

# Individualization and Community Networks in East Asia: How to Deal with Global Difference in Social Science Theories?

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## Introduction

This study is aimed at investigating the concrete pathways to individualization in East Asia with a specific focus on the relationship between individuals and community networks. We argue that East Asia is distinctive by its cultural emphasis on the value of flourishing community, including the family, and therefore consider this relationship to be of paramount significance for understanding individualization. We begin by raising a question of whether the theory of individualization based on the Western tradition of individualism can be reasonably extended to East Asia. The aim of this research is then to demonstrate how individualization as a structural transformation tends to be combined with cultural traditions in multiple ways, making East Asia quite different from the West.

More specifically, this research will first compare the pathways to individualization in East Asia and the West and then examine variations within Korea by formulating a clear-cut analytic framework. The study will treat individualization as a structural process of transformation significantly affected by the relationship between modernity and tradition, on the one hand, and the interaction between the push and pull factors of individualization, on the other. The push factor means a structural force compelling large numbers of people in a society to change their patterns of behavior. More often than not, this is socioeconomic in nature, whereas the pull factor is deeply associated with the cultural and discursive process of

social construction. We would like to argue that individualization as a structural transformation can be adequately understood only when both the push and pull factors and hence both socioeconomic and cultural-discursive dimensions are properly understood in close interactions.

In the West, among others, Beck (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have carried out pioneering research on the problems of individualization. However, we think that such a theory of individualization has, in fact, unfolded with the tacit historical assumption of the individualist tradition. Thus it is debatable whether we can take this as a self-evident reference and apply it to non-Western countries such as those in East Asia where the individual has been considered not as a socially isolated, atomized, independent subject, but rather as deeply interwoven with the community as a person is with his or her family. Thus it is important to pay full attention to the relationship between individuals and community and better understand significant variations and complexities involved. It is hoped that this investigation may lead us to understand better why and how East Asia differs from the West while comprehending common characteristics of individualization.

## **The Western Theory of Individualization**

Individualization is a complex process related to as diverse conditions as cultural changes, legal entitlement, political participation, and internet communication, among others. The concept of individualization indicates a categorical shift in relations between an individual and the society (Beck 1992: 127). First, it is related with cultural democracy. Individualization presupposes that individuals get liberated step by step from the taken-for-granted constraints exercised by collectives of various kinds. An outcome of this historical process is human rights or individual sovereignty. Second, individualization involves the emergence of an individual as subject of legal rights. It is an individual, not any collectivity that is legally entitled to make a claim for right. Third, individualization means the emergence of an individual citizen as the subject of political participation whose mode of action differs significantly from collective actors. Fourth, the process of individualization tends to be further facilitated by the development of the communication and digital revolution.

Another line of exploring the meaning of individualization today is how to manage risks and dangers that citizens may face in their life. In the Western countries, responsibility for risk management is shifting more and

more to individuals. With respect to the economic life the concept of individualization assumes that individuals get unleashed from the previous frameworks of welfare financed by either the state or business firms or the family. In other words, individuals have to take care of their life by their own means, as seen in personal insurance packages.

According to Beck-Gernsheim (2008), Westerners left their traditional way of life, pushed not only by detraditionalization but also by legal development and the emergence of welfare state. Divorce, for example, which was extremely difficult for women, became possible through changes in social mores expressed through changes in the law and the emergence of the welfare state (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The rise of the “post-familial family” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Shim 2011) is a case in point. Different from the nuclear family, the “post-familial family” refers to diversified forms of family: (1) based on confluent love, (2) characterized by gender equality, and neither assuming (3) heterosexual relationship only, nor (4) people from the same nation (Giddens 1992). Thus the family in the Western countries today is characterized by “marriage and divorce chains,” “conjugal succession,” “multi-parent families,” “patchwork families,” and “elective family relationship” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 96). It is a change from “living for others” to “a life of one’s own” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 54), which is based not only on individualization, but also on individualism. It is a historical process that tends to break up people’s traditional rhythm of life, that is, so-called “the standard biography,” and to give way to “do-it-yourself” life history (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The basic idea that everything depends on individual free choices we would like to call a “libertarian individualization” of the West.

## **An Overall Analytic Framework**

The relationship of individuals and community in East Asia differs significantly from the salient characteristics of libertarian individualization. This can be shown clearly by examining individualization within the context of the family. The extent to which individuals in East Asia get unleashed from previous social bondages in industrial society, such as family, kinship, gender, and class and become responsible for their survival will be examined. An assumption of this research is that individualization, as a historical process of transformation, can work well as in the West when the action-oriented, cultural-discursive dimension of individualism is

strong and effective. However, the cultural-discursive factor in East Asia is significantly different from the West. This is why we need to investigate the concrete pathways to individualization in East Asia which differ from the West.

For such an analysis of the process of individualization we will use the model we have developed (Shim and Han 2010) utilizing Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (2002) theory of individualization. In order to better reveal the dynamic aspects of individualization as a three-dimensional process of “disembedding,” “disenchantment,” and “reembedding” (Beck 1992: 128)<sup>1</sup>, we combined the structural-objective dimension and cultural-discursive dimension on the one hand, and push and pull factors of transformation on the other, to make the following model (Shim and Han 2010).

**Table 1** Conceptual framework of individualization

	Objective-structural	Cultural-discursive
Push factors	Global risks Disembedding	Breaking-away energy Survival uncertainty
Pull factors	New institutions Reembedding	Forward-looking energy Justification

Source: Shim and Han, 2010: 240.

To clarify, the process of disembedding unfolds under the objective-structural conditions such as global risks, which, as a push factor, unleash individuals from traditional and modern welfare arrangements. This objective-structural tendency gives rise to the collective experience of fear,

<sup>1</sup> Beck’s original explanation of individualization shows the following three-dimensional process: “[D]isembedding, removal from historically prescribed social forms and commitments in the sense of traditional contexts of dominance and support (the “liberating dimension”); *the loss of traditional security* with respect to practical knowledge, faith and guiding norms (the “disenchantment dimension”); and—here the meaning of the world is virtually turned into its opposite—*re-embedding*, a new type of social commitment (the “control” or “reintegration dimension”)” (Beck 1992: 128; italics original).

The first axis of distinction refers to the two deep layers of reality with equally substantive consequences. The objective-structural layer is mostly, if not exclusively, about economic conditions on which institutions are formed. The cultural-discursive layer is about the practical field of actions in which “dispositive” and “habitus” manifests itself. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim seem to have paid more attention to the objective-structural dimension, although they refer to the problem of reembedding.

anxiety, and disillusionment, which originates from survival uncertainty. In other words, the cultural-discursive stream of disenchantment (Beck) works as a push factor. Reembedding, in turn, can be made possible in reality when a new institutional arrangement is formulated and backed up by public policies and laws. Yet the process of reembedding cannot stop here since it requires a forward-looking perspective or motivational support from cultures, ideologies, and collective aspiration. Otherwise, the process of reembedding may face serious misunderstanding, conflict, and tension. Therefore, individualization can move well only when the culture-based pull factors operate reasonably well leading individuals to accepting and, if needed, justifying a new institution offered (Shim and Han 2010). Seen from this conceptual framework, reembedding is as crucially important as disembedding for individualization.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between individuals and community is an important factor that distinguishes East Asia from the West. With regard to this, this research attempts to show the difference between East Asia and the West by suggesting a typology. The difference is more about the function of the pull factor, that is, the cultural-discursive factor, than the push factor. The push factor works as structural pressure toward individualization in all countries. The extent of pressure may vary depending on the circumstances of the given country. Yet the tendency of economic crisis and polarization yields structural pressures to discharge individuals from the given welfare institutional frameworks. What is decisive in this context is the pull factor. The concrete pathway of individualization is shaped by the cultural-discursive pull factor.

## **Individualization in East Asia: Japan**

There is considerable research on individualization in Japan within the context of the family. Japan seems to be somewhat ahead of Korea and China in this field of study (Suzuki et al. 2010; Ishida et al. 2010). As to individualization as a structural transformation, Suzuki et al.'s (2010)

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<sup>2</sup> We see no problem with the issue of disembedding since it is exactly what is going on almost everywhere in the global risk regime today. The analyses of Japan (Suzuki et al. 2010), China (Yan 2010), and Korea (Chang and Song 2010) clearly demonstrate this. We have no intent to dispute about it. However, we perceive that this is only half of the story to be investigated. What remains to be seen is where and how reembedding is proceeding, and with what kinds of consequences.

work is representative. They argue that two mechanisms were responsible for risk management in the first modernity: first, Japanese management/company-centrism (private corporations that guaranteed long-term stability for employees and their families), and second, land development policies implemented under the guidance of bureaucrats. This means that company-centered society and the developmental state functioned as a buffer. However, from the 1990s these systems were fundamentally destroyed by globalization and neoliberal policies. Japanese company-centrism broke down, paving the road to individualization of employment. Since then individuals in Japan had to rely on themselves and find their own way. Now, individualization within the context of the family has advanced as the rate of unmarried people and the divorce rate have climbed.

Suzuki et al. (2010) have demonstrated the tendency of disconnecting individuals from the first-modern institutions and placing the burden of survival on the shoulders of individuals. In this neoliberal context, individuals are encouraged to be independent and autonomous. Yet individualization involves not only disembedding but also reembedding. However, their discussion remains largely tied to the role of the push factor and not well extended to the pull factor. Thus there is a further need for a research.

The relationship between individuals and community has been touched upon by Ochiai's (2004), Morita's (2009), and Yui's (2009) works. First of all, Ochiai's (2004) book is about the new family model of the twenty-first century from the feminist perspective. She criticizes the so-called "the crisis of the family" discourse, claiming that it is nothing but an official view of the Economic Planning Bureau of Japan. She also claims the model of woman as a house wife was a postwar ideology based on the change of industrial structure from agriculture to employee-centered society. As the characteristics of the family of the 1990s, she points out *both* independence of women *and* the reemergence of "ie," that is, the family. As a new type of the family, she discusses the "neighborhood network" and "single unit society" as salient characteristics of the Japanese pathway to individualization. She thinks the trend from the "family unit society" to "single unit society" will continue, but she does not consider it as the "collapse of the family."

Morita (2009) shows an interesting contrast between Japan and the West in terms of an ideal-typical self. In line with Charles Taylor, he contrasts the typical self in the West as "buffered" while the Japanese case

is “porous.” The “buffered” self has developed discipline and self-control and seen him/herself more and more as an independent and sovereign individual not subject to any external constraints. This idea emerged from the Western process of religious reform toward a transcendental existence of the individual in dialogue with god. While the Western modern self had to enclose its boundary completely, the self in Japan remains porous even after it is institutionally modernized, because in Japan where collective rituals are not considered negatively, the “porous” self did not feel it necessary to close itself against the world completely. Consequently, the Japanese self is more vulnerable to intervention from the outside world in the form of collective rituals.

Yui (2009) makes a similar argument, claiming that the history of Japan shows the world of “habitat segregation.” Many different “religions” could coexist simultaneously, which is different from the West where the drama of an “all or nothing” type of alteration between orthodoxy and heterodoxy prevailed through a long history of cutthroat battles. Presenting Kafu (the name of a man in a novel who lived in two worlds of habitat segregation), who lived in two separated spaces and ran away to downtown to hide himself there temporarily, as an example of Japanese modern man, Yui argues that this type of separation/fragmentation of time and space accelerated so drastically that members of the young generations are now running away in the contemporary configuration of time and space in this world. Differentiating the “habitat segregation” of time and space into minute details has given rise to a “transitional” identity as a self (subject), forming “polygamic” networks with different places. The logic and the psychology of “habitat segregation” make it possible for instrumental rationality and irrational world of “free and easy going (let joy be unconfined)” to coexist side by side.

Ochiai’s, Morita’s, and Yui’s accounts are insightful in revealing the characteristics of “run-away individualization in networks” in Japan. However, their arguments are basically conceptual. Thus there seems to be a need to be substantiated.

## **Individualization and Community in China**

There are a few studies on individualization in China (Yan 1996, 2003, 2009, 2010). Yan’s work (2010) traces the origin of the individualization process to the Maoist era, arguing that some collectivist programs of social engineering and the socialist path of modernization under Maoism

ironically resulted in a partial individualization of Chinese society. He examines profound social changes during the three decades of the post-Mao reforms, discussing the contours of individualization in various aspects, such as the privatization of labor and the economy, rural-urban migration of workers, rights awareness, politics of lifestyle, and the self and the subjective domain of individualization. As a conclusion, Yan argues that there are similarities with the individualization process in Western Europe, but also some important differences.

Yan (2010) offered a great image of the Chinese way to individualization. Individualization in China is characterized by the management of the party-state and the absence of cultural democracy, the absence of a welfare state regime, and the absence of classic individualism and political liberalism (Yan 2010). Unlike in Western Europe where individualization results from the radicalization of modernity itself, Chinese individualization remains a developmental strategy under the direction and management of the powerful party-state (Yan 2010). The Chinese individualization process remains at the stage of emancipation politics of first modernity.

Yan's argument is persuasive. However, Yan (2010) focuses on the disembedding, not the reembedding process of individualization. Recent studies on the relationship between individuals and community, which focus on love, marriage, and family of the new generation of migrant workers in China, deserves careful attention. Representing about a 100 million people, they show distinctive characteristics (Liu 2007). As "double out-comers" (Tan et al. 2003), they are inclined to enjoy freedom to choose a spouse by themselves (Wu 2011). However, on the other hand, they want to choose fellow-villagers as the first choice for their spouse because fellow villagers share common language and habits. What is more striking is that 19.2 percent think they would go back to their hometown to find spouses, and they have a willingness to provide a better life for their family, especially for their children (Wu 2011).

Yan's more recent work (2012) deals with not only disembedding but also the reembedding process of individualization in China. He argues that with the individualization process a new model of individual appeared in China, which he called "the striving individual." Through his interviews with a farmer in a Chinese village, he revealed that many people in China strive hard to make money for their children's education and success. The "striving individual" is characterized as having a materialist goal in value orientation and is different from the "enterprising individual" of the West



who is more oriented to expressive and postmaterialist goal.

These recent studies, including those on Chinese people's way of choosing spouse and married lives and Yan's research on the striving individual, indicate *both* an individualizing *and* a family-oriented tendency. This characteristic has also been found from our research on the transnational marriages in Korea, particularly from the women who have come to Korea for marriage from Northeast China and Southeast Asia (Shim and Han 2010). This characteristic indicates a type of individualization which may be called "communitarian individualization."

## **Two Salient Modes of Individualization in Korea**

In the literature on the change of the family type in Korea we find two potentially conflicting perspectives. The first perspective is called "family disorganization" discourse, which considers such family problems as the increase of divorce, the decrease of marriage, and lack of communication in the family as family disintegration or family disorganization (Pyo 2000; Choi 1997). This perspective considers that these problems emerge because the traditional family norms collapsed.

The second perspective is called "a variety of families" discourse, which considers the recent change of the family type as an adaptation of the family members to the recent social structural change (Kim 2008; Kim et al. 2004; Lee 2004; Byon and Cho 2003; Lee 2003; Chang et al. 2001; Lee 1999; Yim 1999). Thus the increase of divorce, the decrease of marriage, the increase of the singles, the increase of late marriages, and the decrease of the birth rate, are considered as a matter of individual's choice, and even the homosexual family is recognized in this perspective. This is a perspective of feminists or pluralists who explore a new family order going beyond patriarchy, positively accepting the increase of individuals' choice.

However, neither of these perspectives focuses on the gap between the family type and family norm. They also cannot explain the macroscopic meaning contained in the recent family change. Of crucial significance in this regard is research on family values (Eun 2006; Eo 1997) and the effect of socioeconomic changes on these values (Park 2003). Combining the concepts of compressed modernity and risk society, Chang (Chang 2009; Chang and Song 2010) considers the recent phenomenon of delaying marriage and low birth rates as risk-evasive individualization. His argument is that in this state of compressed modernity, the family, which used to be the welfare foundation for individual, has lost its functions as

welfare resource or buffer zone, and that the family members have no choice but to be unleashed from the family and rely on one's own efforts and ability, even though they are not equipped with strong individualism as in the West. Thus he calls the individualization in Korea "individualization without individualism" (Chang and Song 2010). This is a very important observation.

However, Chang's discussion focuses mainly on the disembedding process of individualization, not on the reembedding process. In other words, he pays far more attention to the push factor than pull factor. Individualization referred to by "a variety of families" discourse above shows the consequences of adaptation to the changing reality of the neoliberal global economy. Adaptation differs from normative value. The "family disorganization" discourse reflects the breakdown of family norms taken for granted in the past. These two contrasting perspectives, though significant in many respects, fall short of grasping the reembedding process of individualization.

In this context we have attempted to deal with the reembedding process of individualization by paying attention to women marriage migrants (Shim and Han 2010). We have examined this because it shows *both* individualizing *and* family-oriented tendencies. More specifically, women marriage migrants are individualistic in the sense that they pursue their own course even taking the risk of being separated from their family, as a determined challenge to the survival uncertainty their family faces. They are "individualistic" because they came all the way from their home despite the various anticipated difficulties. On the other hand, they are also very family-oriented, that is, "familial," because they came for better living conditions of the family, and, with family responsibility, do their best for their new family and endure the difficulties for their families in the home country (Shim and Han 2010). This individualization was called "family-oriented individualization." Perhaps, a similar example is the so-called "wild goose families" (Lee and Koo 2006) frequently found in Korea. This case also illustrates well both individualization and family-oriented networks, not simply in a traditional way, but innovatively. This pattern of transformation is distinctive to Korea.

Another effort to integrate both the disembedding and reembedding process of individualization is seen in Han (2007). In a recent work on the so-called the "386 generation," that is, the postconventional generation, Han (2007) argued that the salient characteristics of individualization and the relationship between individuals and community in Korea can be

described as “postconventional networking individualization.” The term *postconventional* has specific implications for the process of disembedding as well as reembedding. To be more specific, postconventional means that one breaks away from the taken-for-granted authority, taboo, and customs, on the one hand, and reactivate flexible networks as a shared way of life, on the other. With this concept he argued that we can cover both individualization as a structural transformation and strengthening of networks including the family solidarity in an innovative way. Thus he tried to present how individualization and strengthening of the family network solidarity can go well along in Korea from the perspective of “the postconventional networking individualization” as an ideal type.

In order to grasp these two salient modes of individualization we want to pay attention to two constitutive factors of individualization, that is, the subjective factor and value orientation. The former is whether one’s way of thinking is traditional or reflexive. The latter is whether the action is oriented toward collective interests or self-interests. Thus a typology made of these two dimensions will be useful in tracing not only the change of traditional versus reflexive ways of thinking/acting but also the change of the orientation toward collective interests versus self-interests. By crossing these two dimensions of individualization as two main axes, we constructed the following four types of individualization.

**Table 2** Type of individualization

		Value orientation	
		Collective interests	Self-interests
Mode of thinking	Traditional	A conventional types of collectivism	B family-oriented striving individualization
	Reflexive	C public-minded participatory individualization	D self-centered libertarian individualization

Type A is characterized by both strong collective interests and traditional way of thinking, thus it can be called “conventional types of collectivism.” This type can be typically found among those who consider collective interests to be more important than self-interest in a traditional way. Type B is characterized by traditional way of thinking (for example, family-oriented), but the Type B person tries to pursue self-interests for survival.

The self-interests here can be interpreted as private interests. Thus it can be called “family-oriented striving individualization.” This type tends to be frequently found among those who strive hard to get out of poverty for the welfare of the family rather than an individual in question. The type we have called “family-oriented individualization” (Shim and Han 2010) can be classified as a category of this type. Type C is characterized by a reflexive way of thinking closely associated with the mode of action pursuing and advocating public interests. A typical example is civil movements based on individual decision to join through either online or off-line deliberation in order to pursue certain values of public significance. Thus it can be called “public-minded participatory individualization.” Han’s study on the so called the “386 generation,” or the postconventional generation, reveal this type of individualization (Han 2007). Type D is characterized by both a reflexive way of thinking and a pursuit of self-centered individualizing tastes and preferences. This type can be typically found among the younger generations like the teenagers or those in their twenties. Libertarian individualization may develop fully when such conditions as cultural democracy, welfare state, and classical individualism are met (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

According to a survey research on individualization (Han and Shim 2012), all the types above are found in Korea. And the distribution of these four types of individualization is as follows: the proportion of the type A, that is, conventional collective arrangement, is 41.9 percent; that of type B, that is, family-oriented striving individualization, is 29.9 percent; that of type C, that is, public-minded participatory individualization, is 15.5 percent; and that of type D, that is, self-centered libertarian individualization, is 12.7 percent. And the age distribution shows that while the proportion of type B is high among the age group over fifty, that of type C is high among the age group of thirties and forties, and type D is found among the younger age group between ten years of age and into the twenties (Han and Shim 2012). Han’s research (2007) shows the prevalence of type C among the thirties through forties age group, even though there are some variations in them. Shim’s research (2012) shows the prevalence of type B among elderly people, even though there are some variations in them. In the following we will discuss Shim’s research as an example of data resisting Western theory of individualization.

## **“Striving Individualization” among Korean Elderly Women**

Shim (2012) conducted research based on in-depth interviews to seventeen elderly women to explore the types of individualization among elderly women in Korea. The people of this study underwent “family-oriented striving individualization” while trying to overcome the risks of poverty and family conflict they encountered. This type of individualization is characterized by traditional way of thinking but oriented to self-interests (not public-minded). The people interviewed for this study can be divided into two subtypes according to the risks they had encountered: the “poverty overcoming type” and the “family conflict overcoming type.” The risk for each subtype was material risk and relational risk respectively. More specifically, the “striving individualization” can be found in the interviewees’ life stories. Among the seventeen interviewees, six cases can be classified as “poverty overcoming type.” They suffered from extreme poverty during their childhood, thus they did not have enough to eat and could not go to school. Thus more than half of them left the parents and home and came to Seoul during their teen ages, either with or without telling their parents, like many rural young girls who left villages to make money in Seoul. In Seoul, they made all their efforts to make their own living and to succeed, working as house-maids, factory workers, or as peddlers, even though they encountered various difficulties. When they reached marriage age, many of them managed to find spouses without the help of their parents, at a time when most of the marriages were arranged by the family. Most of them met a husband who either was very poor, an orphan, or in a similar situation. After marriage they made all their efforts together with their husband, performing all kinds of low-paying dirty works “in order not to pass down poverty to their children.” Now they are better off materially, thanks not only to their industrious effort but also and mainly to the economic development of the country as a whole. They often go to the welfare center for the elderly to attend various educational courses and to enjoy life with new friends.

As can be seen in the foregoing stories, the social constraints these “poverty-overcoming types” were unleashed from are the hometown and the parents whom they left when they were young. Thus they managed to find spouses without the help of their parents. And most of them made efforts together with their husbands with a strong determination to overcome poverty and not to pass down poverty to their children.

On the other hand, the life stories of another six interviewees of “the

family conflict overcoming types” were different. Most of them grew up in well-to-do families, did not suffer from poverty, and received good educations. When they got married, most of them followed their parents’ opinions. They left their parents with the marriage. After marriage, most of them suffered from living with the in-laws, from a patriarchal husband who is violent and/or who has an affair with another woman, or a husband with no love. Most of them lived a life for others, for in-laws, husband, and/or children. Even though they suffered from the family conflict, they endured the husband’s abuses due to various circumstances such as economic dependence, their parents, and children. As the relationship with the husband did not change even as time passed, many of them wanted to have a divorce but went only as far as “domestic divorce”<sup>3</sup>, and only two ended up in a divorce. As for those who had a divorce, they got a divorce with the support of grown-up children, not with one’s own decision alone. Even though they had a divorce with the husband, they maintained their relationship with the children and families. Now they go to the welfare center for the elderly to take courses and to enjoy life with new friends.

As can be seen in these life stories, the social constraints these “family conflict overcoming types” were unleashed from are the family, that is, the husband and the in-laws. However, their unleashing is rather late compared with the poverty overcoming type. Also their unleashing is rather limited in that most of them stayed in “domestic divorce.” This can be called individualization, because they tried to get out of the existing settings of relationship, or standard biography and dreamed of a life of one’s own.<sup>4</sup>

When we analyze the disembedding and reembedding process of individualization, we can see the characteristics of the individualization of Korean elderly women more clearly (Shim, 2012). The factors that

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<sup>3</sup> “Domestic divorce” became a buzzword after the publication of a novel *Domestic Divorce* (1985) by Ayashi Yigyū in Japan. This novel described the collapse of a couple and family relationship. Domestic divorce refers to a situation when a couple lives together and maintains the husband-wife relationship on the surface while the husband-wife relationship has in fact broken down. A couple in this state lives together in the same house, but eats and sleeps separately and does not talk to each other. The reason why people choose a “domestic divorce” is because they cannot separate due to economic reason, children, social stigma, even though they want a divorce (Yamada 2010: 30)

<sup>4</sup> Some might question whether “domestic divorce” can be considered individualization. However, it can be considered so, because it involves a couple living together in the same house, but eating and sleeping separately and not talking to each other. This can be considered as an unleashing from the husband even though they cannot separate due to economic reason, children, and social stigma.

influence the individualization turned out to be different according to the different subtypes. The women interviewees in the “poverty overcoming type” were forced to leave their home and parents due to poverty, and they were eager to get out of poverty and discrimination. The emergence of new job opportunities pulled them to the cities; they had aspirations to learn, to make money and succeed for the family. Thus the risks or structural-objective push factors were the Korean War, the poverty of the time, and discrimination against daughters, while the cultural-discursive push factors were aspirations to get out of poverty and discrimination. And their structural pull factors were industrialization, urbanization, and the emergence of new job opportunities in the cities, while their cultural pull factors were aspiration to learn, to make money, and succeed.

Many of the women interviewees in the “family conflict overcoming type” suffered from living with in-laws and from violence and extramarital affairs of the husband. However, they endured it for a long time for their parents and children and also because of social stigma and economic dependence. Now they went out to the welfare centers to learn and to make new friends. They expressed and acted out their feelings only when they got old and when social changes such as emergence of diverse families and new welfare facilities occurred. The new opportunity and circumstances probably helped them think and decide for a life of one’s own. But most of them did not get divorced, but stayed in “domestic divorce.” Thus the structural push factors were stubborn patriarchy such as living with in-laws, violence, and extramarital affairs of husband, while the cultural push factors were cumulated distrust and disillusionment against the husband and in-laws. And the structural pull factors were the second modern transformation such as emergence of diverse families and change of household generation composition and emergence of new welfare facilities, while the cultural pull factors such as classical individualism were hard to find, almost nonexistent.

Despite the differences between these two types, they share a common theme that they strived hard in their life and they did it for their families. And this common theme can be called “family-oriented striving individualization.”

## **Concluding Remark**

The above discussion shows that the characteristics of the individualization of Korean elderly women are different from that of the West. They are different in three aspects (Shim 2012). First, the risks or structural push

factors are complex in that they are not only from the radicalization of the modernity but also from deficiency of modernity, that is, the mixture of the first and second modernity (Han and Shim 2010). Second, the pull factors are also complex in that the structural ones are there, but cultural ones are almost nonexistent. That is, no classical individualism is found among Korean cases as in the West. Third, in terms of the relationship between the individual and the community, the cases show a strong family-orientation even though the targets are varied, with many of them oriented toward their children, some toward their husbands, and others toward their parents. Even though they have made new friends at the welfare centers, which can be considered to have characteristics of the second modernity, the family-relationship is central to them. Even in the cases where their relationship with their husband is not good, most of them do not leave the family, but remain in it, living in the state of “domestic divorce.” The individualization of Korean elderly women is different from the self-centered libertarian individualization of the Western societies in these senses. In this sense it can be said that the Western theory of individualization has difficulty in explaining individualization in Korea and that a new theory better fitting to East Asian situation is needed to explain it.

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