anticapitalist (109).

2. Recently, feminists have raised the issue of the Japanese Imperial Army's conscription of Korean women as "comfort women," gaining international attention through the United Nations. Most south Korean male leaders, both in politics and intellectual circles, simply want to put the problem away, saying, "It's shameful. Let's just not talk about it."

3. Here, I am reminded of an early Christian missionary's comment that a Korean woman of her acquaintance "was the real man in resourcefulness, energy, and ability to manage. Many Korean women do that, however, and they are quite used to it" (Underwood 1905, 222–223). Wolf (1972) describes how Chinese women forge "uterine families" as bastions of strength within the similarly Confucian Chinese family; her discussion has much in common with the dynamics of the Korean family.

4. Editor's note: For an account of a lower class woman, similarly resourceful in desperate times but bereft of family solidarity and resources, consider the mother's story in *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman* (Kendall 1988). Even the dream of a child's university education is remote from her experience.

5. The decline of the rural population was drastic. At the time of the Liberation, only 13 percent of the peninsula's population was living in settlements of over 50,000 persons, and approximately 80 percent were living in rural settlements of under 20,000 persons. The population in settlements of over 100,000 grew by 117 percent during the 1970s. In 1975, the urban population was 48.4 percent of the total population. By the middle of the 1980s, only 24 percent was rural (Cho Haejoang 1984, 195–196).

6. The average schooling of this generation (born between 1937 and 1946) is 8.52 years. For men, it is 9.88 years, for women 7.14 years (Kang 1996, 594).

7. Toward the end of the Meiji era, Baron Kikuchi, one-time Minister of Education and President of both Tokyo and Kyoto Universities, defined the goal of female education as follows (quoted in Smith 1983, 75):

> Our female education, then, is based on the assumption that women marry, and that its object is to fit girls to become "good wives and wise mothers." The question naturally arises what constitutes a good wife and wise mother, and the answer to the question requires a knowledge of the position of the wife and mother in the household and the standing of women in society and her status in the State. . . . [The] man goes outside to work to earn his living, to fulfill his duties to the State; it is the wife's part to help him, for the common interests of the house, and as her share of duty to the State, by sympathy and encouragement, by relieving him of anxieties at home, managing household affairs, looking after the household economy, and, above all, tending the old people and bringing up the children in a fit and proper manner.

8. Kendall's (1996) extensive study on modern south Korean practices of marriage and dowry describes various media treatments of extravagance. She notes that upper-middle class housewives, who orchestrate their childrens' weddings, are the common butt of criticism.

9. Editor's note: See Fulton and Fulton (1997, 139–160) for a translation of this story as "Identical Apartments."

10. Editor's note: *Yoksim* is usually translated as "greed", but implies a relentless appetite for wealth or recognition, an intense, driving craving.

11. These responses are from classes taught by Kim Eun-Shil and Yi Myong-son at Ewha Women's University in the spring of 1994.

12. Forty-four companies were accused of violating the equal opportunity employment law because of such hiring practices. In December 1994, the judge found eight companies guilty of this violation and asked them to pay a million wŏn (about US$1,300) in penalty. The rest of them were found not guilty because the competition was among members of the same sex with no comparable group from the other sex.

13. Fraad considers one of the cultural conditions contributing to anorexia to be a gender ideology that presents women as sex objects. She writes, "We learn what we look like rather than how to feel and know the sensations of our bodies. We are dependent upon external reinforcement for being attractive and sexy. Attractiveness is verified by those one attracts. Women's own sexuality, our own desire, is not cultivated as our own experience but the experience of being desirable to someone else" (1990, 83). The other condition Fraad discusses is a period of class and gender transition where the contraction of women's existence is dramatized by their being neither firmly situated in a male-supported household nor in emergent roles in both the household and the marketplace (1990, 82). Fraad concludes her paper thus:

> The seeming contractions in anorectic behavior express the conflict between current expectations of women and a past with which we are now breaking. For hundreds of years, women's primary labor has been socially defined as the production of household goods, services, and nurturance. Now, women are expected to maintain their roles as homemakers while succeeding at labor in the marketplace, all the while disciplining ourselves to fit media images of feminine attractiveness. Whereas formerly we had one master, the male head of the household, now we have three masters: men, bosses, and the media, all giving simultaneous contradictory directives. The radical break in ambitious, modern lives erupts in the form of eating disturbances expressing the rupture between generations of daughters and their mothers (Fraad 1990, 97–98).

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