
When Individual Mind Becomes the Social

In South Korea, perseverance has been over emotion for a long time, under collectivistic relationship. This cannot be simply regarded as an Asian trait, but rather as reflection of Korea's social-structure since late 20th-century. And this could sustain under high social-mobility amid long-term economic miracle. While this remained unchallenged by increasing instabilities and vis-a-vis competition since 1997 financial crisis, however, 2008 global economic crisis was followed by radical transformation of all social priorities. Cease of social mobility made competitions no longer assure success, people began to doubt the value of unconditional perseverance and efforts. And intensifying competitions suppressed the benefits of collectivistic relationship, which became replaced by fragmented individualism.

Amid the individualization, then Korean people looked back at their own emotions for the first time. Concurrently, with probable relation with that, by 2008-2010 Korea's psychology faced the new era of emergence, with soaring number of studies on ADHD, depression, and happiness. Linking society, emotion-priority, and psychological trends, my meta- and discourse analyses prove: psychology, though dealing with individual minds, is also a social product.

Key Words: minds and society; psychology as social reflection; perseverance for achievement; social mobility and emotion.

Introduction

South Korea, the country I want to address in relation with its academy history as reflection of social change, is not influential country alike U.S., China, or France, nor not the most often researched country. Nevertheless, I assert this country is very worth focus for meta-analysis of psychology/psychiatry, for its unique history of value transition. For decades, the economic miracle rooted the firm belief on the value of perseverance. Its fastest economic growth throughout the late 20th century, also social culture and institutions changed fast, correspondingly. And according to Matsumoto (Matsumoto & Juang, 2013); cultural psychology is reflect that follows shortly later the social environment, people minds of such society would have drastically transformed. No. rather, we Koreans are living in the society where generations whose values are totally heterogeneous, because they spent their young age when the social style was totally different.

By extension, the discourse, studies and social concerns on people's emotional problem has evolved dramatically. And those are, at least partially, byproducts or aftermath of mega social-

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trend. That is what I want to discuss in this paper, with the well-known and common themes in psychiatry — anxiety, ADHD, depression, schizophrenia, — along with a totally different element.

In the following sections, first I will discuss radical and drastic value changes of Korean society since Korean War's end by 1953 until 2015. The subsequent sections are chronology of aforementioned psychology/psychiatry subjects researches in Korea, with its reflection of contemporaneous society. And for conclusion, I will make it clear about linkage of change of social structure, value priority, and the trend of research.

Literature Review about Koreans' Mind in Transformation:

From Collectivism to Fragmented Individualism, and from Perseverance to Emotion

In this chapter, I want to say about the big picture of the social change of South Korea since late 20th century until the present. At the same time, I will also discuss value-transitions of Koreans since the global economic crisis 2008, from collectivism to fragmented individualism, and from perseverance and achievement to emotion-orientedness, which caused the new wave of psychological/psychiatric studies since 2008-2010.

1. Brief Summary on Collectivism to Fragmented Individualism, and Perseverance to Emotion

Hofstede points out that the nature of perseverance is emotion-control (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Perugini, 1993). That is, perseverance and emotion-acceptance, to a certain degree, are mutually opposite thing. And in this chapter, I want to point out that for a long time Koreans were more inclined to perseverance over emotion, due to strong belief on the value of effort and on the achievement. This is only changed since around between 2008 and 2010, when global economic crisis in 2008 ceased Korea's economy miracle, and augmenting vis-a-vis competitiveness made people live life more alone.

Historically in Korea, and effort assured success, perseverance was prioritized over emotion-expression because of two factors. One is long-time persistence of collectivism until mid-2000s which was firmly rooted from authoritarian-regime era, as I will explain below. The other cause of perseverance-over-emotion was long-standing social belief that constant effort will compensate. Since 1990s there were more stressing-out elements with augmenting competition, as will be stated below, people stood with it for a long time, due to belief that in the long run it will award them and their socio-economic status will be different. It was like "I feel hard, but I will not say so: I will go on with hard-working, for final awards". So negative emotion could be oppressed.

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However, when the economic miracle was put to the end following and people recognized that constant effort no longer guarantees anything, then they began to look at their minds; perseverance no longer could be over emotion/minds. This drastic change intensified as the society became even more competitive and the fragmented individualism began to replace traditional collectivism — when everyone living alone, each sees more of one's minds. This made the emotion important for the first time for Koreans, and it is this time when there was new wave of psychological and psychiatric studies in Korea. 2. Factors of Collectivism until Mid-1990s

Until the end of authoritarian regime at late 1980s, the collectivism of Koreans appeared either in the form of and he/she will leave him/herself voluntarily. "Once you're accepted as our company's member, you are forever one of us. Even when we don't want you, it is you to decide to leave". And feeling their place secured, employees were voluntarily loyal.

However, Korean enterprises' custom of lifetime-hiring and loose collectivism was broken after Asian financial crisis 1997. Around this time, several conglomerates of Korea went bankrupt. And Korean government had to get loan from IMF, who imposed labor-flexibilization policy. So, layoff system began introduced. Furthermore, the survived conglomerates' owners felt they had to change management, seeking more profitability. Now laborcost reduction became relevant. Then, sudden flow of massive layoff/firing was followed by economic crisis 1997. And of course, the within-workplace competition not to lose his/her job became intensive.

Until 2008: Standing with Competitiveness

I have said the competitiveness and its stress were augmented in Korea since 1990s, for two factors: emergence of Tiger-Mom culture pressuring on academic performance, and disappearance of lifetime job security.

Nevertheless, this did not immediately made people believe that the life is alone competing against all the others vis-à-vis. Still the authority and importance of parents was utmost emphasized. Furthermore, Korea escaped rapidly from economic debt on IMF, and was considered as successful model overcoming financial crisis. Those leaved rooms for belief on success and social mobility through efforts and perseverance. Still Koreans strived, and so-called emotion was a thing to be left behind.

It is this period that tradition of job security through lifetime-hiring began to disappear. The neo-liberalistic IMF authority urged labor market's flexibilization, and large companies (Chaebol) began to introduce layoff system to reduce cost, as they began to lose in the market. Previously, firing was very rare in Korean companies, for two reasons. First, collectivism was important value in Korean enterprises. Therefore, they preferred to keep the same employees

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for a long time so that everyone gets familiar with each other and stays loyal to the company (Even nowadays, the main catchphrase in Korean large business-group is “Company like a family’, though they no longer guarantee much to employees). While they were gaining enough profits until 1997, they had few reason for frequent layoffs. It changed after the crisis in 1997.

While the 1997 crisis made company-life more competitive, because lifetime job is no longer secured, this did not immediately lead to individualization. Still people stayed with collective minds. While they could not be loyal to their hiring company as before, they still relied on and prioritized social relationship hierarchy with their senior/Seonbae, parents, relatives, etc. And Korea’s social mobility was still considered high, by which people held belief they could success through efforts. By this, people stood with unfair behaviors by boss, long-hours working condition, and many other stressful factors at workplace and social relationship.

After 2008: Transition to Fragmented Individualism, and Emotion over Preseverance/Efforts.

However, a decade later, Korea economy faced the second crisis — impact of global economy crisis 2008. It is this time since which Korean economy lost dynamicsi. And as aforementioned, it had been long ago that large enterprises Chaebol took dominant hegemony over Korean government. Following chronic stagnation and domestic-market reduction, now they began to significantly reduce job-offering to minimize cost. They were still gaining profit, but they could not accept even small decrease of it. That explains their active attempt for labor-cost minimization, this suddenly increased uncertainty of life and future, for 20s and and he/she will leave him/herself voluntarily. “Once you’re accepted as our company’s member, you are forever one of us. Even when we don’t want you, it is you to decide to leave”. And feeling their place secured, employees were voluntarily loyal.

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2009).

Furthermore, the enterprise culture of South Korea added to the collectivism; until mid-1990; layoff was very rare, and one recruited the lifetime hiring was secured unless (s)he was too bad employee; so that competition within company was not so harsh and the organization could be cohesive (Sang-Hyuk Shin & Kun-Ho Lim, 2007).

The Age of Increasing Competitiveness, since 1990s

However, along with economic growth, Koreans began to suffer more stress with two kinds of intensifying competition. First, the Asian financial crisis in 1997 made large companies abolish previous lifetime-hiring system, and layoff expanded. Therefore, the competition in companies was to intensify. Secondly, while until 1970s the Koreans' education competition was based on voluntary sense of responsibility to rebuild his family through success, its nature changed since late 1980s: now, studying was something imposed by Tiger-mom.

Another source of competition was end of lifetime-hiring custom, following Asian financial crisis of 1997. Around this time, several conglomerates of Korea went bankrupt. And Korean government had to get loan from IMF, who imposed labor-flexibilization policy. So layoff system began introduced. Furthermore, the survived conglomerates' owners felt they had to change management, seeking more profitability. Now labor-cost reduction became relevant. Then, sudden flow of massive layoff/firing was followed by economic crisis 1997. And of course, the within-workplace competition not to lose his/her job became intensive.

Yet, since 1990s, Koreans society began to suffer more stress from intensifying competitiveness, which is a contrary value to collectivism. This has appeared in two realms: education, and company workplace.

(1) Changing of academic competition's meaning. During 1980s, the dictator Chun Doo-Hwan changed education-policy to stimulate academic completion for university entrance, by supporting mediacampaigns depicting romanticism of university-student life, and by imposing all high-school students stay in school even until the night. Its purpose was making students only study, preventing them from seeing maladies of dictatorship regime. But even after 1989 when Korea was politically democratized, the competition-provoking education system remained.

And now Korea is no longer poor country, and parents had means to financially support and control children's academic endeavors. That is, the "Tiger-Mom" family emerged. Until 1970s, not going to university was not a shame, but since late-1980s it became the must. And while previous generation studied with sense of voluntary responsibility to rebuild his/her poor family, now for children study became something pressured by his/her Tiger-Mom.

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So, Korean children have become extremely unhappy already from early 1990s. It was 1994 when a kid's suicide for academic failure was reported for the first time ever. And then, every year more than 10 has killed themselves, and since 2010 annually over 20. But not all facets of a culture change concurrently and coherently. That is, Korea's Tiger-Mom culture at that time is quite similar to recent U.S. trend, but unlike U.S. Korean parents' authority could never be questioned. So, physical punishment for academic performance has been never a shocking event in Korea, and there was nothing to discourage parents from putting excessive pressuring on their children.

Therefore, students' suicide until mid-2000s was never attributed to parents' coercion and excessive pressuring. It was always the education-system as abstract thing to be blamed for tragedy. It is only in 2008 that social voice calling for parents tolerance was raised (Health Chosun, 2009). And this seems too late. Under such culture, students have had to compete on their own, all-against-all.

(2) Augmenting competition at workplace: since Asian Financial crisis 1997. Although its impact on labor market emerged far later, shortly after political democratization, it is conglomerates (Chaebol or Zaitatsu — e.g. The conglomerates of Korea and Japan like Samsung, LG, or Mitsubishi differ from other countries' large business groups, in that they cover far more various industrial fields) who took hegemony of society displacing previous dictators. Political democratization did not lead to equality in all spheres.

Despite such social power, until mid-1990s, Korean companies did not like massive layoff just for cost minimization. Their culture had been collectivism, and getting employees' voluntary loyalty and sense of belong was very important for most of large-business owners. So while they demanded employees to attend regular informal dining where everyone drinks and talks together, they promised lifetime-hiring to most of employees. Layoff and firing were rare. Even when they wanted a bad employee out, they never directly fired him/her; instead, they just let him/her stay idle at office without giving any work, while still paying wage. Months later, the bad employee will see he/ she is not wanted person in the company.

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