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**FAMILY RELATIONS AND THE "EDUCATION" FACTOR IN THE  
REPUBLIC OF KOREA - BETWEEN CONFUCIAN TRADITIONS AND  
MODERNITY**

Dissertation summary

For obtaining educational and scientific degree “Doctor” (PhD)

2.1 Philology

Scientific specialty: Languages of the peoples of Asia, Africa and America (Korean  
language and society)

Dissertation Supervisor: Prof. Svetla Karteva – Dancheva

Sofia

2023

The dissertation was discussed and proposed for public defense by the Department of Korean Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The paper is structured in three chapters and contains 184 pages, 3 appendices and a bibliography list with 164 sources in Bulgarian, English and Korean.

## **I. Characteristics of the Dissertation**

### **1. Topic, object and subject of the research**

The Confucian ideology has a strong influence on almost all aspects of Korean society. Among them, its impact has been extremely assertive in the formation and development of the traditional Korean family. The ideology is still heavily present today in the core of familial and interpersonal relations.

The Korean family is a patriarchal hierarchy and is characterized by strictly defined roles and norms. It has been the most important social unit since ancient times. The traditional Korean family was formed during the second half of the Joseon Kingdom<sup>1</sup>.

Confucianism has shaped Joseon society, establishing the basis for ethical standards and ideas about political, public, and family relations. It is a dynamic Chinese tradition that has developed rapidly over the centuries. The ideology has been the dominant value system and the most powerful source of influence that has been shaping Korean culture and mentality for thousands of years. The family has always been of paramount importance on the Korean peninsula. According to Confucianism, each person's life is simply one link in their family line, and the individual is a continuation of their ancestors. Thus, Confucian philosophy emphasizes the collective well-being of the family or clan more than the individual one.

One aspect of society directly affected by the influence of Confucianism is the pursuit of a good education. In Korea, academic achievements and relationships usually play a more important role than individual abilities in employment or promotion (Lee 2006: 8). Furthermore, a degree is a significant factor not only in the work environment but also in defining the individual's social status, income and even marriage. In other words, it is the main factor determining the socio-economic position in modern society. Even if a person has competitive abilities, people with lower academic achievements are often limited in their choice of profession. If they somehow do manage to have successful careers, without education, they still struggle to achieve high social status and are subject to discrimination (Sorenson 1994: 24).

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<sup>1</sup> The longest-existing Korean kingdom/dynasty from 1392 to 1910.

Education is not only important for an individual's career, but it is also crucial for the success and prosperity of the whole family and largely determines the dynamics and relationships within the family. The belief that education and success go hand in hand is deeply rooted in the Korean way of thinking and is connected to the centuries-old Confucian tradition. The idea that an individual could advance in society through education was established during Joseon as a direct result of the dominating Confucian values.

Although there is no organized higher Confucian institution in the country, almost all Koreans follow Confucian norms, values, customs and manners. In other words, the majority of Korean people are Confucian, regardless of their affiliation with religious denominations. Therefore, it can be said that Confucianism is a major factor dominating the organizational culture of Korean education as well as Korean society.

The clash of Confucian norms and values with the modern world and its demands and peculiarities has led to significant social problems in the country. Although traditional ideas are still at the core of people's way of thinking and behavior, many of them are in discordance with interpersonal relations, politics and economics. The family is at the heart of Confucianism, but as Western values have spread in Korea, the strictly defined roles and relationships within it are beginning to blur. The hitherto unchallenged patriarchy has been experiencing weakening due to various movements, one being the struggle for gender equality. One of its many side effects is the increasing age of first marriage with each decade. The number of marriages is generally declining, as is the birth rate, while divorce rates are rising dramatically. New family types and single-parent households are emerging in an attempt to cope with modern demands. As a consequence of these problems, the country is also struggling with a noticeable lack of workforce and an aged population<sup>2</sup>, a large proportion of whom live in extreme poverty. Because of the obligation of traditional expectations and the financial burden of education, many young people choose not to start a family at all.

In contemporary Korean society, Confucianism has deepened the idea that a person must seek prestige and profit. The ideology has also retained its focus on collectivism, family and

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<sup>2</sup> The United Nations defines a country's population as "aging" if the percentage of people over the age of 65 exceeds 7%, as "aged" if it exceeds 14%, and as "super-aged" when it is over 20%.

harmony. Combined with the enduring Confucian emphasis on education, hierarchy, hard work and discipline, these values condition family relationships, goals, roles and needs.

The object of the study is to examine the influence of Confucian tradition and education on contemporary family and intergender relations in the Republic of Korea. The subject of study is the traditional and modern Korean family, Confucianism in the context of familial and interpersonal relations in general, Confucianism's emphasis on education, and education as a familial necessity.

## **2. Aim, objectives and hypothesis of the study**

The dissertation aims to trace and analyze Confucian values as a conceptual framework for understanding Korean family processes, structures, relationships, and roles in familial and social contexts. The study also aims to demonstrate the nature of the relationship between the educational needs of the family and the attitudes and choices of its members.

The tasks set to realize these objectives are:

1. Tracking the persistent impact of core Confucian values in modern times. To accomplish this goal, it is necessary to examine the traditional family and Confucian influence in its formation, as well as their current status.
2. Clarifying the factors that have led to changes in the family structure and function. By analyzing them, a clear picture of the processes and influences on familial relations is gained.
3. Analyzing the societal position of education in the country and its direct impact on family forms, roles and family planning decisions. By tracing its historical value and its different setups in the country, the key educational function of the family is clarified.
4. Tracing new phenomena and social problems that arise in the country due to the clash of Confucian views with the demands of the modern world. Studying these highlights the incongruity of the traditional with the modern, reinforcing the ubiquity of Confucian values and illustrating attempts at change.

The hypothesis of this dissertation consists of two parts. Hypothesis 1: Confucian norms are persistently embedded in the foundation of the modern Korean family and largely still determine the relationships among its members. The clash of Confucian views with contemporary demands has led to a number of social problems in the country and exacerbated gender inequality and misunderstanding. Hypothesis 2: Education, on which Confucianism places strong emphasis, is a major factor in family relations, roles, forms and composition.

### **3. Research methods**

The dissertation employs a complex research method - component analysis with a descriptive exposition of parts of the material. The comparative analysis will reveal the specific features of the traditional Korean family and their reflection on its contemporary appearance. We will use synthesis, comparison, and generalization to clarify and trace the relationship between Confucianism, education, and family.

The family as a social unit has been the object of study in many scientific fields, such as anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, ethics, etc., so analyzing its problems, functions, and relations requires an interdisciplinary approach. Depending on its specific aspects, the family is studied with different methods. In this dissertation, we will use a functional and systems approach, incorporating descriptive elements and synchronic and diachronic analysis.

According to the functional approach, the family performs various valuable functions for its members, which can be categorized into reproductive, educational, communicative, economic, emotional, socializing and sexual (Stefanov 2013: 22).

According to the systems approach, the family is a hierarchically organized system in which each member has a specific role and, depending on that role, must adhere to specific rules.

### **4. Relevance of the problem**

The family is the oldest and most stable social unit that survives and adapts over time, hence it is always a relevant topic for research worldwide. With its peculiarities and characteristics, the Korean family is of interest to many researchers. This has led to the existence of numerous publications in English that focus on its various aspects, such as development (Im 1966), transnational forms (Finch and Kim 2012; Cha and Kim 2013), values (Yang and Rosenblatt

2008), and roles (Kim 2001; Byun 2002). There are also books on the family in general (Lee 1997), but unfortunately, most do not reflect the changes and new phenomena that have emerged in Korea in the last 10-20 years. Because of the social problems and new phenomena related to the family, the topic has been the subject of many studies in Korean as well, but most researchers approach it from one perspective only - i.e. issues, health, or as political agenda. Confucianism and education are also among the frequently researched topics in Korea and worldwide (Im 1998; Lee 2006; Lee 2000; Byun 2021). However, few studies cover family, Confucianism, and education and analyze their interrelationship, considering education as a transformative factor in family relations. Some of the "new phenomena" discussed in this paper have not yet been subject to analysis even by Korean researchers.

Korean traditional or contemporary family relationships, and their characteristics, have not been studied in Bulgaria so far. Although Confucianism is present in numerous pieces in the country (Fedotoff 1998; Fedotoff 1997; Mancheva and Zaburtova 2022), its contribution to education has been traced only to traditional Korea (Mancheva 2016), but not in modern times. There is also a lack of research on its impact on the family and the contemporary phenomena and social problems it has influenced.

The relevance of the study is supported by the aforementioned lack of similar works in Bulgaria, and laying the foundations for research in this area is the motive for its creation. The dissertation focuses on contemporary processes and phenomena that have not been extensively studied, even globally. The main contribution of this work is filling the lack of research in Bulgaria on Korean family relations, as well as on educational needs, contemporary family forms, and the continuing Confucian influence in Korea.

## **5. Justification of used terminology**

In this dissertation, the term "traditional" is used to refer to the reign of the Joseon Kingdom, especially the second half. The reason is that period was the turning point of the consolidation and institutionalization of the patriarchal family system as the foundation of society under the influence of Neo-Confucianism. Furthermore, most articles discussing the modernization of the traditional family structure define Joseon as a framework for comparative analysis. "Modern" is used as opposed to "traditional."

Although Neo-Confucianism has had the strongest influence on Joseon and Korean society and family, it is still derived from traditional Confucianism. Since this dissertation examines the overall impact of Confucianism throughout the ages, the term "Confucianism" is used with the inclusion of "Neo-Confucianism".

In addition to Joseon, the dissertation also examines the modern Republic of Korea, hence the use of the terms "Korea" and "Korean" should be understood as "South Korea" and "South Korean."

The transcription of Korean names and terms in the dissertation follows the "Transcription of Korean Names and Words in English Texts" adopted by the Department of Korean Studies at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (Beneva et al. 2018).

## **II. Structure and Content of the Dissertation**

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, three appendices and a bibliography. Appendix 1 presents a glossary of terms and neologisms related to family relations and new social phenomena in Korea. They are existential to understanding the Korean family and sociality and an essential step in the move away from collectivism and towards individualism. Many of them are presented for the first time in Bulgaria. Appendix 2 includes proverbs and sayings related to the family. They are an integral part of the folklore of each country and provide essential information about its values. Appendix 3 contains charts and tables with basic statistics relating to the family. They clearly illustrate the changes that have taken place in the country over the last 60-70 years and allow easy tracing of the development of many of the phenomena and issues described in the dissertation.

### **Introduction**

The introduction presents the relevance of the problem and the need for its research. The dissertation's object, subject, aim, objectives and hypothesis are defined. The methodology is also presented, as well as a justification of the used terminology.



## **Chapter 1 "Nature and Features of the Korean Family"**

Chapter 1 examines the characteristics and peculiarities of the Korean family, drawing a comparison between its traditional and modern forms. It traces which core Confucian values and traditional aspects have survived to the present day and which have been transformed or disappeared.

Even today, the basic unit of Korean society is not the individual but the family. A person is valued based on the tradition and origin of their family. When someone is accused of a crime, the whole family or the head of the family is blamed.

When someone advances in society, their whole family receives praise. Children are always careful how they behave so as not to embarrass their parents. Children are required to obey their parents unconditionally and express their immeasurable gratitude for having raised them. An unbroken family line is a supreme goal for the traditional Korean family. That is why, to this day, Koreans are particularly concerned with rituals and honoring their ancestors, maintaining and expanding family property, and producing an heir to carry on the lineage. Therefore, every Korean is expected to marry eventually and fulfil their traditional obligations.

The traditional Korean family was formed under the undeniable influence of Confucianism during the Joseon period. Because of the comparative proximity of this period to what we regard as 'modern' Korea, it is not surprising that many traditional values, especially within the family, have been preserved. Confucian views are so ubiquitously ingrained in the Korean mindset and interpersonal relations that they prove resistant even to the strong influence of the modern world.

The chapter introduces family relationships and roles. Analyzing family roles is an integral part of studying Korean family life. Roles define the rights and responsibilities of members of social units. The prevailing familism in Korea prescribes a set of attitudes, expectations, and acceptable behaviors according to roles. The preservation and prosperity of the family are the ultimate goals of identifying and fulfilling any social roles. The spousal role is a prerequisite for family formation, the parental and filial roles are essential for family continuation, and the worker role is necessary for both the family's material well-being and social success. Familial relationships depend largely on adherence to the traditional roles set out by Confucianism.

Patriarchy, male-centeredness and strict hierarchy are still very much present in Korea today. They still define relations in society and within the family based on gender and age. As a result of slowly changing views on patriarchy, traditionally assigned roles within the family are also relatively preserved. In other words, the man is responsible for the family's livelihood and its representation in society, while the woman must take care of the home and the upbringing and education of the children.

Confucianism relies on three core values - filial piety, humanity and ritual consciousness. Filial reverence and respect for parents are at the root of the other values. In this context, Koreans give more weight to the parent-child relationship than the marital relationship. This belief is one of the main reasons Koreans regard their children's success as bringing honor and prosperity to the whole family. Since Confucianism places filial piety and the father-son relationship at the heart of the family, it is not surprising that even today, the parent-child relationship is more important than the one between spouses. The idea is still widespread in the country, and children are expected to listen to and obey their parents and do everything in their power to elevate their family status. Parents, in turn, sacrifice everything for their children and their prosperity. Sacrifice for the family is deeply embedded in the mentality of the Korean mother, who still achieves self-fulfillment through her children's successes.

The relationship between the spouses remains secondary. Nowadays marital relations are more liberal and based on love rather than entirely on the respect and submission that women should have for men. However, women still remain in a subordinate position, to some extent, as they are often financially dependent on their husbands. The specific Korean sense of *jeong* and its place in family relationships shows that couples get used to each other, and although love is present in marriages nowadays, Koreans continue to prioritize relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

One of the most complicated family relations for women is still that with their in-laws. Even today, the parents' opinion is crucial for the marriage, and they must necessarily approve of the chosen partner. There has been an age-old tradition that the in-laws arrange the marriage and even make the decisions within the family. As a result, women continue to have numerous obligations to them, even if they rarely have to live together anymore.

The authority of the patriarch is diminishing, and the children find themselves at the center of the family, mainly due to the hopes placed on them for future success. In a sense, it could be argued that the Confucian perception of the success of one family member as the success of the whole family is even strongly present today because of the greater opportunities for social mobility in the country. The children's future success has become the family's central goal, as they will contribute to the overall well-being of all members. While families have always placed hopes for a better life on the next generations, one of the main changes is that in the past, they relied on the protection of the ancestors, whereas in the present, Koreans turn to the practical - i.e., the efforts of the living.

Although the Korean family has undergone many changes under various external influences, the traditional Confucian values that dictate relationships, views and expectations are still preserved at its core. It can be said that the strictness of the Confucian framework is diminishing as the ideology adapts to the modern world, showing greater continuity but retaining its core essence.

The chapter also pays attention to the main factors that contributed to the changes in the Korean family. They can be categorized into urbanization, modernization, and Western influence.

Increased urbanization in search of better education and jobs is helping the typical urban nuclear family to rapidly displace the traditional Korean stem family as the new norm. The family structure is subject to expensive housing and small spaces in cities, but also to young families' desire for independence. The strictly regulated, demanding and stressful intergenerational relationships are also becoming one of the preconditions for change, as people are moving towards smaller families, including single households.

Many of the demands of the modern world, such as continuing education, intense competition in the labor market, dedication to work, expensive living, labor demand, dual-income households and the possibility of social mobility, are among the reasons for the transformation of family roles, relationships and structure.

The chapter traces the changes in the family structure and the new phenomena occurring with the country's modernization.

A characteristic feature of the modern family is that its members are becoming fewer thus single-person households, those of widowers, remarried, or childless families are emerging. These households, apart from those of widowers, are considered new family forms in Korea, as they were traditionally almost non-existent during Joseon but are considered common in modern times.

In contemporary Korean society, the values of family, marriage and children are constantly changing in an attempt to preserve tradition but also meet the needs of the individual and the demands of modern society. Unsurprisingly, as a stable social unit, the family is also adapting to modernity, and thus new family forms are emerging to meet family needs such as work or education. An example of such family forms is the *kirogi kajok* (기리기 가족) and 'weekend couples' (주말부부), who, though living apart, retain their traditional roles and make sacrifices for the well-being of the family. Globalization, developed infrastructure and advanced technology are also helping to facilitate the emergence of diverse family forms. They are emerging mainly due to economic and educational factors but also in an attempt to escape from some traditional responsibilities, such as the responsibilities for the husband's parents.

Much of the ideological changes in the country can be attributed to Western influence, or more specifically to Christianity and modern education, which have contributed to the weakening of the patriarchy and the raised status of women. Confucianism restricts women the most, morally and physically, so it is not surprising that it is women who have seen the most significant changes. Nowadays, women are educated and work, but this carries a double burden as housework and children are still considered their primary tasks. Women are not recognized for their careers or personal achievements but for those of their children. Moreover, because the children's education is seen as a fundamental pillar for future development and social mobility, many decisions within the family are made with educational needs in mind, so the educational function of the family becomes central.

## **Chapter 2 'Education and its impact on family relations from the Joseon period to the present'**

Chapter 2 traces the development and consolidation of the place of education under the influence of Confucianism and its relationship to views of prestige and prosperity.

Confucianism defines education as the highest ideal, which over the years, has also become the steadiest way to advance in society. While religions such as Buddhism and Christianity also contribute much to the spread of education, it is Confucianism that gives it a central place in society and hence in the family. It has also enabled the rise of 'education fever' in Korea. In a country where education has been the privilege of the elite alone for millennia, it is still a potent symbol of prestige and defines all aspects of society.

Education in Korea has held a significant place since ancient times when it was an integral part of religion. It is seen as the highest value and considered the best way to educate people (Mancheva 2016: 8). One of the most crucial moments in the educational history of Korea was the introduction of a renewed system of the state examination, called *kwago* (과거), in 958 in Goryeo, and only those who passed could hold a state post. This change also had a direct impact on the family. The adoption of the state examination system in the 10th century led to careful documentation of family relationships and lines. Since only men could take the state examinations, Koreans began to place more importance on direct male inheritance. Thus, the family gradually relied more and more on the man to take the exam and occupy a high government position to provide for the family. This social change led to a higher status for men within and outside the family. The trend also reinforced the widespread Confucian ideals that women should submit to men. Women's position and rights gradually diminished, with more of them confined to the boundaries of the family home. It could be said that this was the turning point when the Korean view that advancing in society was possible only via a good education deepened - an idea that is still firmly held today.

Although education has been emphasized since the time of the first Korean states, its influence and importance were consolidated during Joseon, when it became closely linked to examinations and success. Confucianism transformed the state into a hierarchical society in which academic success was the main path to higher social class and life prosperity. Koreans' "passion" for education stems from Confucian views, which have always attached great importance to it and made it a core value.

The Confucian education system was maintained until the late 19th century when Korea was forced to open its doors to the great powers and adopt the Western education system. However,

the tradition of *kwago* is still alive and seen as the matrix of the current civil service examination and the university entrance exam.

After tracing the relationship between Confucianism and education, the chapter introduces and analyzes "shadow education", or the huge private tutoring industry in the country. Institutionalized *hagwon* (학원) schools are seen as the successors of *sowon* (서원), private Confucian academies during the Joseon period.

Nowadays, education in Korea is much more attainable than it used to be, and almost anyone is willing could continue their studies at university. Furthermore, there is no empirical evidence linking shadow education to higher test scores. However, despite reforms aimed at humanizing the testing process and expanding university admission criteria, supplemental education continues to be in high demand. This fact suggests that the problem is not the quality and quantity of public education. Many parents start sending their children to private tutoring when they turn two. However, since at this age, one certainly cannot speak of a need for academic achievement, this phenomenon confirms the importance of extra tutoring as a symbol of prestige and reassurance that parents are doing everything possible to better the child's opportunities.

Although the Joseon hierarchical system does not exist anymore, Korea is still ruled by people who graduated from the best universities. The tradition of elevating the status of the entire clan and preserving the privilege of the elite also remains intact in the family-run conglomerates that hold great economic power in their hands. Since education is available to all, the belief that one can get a better job and climb the social ladder is even stronger. In addition, there is also the deeply rooted belief that a degree from an elite university can only be obtained through a multitude of private tutoring.

It can be concluded that shadow education in Korea represents a fusion of culture and functionality. Traditional Confucian views dictate that education is the highest goal and the surest way to rise in society. For many Koreans, driven by the desire to enter a prestigious university and pursue a successful career, education and exams are a fundamental social reality and professional structure. For parents, shadow education not only represents a basic requirement for access to higher-paying, higher-ranking careers but also a visible sign of status and legitimacy.

The chapter pays extensive attention to the role of the mother as the traditional caretaker of children and their education. According to Confucianism, the husband is the head of the family and has the authority to decide most family matters, while his wife is subordinate in almost all affairs. At the same time, however, she is the 'domestic master', and her authority is accepted in domestic affairs and family relations. It can be said that the husband's authority is a product of power structures, while the wife's authority is based on her emotional competence in family matters. The attitudes of fathers and mothers towards their children are radically different. Even nowadays, fathers are most often expected to be somewhat emotionally distant from their children to maintain a position of authority and respect. At the same time, fathers give guidance to children, especially sons, and demand discipline and obedience from them. In contrast, the mother's role as mediator in the family allows for much more intimacy between mother and child. Accordingly, anthropologists characterize the father-child relationship as a power structure and the mother-child relationship as an attachment structure. Of course, nowadays, most fathers are not so distant from their children and show emotions. However, the traditional responsibilities of the roles are still maintained, and even if the woman also works, the responsibility for the home and children remains hers. Korean parents willingly give up their personal lives for their children's education.

In the traditional Korean family, a woman consolidates her status in her husband's family only after giving birth to a son. Nowadays, the importance of male offspring is declining, but the woman's worth continues to be measured through her children and their achievements. The importance of education and the choice of a good *hagwon* directly influences the lives of Korean parents and especially mothers. "Koreans even have a saying that finding the best *hagwon* for a child is a mother's way of showing her ability and affection as a parent" (Kim 2016: 5). If a mother fails to fulfil her function as an "educational manager" due to her lack of skills, finances, or time, she is accused of hindering her child's climb up the social ladder.

Families are primarily oriented towards their educational function. The child's educational needs predominantly determine even family relationships. Mothers retain their Confucian role and responsibility to raise their children, fully measuring themselves with their successes. This function of mothers and their excessive involvement in their children's education is so widespread that many terms for this type of mother, such as 'mother pig' (돼지 엄마) or 'Gangnam mother' (강남엄마), have emerged in the country. Fathers continue to adhere to their Confucian role of

providing for the family, and while they are rarely involved in children's education, they are indirectly influenced by it, for example, by the *hagwon* schedule and budget allocation. The chapter focuses specifically on the direct impact of education on family relationships, functions, and structures, as well as its impact on individual family members.

As education becomes more important, family dynamics, relationships, and expectations change. Parents' daily lives revolve around the educational needs of their children. They spare no expense or effort to provide the best education for their children in the hope that they will find good jobs and thus improve the status of the whole family, which in turn will ensure a peaceful life for the parents in old age.

Parents' excessive fixation on education distances them from the opportunity to create a more cohesive relationship with their children but instead often transforms mothers into 'managers' who only encourage more learning and seek private tutoring. Children are forced to pay the heavy price of education fever, with little free time for hobbies and friends. Moreover, they are overly stressed by the responsibility to succeed and raise their family status, which also leads to a large number of suicides.

Many parents are willing to relocate or even live in different cities as long as this provides their children access to better educational institutions, which also shows the influence of education on family structure. Education directly impacts the creation of new family forms, such as the *kirogi kajok*, in which half the family migrates with the sole purpose of better education.

There is a widespread view in the country that a child cannot get a good education and prosper without the help of a *hagwon* and serious financial investment. This fact leads many to limit family plans to one child or even make the decision not to have children at all, which is another of the direct impacts of education on family structure and composition.

The social bias in favor of academic qualifications is enormous and is directly related to status, high salary prospects, and even marriage. Many people choose their partners based on which university they have graduated from and therefore what their income is.

Despite all the positives that education brings, an excessive fixation on it leads to a number of social problems, such as an academically oriented society; elitism based on academic achievement; selfish familism; an overly competitive education system; excessive spending on



education; social disharmony due to the increasing need for private tutoring; and the mass 'production' of unemployed graduates. It also creates problems of debt and loan repayment, leading to the emergence of a new social status - 'poor because of education'. It often harms family members as well, leading to depression, dissatisfaction with life, divorce and even suicide. Based on this reality, it is not surprising that an increasing percentage of young people are beginning to move towards individualism and are choosing not to start a family but to live for themselves and have financial security.

### **Chapter 3 "Gender Relations and the Social Consequences of Confucianism's Clash with Modern Reality."**

The focus of the analysis in Chapter 3 is on the many social problems that Korea and its population face as a result of the incompatible burden of the traditional with the reality of modernity. Attention is also given to the growing gender tensions exacerbated by the gender inequality created by Confucianism as a pretext for refusing to start a family.

Many of the Confucian injunctions are in conflict with the modern world and its possibilities. This clash is causing serious social upheaval, especially for younger generations who seem to be trying to move away from Confucianism and live more freely and without conforming to all the traditional family responsibilities.

The centuries-old Confucian tradition has created serious gender inequalities, which the country is still trying to solve today. The ubiquitous adherence to roles and patriarchal views assign the home as a woman's primary concern, but expensive living and the need for a degree, even sometimes just for prestige, draw women into the job market. Education is one of the first steps to equal rights and opportunities. However, it is also a financial burden for parents with more than one child, who until relatively recently chose to educate only their sons.

For centuries, men have been expected to focus mainly on their careers and supporting their families. Although in the 1990s, more and more women began to enter the labor market, even nowadays, many of them are forced to suspend their careers when they marry or become pregnant so that they can focus on the primary duties of their gender, namely the family.

The traditional roles that Confucianism defines for the two sexes are still widely held, especially among the elderly, who pass these views on to their children. Thus mothers are still the

primary caretakers of the home and must raise their children almost entirely alone without help from their husbands. Even if a man wants to help his wife with the children, he often has to endure ridicule and criticism from relatives, friends and colleagues for doing 'women's chores'.

Among the many gender inequality issues that Korea has been experiencing, the most significant seems to be the gender wage gap. The country has the biggest wage gap among OECD countries at 37.1% as of 2019. In addition, many women face discrimination when they become pregnant. Many companies prefer to force pregnant employees to quit work rather than pay maternity leave, and those who manage to return to work afterwards are seen as having damaged their careers. There are still cases where women are not hired because they are newlyweds and may soon have children or simply because they are women and are expected to go on maternity leave at some point.

Women face many challenges, such as the pay gap, discrimination, dual responsibility at home and work and maternity. However, young men believe they are victims of discrimination because of government policies aimed at gender equality. Men do not want to take full financial responsibility for supporting a family, but at the same time, they do not want to have competition in education and for jobs from women. The clashes between feminists and anti-feminists are creating serious turmoil in the country, even at political and corporate levels and contributing to gender tensions. Those clashes even create a real fear of commitment and engagement with the opposite sex.

The chapter also traces new phenomena, dynamics and trends of social development, such as attempts at individualism and a move away from Confucian views.

Many Confucian norms are maintained in the core of Korean society, family and human relations. However, they are proving to be inconsistent with the peculiarities of the modern world and are leading to the emergence of new phenomena, such as the so-called solo culture, as well as a host of social problems, such as gender inequality, a culture of over-education, refusal to marry, give birth and even have a family, and consequently a poor aging population and labor shortages.

The long years spent studying and in various educational institutions, the highly competitive society, and the strict hierarchical social relations and norms of behavior of the collective Korean society are prompting more and more people to start turning to individualism.

Lack of financial stability, strict Confucian expectations, and a growing number of demands on the individual for success are also among the contributing factors, as is the decision by ever more people to give up starting a family and focus on themselves and their careers.

With today's economic instability and youth unemployment rates, it is not surprising that a growing number of women are beginning to prefer putting their degrees into practice and entering the job market. After so much effort to get the necessary education and work, ever more women are starting to recognize the advantages of economic stability and independence over marriage. In other words, the traditional roles and financial burdens, especially on children's education, are the fundamental factors in making existential decisions about an individual's future and giving up raising a family.

The emergence of a solo culture in the strictly collective Korean society is indicative of the youth's desire for greater decision-making freedom and independence. It can also be seen as an attempt to move away from Confucian social norms of behavior, relationships and roles. The promotion of independent social activities such as eating and drinking, as well as the breaking of the surrounding taboos, can be seen as a natural social evolution that has arisen in the wake of phenomena such as the *sampo* generation (삼포세대), the prevalence of single-person households, and the increasing number of people giving up on marriage and children and choosing to devote their time and money to themselves.

It should be emphasized that some women, for example, those categorized as “alpha girl” (알파걸) and “gold miss” (골드미스), have not crossed out marriage and family as an option but do not consider them a priority. However, they often face difficulties finding partners who will accept their choice of career development over raising children and will not feel threatened by their financial abilities. Traditionalists believe that the selfishness of these women undermines Korean society and breaks down the basic social unit, the family. Society still does not look kindly on rich single women. Because they are still seen only as women and not professionals in their careers, people often think there is something dubious behind their wealth.

This trend is further proof that in Korea, it is still believed that a woman should stick to her traditional role of being a wife and mother, sacrifice herself for the sake of the family, and choose

between it and her career. Despite these widespread views, more and more women are beginning to make a place for themselves in the corporate world.

In addition to people who have chosen independent living, the chapter also pays attention to single seniors. The huge number of elderly living in extreme poverty or even homelessness clearly illustrates the weakening of Confucian values, or more precisely, filial piety. The irony is that some people have abandoned their children because they could not afford to invest enough in their education, while others live in poverty for the opposite reason - they have invested everything in their children's future but have received nothing in return.

We argue that all the new trends in society and the orientation towards individual activities show that many people do not want to and cannot afford to respect the family-oriented traditions of the collectivist society. They also indicate that young Koreans do not agree with the hierarchical norms and demands for behavior and interpersonal relations. It can be said that the central role of the family has persisted to this day, but due to its complexity and demanding nature, many young Koreans are beginning to see it as a burden and prefer to live alone rather than commit to it and live for other people.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the research, the following features emerged:

In Korea, the family is the smallest and most central social unit. Confucianism and collectivism, which have reigned for centuries on the peninsula, dictate strict concern for society and public opinion and place the family at the center of life and morality. Family members are not seen as individuals who have the freedom to make decisions for themselves. They are part of the group and must make decisions about their future and development consistent with the family and its needs and welfare.

In the process of analysis, urbanization, modernization, and Western values emerged as the main factors for transformations in family relations, structure, role and composition. Urbanization, driven by the need for better education and job opportunities, drastically reduced the number of members in a household and entrenched the nuclear family as the norm. The modernization of the state, laws, education, technology, etc., also impacted the family, giving it more opportunities for migration and social mobility. Western values, especially the spread of Christianity and education,

helped elevate the subordinate status of women, directly influencing family dynamics and giving women a new role outside the home.

However, all these changes and new opportunities do not make people turn their backs on their traditions. We can conclude that Confucian values are beginning to transform and show greater continuity but are firmly preserved at the core of family and human relationships.

Confucianism stresses the importance of rank and status and defines everyone's role in society and within the family. Although there is no longer a gender divide in society, there are still strict norms to be followed and behaviors, duties and responsibilities that are classified as 'female' and 'male'. Although nowadays people have more freedom and choices, within the family, they still adhere to the roles assigned to them by Confucianism, namely, the woman takes care of the home and children while the man earns a living. Women's status and the importance given to children for the future and prosperity of the whole family have risen. The authority of the patriarch has diminished but far from disappeared, and Korea can still be described as a patriarchal state.

The fact that the primary family relationship is not between spouses but between parents and children is also not surprising, given that Confucianism places the father-son relationship at the center of family dynamics. The extension of this relationship to mother and daughter, with the mother not losing her central role, is an example of the ability of Confucian traditions to transform and adapt but also to retain their foundational place in family values.

By achieving the goals of tracing the continuation of core Confucian values in modern times and elucidating the factors that lead to changes in family structure and function, the hypothesis that Confucian norms are persistently embedded in the foundation of the contemporary Korean family and still determine the relationships among its members is proven.

Traditional Confucian views dictate that education is the highest goal and the most stable way to advance in society. This tradition has persisted over the centuries, and nowadays, education and private tutoring have become so important that the organization and the cost of education reorganize family dynamics, structure, and relationships and even contribute to existential decisions such as limiting oneself to one child or forgoing children altogether.

Since the idea that one can find a well-paid job only with a good education is prevalent in Korea, it also serves as a status symbol and a significant criterion in finding a partner. Although

most marriages are for love, because of the age-old tradition of arranged marriages, many Koreans have a pragmatic view of marriage and the financial stability it brings. Thus, a diploma and salary are essential in choosing a partner and getting married. The fact that many people believe that financial capability is fundamental to the definition of a "good" parent and think that they should not have children if they cannot provide them with multiple private lessons through which to succeed in life is revealing the place of education in the Korean family.

Although women nowadays are educated and working, their most essential function remains the traditional role of mother. They have to raise and educate the children and are judged by the achievements and failures of their offspring. A mother's career is also defined by her child's education as most women are forced to quit work once they marry or become pregnant, but often have to find a part-time one when the cost of compulsory private tuition starts to increase as the child gets older.

Children spend most of their childhood in various educational institutions and do not have much time to spend with their parents. The main topics of conversation between parents and children seem to be related to education, grades and academic achievement, which often leads to stress, frustration, loneliness and a sense of misunderstanding in children.

The direct influence of education on the family structure can be seen in new family forms such as *kirogi kajok* or 'weekend couples'. The fact that people resort to migration and are willing to live apart from their spouses for years in the name of education reinforces its place and impact.

It can be observed that the family structure is changing from vertical to horizontal - from husband-dominated to wife-dominated and from father-centered to child-centered. One of the main reasons for this transformation is precisely the importance that education has acquired. Parents sacrifice their interests and give all their wealth to provide the best possible education for their children. This, in turn, enables more prestigious employment, which is a way for the whole family to advance in society and secure a better life. While it may seem that the parents are sacrificing for the child, the effort is actually for the sake of the family. Throughout Korea's history, education has been reserved only for the aristocracy, and nowadays, when it is available to everyone, parents prefer to provide their children with a good education instead of leaving them an inheritance. The children, in turn, do their best to prosper to glorify the family name and not disappoint their parents. In the past, people sacrificed for the sake of their families' reputations and gained identity by

bowing down to their ancestors. In modern Korean society, people dedicate themselves to their families' reputations and identify themselves through the success of their descendants. In other words, the traditional Korean family is ancestor-oriented, while the contemporary family is future-oriented. What remains unchanged is that the individual continues to acquire their identity through the family.

The analysis of the place of education in the country and its direct impact on family forms, roles, and family-planning decisions, proves the second hypothesis that education, on which Confucianism places a strong emphasis, is a paramount factor in family relationships, roles, forms, and composition in contemporary Korea.

The preserved Confucian norms at the core of Korean society, family, and human relations exposed in the course of the analysis are inconsistent with the demands of the modern world and are at the root of social issues such as gender inequality, a culture of over-education, the rejection of marriage, children, and even family, and consequently to a poor aging population and labor shortages.

The segregation of the sexes for centuries and the strong emphasis on the fact that they are remarkably different and must perform radically different functions have hindered development and contributed to the maintenance of gender inequality. This artificial division, born of Confucian views, creates tensions and problems in not only society and the workplace but also develops a real fear of commitment among many of the younger generations who simply avoid the opposite sex.

Young people's desire for a break after long years of study, avoidance of strict social norms, and the widespread view that women can have either a family or a career, but not both, has contributed to the creation of new phenomena such as the *sampo* generation and so-called solo culture. They can also be seen as an attempt to move towards individualism and break away from the traditional subordination to the family, the multiple commitments to new relatives after marriage, and the quest for time for personal growth and finding oneself. Subjected to the norms of filial piety while with their family, children have no right to freedom and personal choice, which pushes the youngest working generations to leave home as quickly as possible, prioritizing freedom and self-reliance over financial independence.

The enormous percentage of forgotten elderly living in extreme poverty also illustrates the weakening of Confucian expectations among younger generations, especially those of reciprocity. It also reinforces the idea that it is not enough for family relations to rely on authority, hierarchy, filial respect, and a sense of obligation alone. The place of education is also seen in this phenomenon, as many seniors feel they have no right to ask their children to care for them if they could not afford to educate them well.

By analyzing the new trends in Korean society, we can conclude that they are reinforcing many people's conversion to individualism. The younger generations seem to see a need for change and that not all traditions fit the reality of a developed economy. The emergence of a solo culture in a collectivist society and the abandonment of the family, which is a fundamental traditional value, indicate a desire to move away from the Confucian norms, which are ubiquitous among older generations.

Tracing the new phenomena and social problems that arise in the country as a result of the clash of Confucian views with the demands of the modern world contributes to proving the hypothesis of the ubiquity of Confucian values. It also reinforces its second part, namely that the incongruence of Confucianism with modernity leads to many social issues in the country, such as exacerbated inequality and gender misunderstanding. Another highlighted aspect is the attempts for change by younger generations, which also shows a weakening of Confucian values.

**Reference for main contributions of the dissertation:**

1. The dissertation is the first study of family relations in the Republic of Korea in Bulgaria.
2. It traces the traditional Confucian values that form the base of family relations in Korea and are present to this day.
3. It links Confucianism and education to the traditional and contemporary family and clarifies their interrelationship and influence.
4. The study analyzes the impact of education on human choices such as those of partner and number of children, and its place in reorganizing family relationships with a focus on the child and their educational needs.



5. It traces the roots of systematic gender inequality, as well as the indirect influence of Confucianism on other social problems such as reluctance to marry and low birth rates.

6. The dissertation introduces new social phenomena such as solo culture, the *sampo* generation, *gold miss*, etc., and traces them to the burden of traditional expectations and the financial demands of education.

### **Publications related to the dissertation topic:**

1. Kirogi kajok: South Korea's transnational family. – In: Globalization in Korea, Sofia, 2020, 261 - 267
2. Confucian influence in the formation of the traditional Korean family. – In: XVII Scientific Conference of Non-Habilitated Lecturers and Doctoral Students at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology 2020. Sofia: University Press “St. Kliment Ohridski”, 2022, 183 – 190
3. Key aspects of the women’s role in the modern South Korean family. – In: XVIII Scientific Conference of Non-Habilitated Lecturers and Doctoral Students at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology 2021. Sofia: University Press “St. Kliment Ohridski”, 2022, 175 – 181
4. "Shadow Education" - the cost of success in the Republic of Korea. – In: Online proceedings of the International Student Seminar “Korea and the World“. Sofia, 2020
5. Confucian Influence on Education in Korea (forthcoming). – In: "The Spirit of Spring" among the texts of Korean literature and culture.
6. Henyo, the women divers of Jeju Island - beyond the tradition of the Korean family (forthcoming). – In: XIX Scientific Conference of Non-Habilitated Lecturers and Doctoral Students at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology 2022. Sofia: University Press “St. Kliment Ohridski”
7. The mother's role in children's education in South Korea (forthcoming). – In: International scientific conference in memory of Prof. Alexander Fedotoff "Oriental studies - traditions and modernity", Sofia: University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2023

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