Urbanization and Housing

Modern Korean Society
Clark W. Sorensen
November 5, 2015
Age of Mass Consumption

- Following the Great Labor Uprising 1987-1990 worker’s wages in large-scale industry rose so that workers could join consumer society
  - Large scale New Middle Class was developing
  - Workers as Consumers were also developing

- Between 1990 and 1997 per capita income in South Korea rose from $8,600 to $15,480 (grew 1.8 times in seven years)
  - Idea of the male provider and the female family reproducer (androcentric nationalism) continued
  - Consumption became “gendered” (associated with femaleness)
    - Peasant family—man and wife co-producers
    - Urban family—man the bread winner, wife the consumer
Economic dualism

- Result of chaebŏl dependence on bank financing and government support

- Large industry (chaebŏl)
  - Better access to capital, thus larger scale with better technology
  - More productive so employees paid better
  - But employees divided into “regular” and “temporary” (or part time)
    - Regular employees mostly male, have job security
    - Contingent employees mostly female, and let go when times are hard

- Small and medium industry (chungso kiŏp)
  - Less access to capital, less up-to-date technology
  - Employees less well educated, are paid less, and have little job security
  - Much work subcontracted from large scale businesses, so small companies squeezed during hard times
1997-8 Currency Crisis

- Banking “reform”
  - In order to join OECD 1996 South Korea had to liberalize money markets
  - Did so, but did not install adequate prudential regulation
  - Chaebŏl could borrow directly abroad without telling the government

- Development of “bubble economy”
  - Large amount of capital entered Korea, value of currency rose, trade deficits developed
  - Chaebŏl were borrowing in hard currency to invest not just in Korea, but also Southeast Asia

- Bubble bursts
  - Thai currency tanked, then Indonesian
  - Korea owed money in dollars and yen, but got worthless bhat and ringet
  - Run on Korean currency, Bank of Korea ran out of dollars

- Women blamed for “overconsumption” (kwasobi 過消費) though people also recognized government incompetence
IMF bailout

- Korea lent $57 billion by IMF and an additional $20 billion contingency fund was set up—the largest bailout in history at the time

- IMF requirements
  - Liquidate insolvent banks and finance companies
  - Force chaebol to create consolidated books and reduce debt to 200%
  - Allow foreign-owned subsidiaries and imports (ceiling on foreign ownership changed from 26% to 100%)
  - Reduce government spending

- Kim Dae Jung administration
  - Government/management/labor councils agree on restructuring (layoffs)
  - Large scale government layoffs
  - Government sells insolvent businesses to foreigners to bring in capital, and chaebol sell subsidiaries (often to foreign capital) to reduce debt
    - FDI didn’t used to be possible, but now it’s important in South Korea
IMF Crisis IMF=İ'M Fired—about 15% of the population was laid off, and poverty and homelessness skyrocketed in 1998-9
- IMF homeless (new social category) distinguished from undeserving homeless
- Public works programs
- Made work for New Intelligentsia (신지식인)
- Venture capitalism seen as a way out

- Neoliberal restructuring
  - Based on individual identity rather than national identity
  - Men prioritized over women (discourse of family breakdown led to reintroduction of stay-at-home mother model)
  - Many women forced into contingent employment (doing same job for half the pay)
Cosmopolitan subjectivities

- Abelman, Park, and Kim article
  - Contrasts Heejin and her unnamed friend who, at a women’s college, is into fashion, etc.
    - Friend is classic Soybean Paste Girl (된장녀), Heejin is “new cosmopolitan”

- Heejin’s background
  - Foreign Language High School (외국어고등학교) with admission by exam—many of these schools private
  - Korea University—top tier of Seoul Universities
  - Says she got there through “self management” (자기 관리)
Author’s interpretation

- Inequalities always justified through discourses of personal effort and triumph over circumstances

- What’s new about Heejin?
  - Her self-styling beyond formal schooling 자기관리
  - Notions of character formation beyond just effort and hard work

- Context?
  - Post-authoritarian liberalization (democratization) from 1987 allowing personal freedoms
  - Neoliberal restructuring of the state (less protection from globalization and more individual competition)
  - Stratified higher education in which rank of universities affects pay-off of higher education
Neoliberal restructuring?

- Flexibilization of labor combined with demise of job security
  - layoffs and restructuring, part-time or contract work rather than secure full-time jobs with benefits

- Retrenchment of state and social support for social welfare
  - Includes IMF welfare programs designed to rehabilitate men as family breadwinners and women as housewives
  - Also includes privatization of education making it more expensive and thus more available to economic elites compared to non-elites
Old and New Subjects

- Old collectivist subjects
  - Those who studied hard and conformed for the sake of, and with the help of, their families and the nation
  - Those who became student activists and conformed more with their political peers than their families, but yet were involved in a collective project
  - In this context individualism 個人主意 was stigmatized as egotism 利己主意

- Cosmopolitan subjects
  - English as “base” (베스)
  - View beyond the state to the world
Effect of 1998 Currency Crisis

- Privatization, individuation, globalization

- Discourse of human capital
  - China: discourse of suzhi 素質
    - N.B. Korean meaning of sojil more like “talent” or “aptitude” than quality in the narrow sense (i.e. 내 품질을 �っぷ어하고 싶다)
    - Neoliberal aspect = education and training thought of as stored value—i.e. intellectual and social capital

- IMF changes
  - Restructuring and less job security
  - Foreign direct investment and management
  - Increasing social inequality
Recent Changes in Education

- Old System emphasized equality of opportunity
  - Exams for high school and college
  - State schools better than private and much cheaper because tuition limited by state for both state and private schools

- New system involves deregulation, privatization, diversification, and globalization
  - Private elementary, middle and high schools now very competitive as regulations prohibiting high tuition have been repealed
  - High schools differentiated through competitive admissions
    - Academic High Schools, Foreign Language High Schools, Vocational High Schools, Commercial High Schools
  - Expensive cram schools (hagwŏn) de rigueur ($$ a month)
  - Colleges highly stratified by examination and cost
    - Seoul based better than provincial
    - Except for Seoul National, elite private institutions (Korea, Yonsei, Ehwa) the best, the most internationally connected, and very expensive
Student reaction?

- Discursive change among students:
  - Students today criticize old “machine-like students” who “did as they were told” (기계같은 시키는 대로 하는 학생)
  - Valorize students who do as they want (하고 싶은 대로 하는 학생)

- Kodae student doesn’t distinguish her personal self from her market oriented self—all self management
  - Kodae her brand (mak’ŭ) and languages (English, Chinese, Japanese) her tool
  - Little awareness of her social advantages, and she sees greater equality as “dumbing down”

- Sori at Third tier Myŏngji—father “stopped investment”
  - No cram school as father thought her “hopeless”
  - (export) “item” (아이템) as metonym for intellectual capital
  - Gendered life-course—Soybean Paste lifestyle?
Student reaction (2)

- Inch’ŏn City University
  - Started private, became state in 1995, and now trying to become national
  - Min the non-conformist
    - Traveled to India to learn practical English (silch’ŏn yŏngŏ)
    - Critical of South Korean language education, competition, and need for connections—did not internalize failure like Sori (Myŏngji)—and has many travel stories
  - Kŭn and the civil service exam route
    - Sees job security and leisure time
Single Women on their Own

- Jesook Song *Living on Your Own* (2014)

- Post 1998 bind for young, female, unmarried college graduates
  - Employment prospects dim
    - More difficult national economy
    - Resurgent conservative gender regime endorses gender discrimination in the job market

- Song sees difficult job market for youth a worldwide trend

- Women want to live on their own because of suffocating pressure from their parents

- Young adults find it difficult to buy or rent a place
Problem of Housing

- Women who live at home face regulation of their sexuality
  - Appearance of chastity (sun’gyŏl) and pressure to marry before one’s shelf life expires put on women
  - Men freer sexually, and can marry later

- Lump sum required to rent in the chŏnse system

- Bank loans and credit are available only for high wage earners (who are mostly men)

- Lump sums are acquired informally from family at time of marriage
  - Unmarried women have little chance to acquire enough money to rent or buy
Finance/financialization

- Wealth (in housing especially) distinguishes the New Middle Class from workers
  - Chungsanch'ŭng (中産層)—middle bourgeoisie (kind of middle to upper middle class)

- Formal financial system (banks, insurance companies, etc.) not so present in housing markets
  - Informal institutions—kye and private loans

- “sedimented financialization”—metaphor that likens informal transactions to sediment that settles through innumerable informal transactions
Post-revolutionary affect

- Women born in the 1960s and 1970s participated in the democratization movements of the 1980s and 1990s
  - They have critically reflected on the male dominated structures of the 1980s
  - Many moved into feminist movements in the 1990s
  - While not attracted to consumerism per se, they are persuaded by the rhetoric of enjoyment and of the self-improvement technologies of neoliberalism—i.e. “I’ve done the movement thing, so now is the time to take care of myself.”
- Foucault’s “technologies of self” = self knowledge + self care
Women in book

- Late 20s to early 40s (2005-7)—born 1965-1980
- Former democracy activists with feminist ideas of self-determination and autonomy
- College graduates from schools of secondary status, so in precarious job market
- Cannot get a loan for housing unless married, living on one’s own for three years, or annual income of 25,000 won
Cultural expectations of young women

- Live at home until marriage, and will get married at appropriate age (late 20s/early 30s)

- Families will rearrange family resources to help children at the time of their marriage

- Abolition of house head system in 2005 has removed some legal barriers to single existence

- South Korean fears of demographic collapse due to low birth rate (TFR 1.3 in 2012—replacement TFR is about 2.1) lead some to criticize unmarried or childless women
  
  - Discourse of the three renouncements 三拋—love, marriage, and children
Programs to Increase Birth rate

- Project to help new mothers with visiting health workers and financial support (if less than 65% of average income)—sanmo toumi (2015)
Women and sexuality

- Family supposed to nurture and protect women's sexuality until marriage
- Traditional sexual norms continue for women despite cosmopolitan influences of movies and other media
  - Confucianism in the past idealized male control of women and female chastity
  - Today Protestant Christianity embraces conservative sexual norms of conjugal sexuality for purposes of procreation only
- Unmarried women living alone are suspected of sexual promiscuity—something that can harm one on the marriage market
- Women who don't marry at the proper time “expire at 28” (만기되다?)
Historical precedents?

- “New women” (sin yösong) and “modern girls” (modŏn gŏl) of the 1920s and 1930s
  - Modern education (though high school)
  - Wanted to lead ‘modern’ independent lives
    - Often associated with modern consumption
    - Many came to a “bad end” or became concubines
      - Na Nyesŏk died homeless and socially ostracized after divorcing and died of hunger and cold
      - Yun Sim-dŏk, first Korean graduate of Tokyo Conservatory, committed suicide with her married lover on April 4, 1926
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFKvWquTtok
Modern Girls in the 1930s

“Waitresses wear high heels that don’t fit their calves, their rears wiggle back and forth, and Their Majesty’s feet are invisible”
Modern Girls in the 1930s
Forms of Resistance

- Study or travel abroad (may be sent by parents to avoid scandal)
- Foreign television series, film festivals
- Work for feminist NGOs, though single women’s issues are often not prominent
- Invented new term “pihon yōsōng” 非婚女姓 to replace “mihon yōsōng” 未婚女性
  - Some wags replace 非婚 (unmarried) with 悲婚 (tragically married)
Life courses

- Moving out to go to university in the city
- Moving out when parents live in the same city
- Moving out at odds
- After moving out
  - Coworkers as matchmakers
  - Image as a “poor, flawed woman” (who cannot marry)
  - Uncomfortable talk about sexual safety at pansanghoe
High price of housing

- Initially due to deliberate government policy to starve the housing market of money so as to leave more available for industrial development (1960s and 1970s)
  - Squatter settlements developed around major cities (p’anja ch’on, pullyang kŏjuji, tal tongne)
    - mid-sixties Ch’ŏnggye cleared out
    - 1969 “citizen’s apartments” simin ap’at’ŭ
  - 1970s green belts circled most cities limiting development land
  - 1980s more money became available, but squatter settlements moved out of Seoul to Sŏngnam
  - Redevelopment with high rise apartments made land more valuable and speculation profitable for the monied
  - Housing lotteries, etc., for the less well off
    - Chut’aek ch’ŏngyang yegŭm (housing subscription savings) make you eligible to bid for apartment ownership
    - Premium may be added to bidding
Key terms

- **Lump sum (mokton, chongjatton)**
  - Need to acquire a lump sum to initiate a rental, and it is larger than most young people can save—so have to borrow through social networks

- **Key money (chŏnse)**
  - Rather than monthly rent, deposit one’s yearly rent in advance to be repaid at the end of the year
  - Landlord invests the money in lieu of receiving little bits of rent every month
  - Can combine chŏnse and rent—high chŏnse, low rent; low chŏnse, high rent

- **Financial know-how (chae t’aek’ŭ)**
  - Investment, accumulating cash
Government policy

- National housing fund lends to people in need (chŏnse chagŭm)
  - Limited to married persons, especially those with children
  - Unmarried not considered “true need” unless over the age of 35
  - Unmarried women over 35 may still be discriminated against for being “abnormal”

- Public housing for young unmarried women like workers dormitories with a curfew
Chŏnse rent

- Prepay annual lump sum deposit
  - 50-80% of the price of the apartment that the landlord returns at the end of the lease
  - Average for informants: $40,000 lump sum plus $500 month rent

- Reason for this system is that a consumer banking system has historically been absent
  - Banks are for large-scale business
  - Many transactions in cash, and lump sum system amasses large sums for investment
  - Consumer mortgages only appeared in 2003, and still only for the rich

- Ordinary people turn to kye, and lump sum payments
  - Kyeju runs it (sunbŏn kye, nakch’al kye)—usually women, but mostly married housewives
  - Exchanges at marriages, retirements
Financialization

- After the 1998 currency crisis had passed, consumer financing became available
  - Minus accounts (like credit/debit cards)
  - Stocks/bonds new (especially bonds)
  - Insurance/savings plans
- Property as financial assets
  - Can live off rent or lump sum
Flexible lifestyle

- Affect discussion p64-5

- Jouissance (joy) as a value, and flexible lifestyle congruent with flexible working?

- Leftist movements had been masculinist and dogmatic
  - After that moved to more self-realization centered women’s movements
  - E.g. Sŏnu—either NL (national liberation) chuch’ŏ sasang (sovereignty ideology) or PD (people’s democracy) focused on class revolution and labor emancipation
    - NL especially was hierarchical, secretive, and socially conservative
Media influences

- Sex and the City, Bridget Jones’s Diary, Will and Grace, Queer as Folk, Ally McBeal, Grey's Anatomy, CSI

- Korean Programs: 독신천하 (Singles World), 결혼하고 싶은 여자 (Girls who Want to Get Married), 올드 미스 다이어리 (Old Miss Diary)

- MBC Documentary: 싱글이라도 괜찮아 (I’m Single and I’m OK)
  - Supposed to be successful singles or women wanting to get married, but ended up with successful married women trying to balance life and career

- Images: Soybean Paste Girl negative, Gold Miss too successful to get married
Upward mobility?

- Valorization of “paeksu” (good-for-nothing)
  - Short for 백수건달 (백수건달) “empty-handed good for nothing”
  - Kŏndal can also mean men who provide the muscle for violence against enemies (like mafia almost)

- Flexibility based on individual creativity
  - Wide interest in self-help and self-realization programs
  - Self-help books translated and popular

- Hip Single? p77
  - Hwaryŏhan singûl 화려하다 more “glamorous”, “flashy” or “posh”
Contradictions?

- Desire to live a flexible life unbounded by the structured capitalist employment system + responsibility to take care of oneself in a flexible labor market

- Criticism of work ethic as “Fordist” yet flexible lifestyle encourages (or adapts to?) neoliberal economic structuring

- Has neoliberal lifestyle developed in opposition to the authoritarian state and rigid job demands inadvertently supported the development of “flexible employment” without job security?
Affective Baggage

- Weighty sense of social duty (1980s)—collective subjectivity
  - Ch’oe Sŭngha’s poety as “labor of social mourning”
  - Sympathy for dispossessed, or tortured
  - Self-suspension as “lateral agency” (small vacations from the will)
  - Playfullness in the movement like p’ungmulp’ae
  - (N.B. Hagen Koo interprets this as “hanp’uri” the release of “han” and a justification of violence)
- Manhwa and TV related?
- 2008 Candlelight Vigils? Social mourning plus enjoyment? Or Kang Jiyeon’s “non-political corporeal memory of youth”?
Affective Baggage 2

- Imperative for an enjoyable life (1990s+)—individual subjectivity
  - (developed out of resistance to dogmatic social norms)
  - Pleasure is a “lateral move” (suspension of will)?

- Recognize high structural importance of married women
  - Don’t think single women will (should?) get high priority in government programs
Gender System (Tari Young-jung Ha)

- Begins with same assumptions as Seungsook Moon, but adds sexuality
  - Gendered *kungmin* defined by status (*sinbun*) as mother/father/son/daughter/daughter-in-law, etc.
  - Family Register (*hojŏk*) abolished in 2008, but this replaced by Family Relations Registration (*Kajok Kwan’gye Tŭngnok Chedo*)—that does the same thing
  - One becomes a full citizen-adult only through marriage. In this context homosexuality:
    - Is *unfilial* because one is not fulfilling one’s duty to have descendants to continue the family line
    - Also does not fulfill one’s *kungmin* duty to reproduce the nation
Military and Sexuality

- All “real” males are subject to conscription—excepting non-conforming males (for race or sexuality)

- Males subject to conscription are examined and excluded if “unfit”
  - Only within military law is homosexual activity deemed criminal, to protect the “healthy life and morale of the collective that is the military”
  - “militarized masculinity” applied to all “normal” males and continues after brief military service
Love and Money (Yoonjung Kim)

- Traditional childbirth
  - At home with or without a midwife (mother-in-law or other kin attending)
  - Some women went to their birth home to have their first child, or had a sister to come help them
  - Kŭmtchul set up to keep people out for three days, worship of Samsin, and miyŏkkuk

- Present-day childbirth (among well-off)
  - Hospital birth
  - Two week stay in a postpartum care facility (sanhu choriwŏn)
  - Additional month of post-partum home care (sanhu toumi)
New/Old Relationships

- New mother’s “mothers” (mother-in-law and/or birth mother)
  - Shift in tension from mother-in-law/daughter-in-law to son-in-law/wife's natal family (시어머니/며느리→사위/부인의 친가집)
  - Three-seven system (21 days of no housework)

- Life-long responsibilities of birth mother (ch’ınjŏng ŏmŏni)
  - Supports daughter in her marital family by paying for postpartum care
  - Also reflects “reponsibility” of the girl and her family to ensure offspring (traditionally a girl could be “sent home” for infertility)

- Power of the mother-in-law (si-ŏmŏni)
  - Story of the Samsinsang (table for Samsin on paegil, 100th day)
  - Birth mother thinks it’s superstition while mother-in-law insists and daughter-in-law wants to placate her
  - But husband’s mother-in-law (changmonim) now in the picture, and his birth mother has less direct control because of neolocal residence