ABSTRACT

Korean Familism in the Global Era:
Case Study of the 'Goose Dad'

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Time and space compression forced by globalization enormously changed individuals' lives with the appearance of the transnational family. In Korea, the 'goose family' is the typical transnational family in this global era. The goose family expanded since the late 1990's, and originated from Koreans' zeal for English education and academic background. At the same time, socially constructed stigma excluded goose families from the public sphere in Korea. Contrary to this negative perception in Korea, there was positive recognition of some Koreans' educational achievements from other corners of the world. These ambivalent aspects of Korean education require complex understanding about the essence of Korean education. However, foreigners' assessments of Korean education focuses only on the results of that education. In truth, Korean education is fundamentally characterized by Korean parents' passion for their children's education. Therefore, the concept of family should be an important analytical factor in any discussion of Korean education. While many studies have already explored the goose family, but there are no studies to analyze its mechanism in regard to cultural background, familism. Transnational families possess the inner cultural mechanism to operate within the outer mechanism of globalization. Therefore, the Korean goose family is an interesting research object to show how Korean familism operates in this global era.

In terms of this research interest, this study specifically aims to explore the Korean middle class goose family, especially the life of the goose dad. Goose dads who stay in Korea exercise familial ideology everyday. In this respect, the goose dad is the one who practices the cultural ethos actively to maintain his family. At first, this study discovered the goose dad's identity by analyzing his narrated life in internet communities. Internet communities seemed to allow goose dads not only to develop their identities but also to overcome identity crises. In addition, this study described their identities and analyzed them under Korean social background with the benefit of in-depth interviews. The aim of the interviews was to understand the middle class goose dad's self-identity and its
change. As time goes by, the goose dad cannot but encounter a huge identity confusion. He pursues traditional Korean values in a contemporary way. This clash forces us to analyze the father's identity at the interface of globalization and Korean culture.

From the internet community analysis, goose dads identified themselves as tragic heroes faced with difficulties. They simultaneously described themselves as comedic heroes in overcoming their difficulties. Their mixed narrative of tragic and comedic heroism results because they identify themselves as mediators: successors of their forebears with a duty to produce children capable of maintaining the family honor. Goose dads express themselves as heroes who have the responsibility to represent their past by producing future generations. Specifically, they remember their parents' affection and sacrifices. This remembrance of their parents pushes them to do the same for their children; to invest resources for education and to make their own sacrifices. Meanwhile, goose dads suffer from negative feelings such as loneliness and emptiness, but the internet communities function as a communication place for consulting and sympathizing with others in similar situations. Interaction and relationship formation between experienced goose dads and new goose dads help them to express their concerns, consult each other, and console each other. These activities are taboo for men in Korean society but were possible because of anonymity of the Internet.

The in-depth interviews reinforced the internet community analysis. Goose dads additionally recognized themselves as the ones with the responsibility to support their children's education because fathers have the duty to remember their ancestors and represent them in the future. Specifically, their memories of receiving favor from their parents generate at least some amount of moral responsibility to repay that debt to their children. Thus, this memory inspires the investment in and support for their children's education. At the same time, goose dads suffer from identity crises, as expressed by the questioning of the meaning of their lives. Globalization enabled the genesis of the goose family; the migration of the goose mom and children essentially strips the father of his identity as a father, leaving him with only the financial duties and none of the personal duties of a father.

Meanwhile, the goose dad's effort to establish intimacy with his children after reunifying shows the changing idea of the definition of an ideal father. As mentioned before, the goose dad took responsibility as dictated by Korean culture, but his authority as a father was decreased while the family was abroad. Upon reunification, the goose dad tries to start conversations and communicate first. This effort for intimacy allows us to reflect on the emotional democracy of the globalized era, which Giddens wrote about.