

Article

The Identity Strategy of “Wild-Geese” Fathers: The Craft of Confucian Fathers

Gwooon Jung ¹ and Hye Suk Wang ^{2,*}¹ Department of Sociology, University at Albany, SUNY, Albany, NY 12222, USA; gjung@albany.edu² Department of Sociology, Yonsei University, Seoul 03722, Korea

* Correspondence: wang1341@gmail.com; Tel.: +82-2-2123-2420

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Abstract: Transnational migration scholarship has discussed parents’ economic and emotional sacrifice for their children as a justification for separation. However, the researchers have overlooked addressing how the parents’ sacrifice is culturally ingrained, and fathers in the homeland construct their identity embedded in local culture. This article fills the gap by analyzing the experiences of Korean transnational fathers, “wild-geese fathers”, who live in South Korea. Using online data and narrative analysis, this article argues that wild-geese fathers identify themselves as tragic figures faced with emotional difficulties and successful heroes overcoming those difficulties. It shows that the mixed narrative of heroism is tied to Confucianism, which imbues fathers with the ideology of strong father controlling their emotions and intermediary roles producing children that are capable of maintaining the lineage honor. The analysis of wild-geese fathers shows that Confucianism proves to be a durable cultural resource for the contemporary Korean transnational family in a rapidly changing global era.

Keywords: transnational families; sacrifices; wild-geese fathers; globalization; Confucianism

1. Introduction

On 11 November 2013, one news article reported that a father in Incheon, Korea, committed suicide (Choi 2013). He had lived alone since 2009, when his wife and two sons went to the United States to study abroad. While working as an electrical engineer in Korea, he had suffered from economic difficulties, and the situation precluded any periodic visits to his family in the U.S. during the entire separation. His suicide note disclosed his emotional difficulties and economic burdens. Although this is an extreme case of a miserable family separation, it highlights the cost that Korean transnational parents pay.

“Wild-geese families¹,” a typical type of transnational family in Korea, refers to families in which children and wives travel to English-speaking countries to pursue education while husbands remain at home to provide financial support (Cha 2010; Cho 2004, 2005; Finch and Kim 2012; Kim 2010; Lee and Koo 2006). Transnational families including wild-geese families and other types have emerged in pursuit of a better education, but they are not unique only to East Asian countries. We can easily find transnational families in other developing countries such as Haiti, Mexico, and the Philippines (Chavez 1992; Dreby 2010; Glick-Schiller and Fouron 1999; Parrenas 2001a, 2001b, 2005). Given that

¹ The term “wild-geese” (*gireugi* or *kirogi* in Korean) is adopted from the seasonal migration pattern of wild geese to pinpoint parents’ seasonal visits to their families abroad (Ly 2005). Terms like “astronaut family” and “parachute kids,” derived from Hong Kong and Taiwan, are other labels to designate transnational families separated for education (Bohr and Tse 2009; Chiang 2008; Lam 1994; Ong 1999; Waters 2002).

their main cause of separation is financial, economically productive members of family travel to the wealthy countries while the children and elderly remain in their home countries.

However, transnational families from East Asia, such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea, stand out in terms of direction of migration and money flow. The children, accompanied by their mothers, move to developed countries, such as the U.S., Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, but the fathers remain in the homeland to support them. Those families, mostly from the middle-class, have emerged to maximize global opportunities and to attain academic credentials and language proficiency in order to secure and escalate social status of the next generation in their home countries (Chiang 2008; Finch and Kim 2012; Ho 2002; Ho and Ley 2014; Waters 2012).²

In Korea, the number of wild geese families has exploded since the late 1990s, caused by Koreans' zeal to receive English education and academic credentials in a global setting (Cho 2004). According to the data of Statistics Korea, as of 2016, the number of students studying abroad in foreign countries is approximately 8743 when we count students enrolled from elementary to high school. Among them, there are 3796 elementary school students, 2700 middle school students, and 2247 high school students (Statistics Korea 2013). According to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) data in 2015, not surprisingly, South Korea is one of the top three sender countries of international students following China and India in the United States (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2015). According to the statistics in 2012, the average Korean wild-geese father within a household was reported to send \$45,000 annually to support their children and wife in a foreign country (Kim 2013).

The emergence of the wild-geese families is tied to the significance of education in South Korea; which is considered as a ladder of social upward mobility such as employment and marriage. (Seth 2002; Sorenson 1994),³ Parents are devoted to their children's education in the period of economic development. In a global context, educational fever is transformed into an emphasis on English education or foreign degrees as better certificates of their educational achievement and the relocation of children to foreign countries (Abelmann and Kang 2014; Cho 2005; Park 2007; Park and Abelmann 2004; Song 2012).

On the basis of this educational motive, existing studies have paid attention to the transnational parents' discourse of sacrifice in order to justify and mitigate their economic and emotional difficulties (Dreby 2010; Parrenas 2005). The discourse of sacrifice may serve for the parents to sanctify their separation from their family members and persevere in living. However, they have neglected to address why transnational parents choose to do so, regardless of the vast cost they pay. Some studies have approached the cultural aspect of education fever in terms of Confucianism (Lew 2013; Oh 2010). However, they do not explain a mechanism of how culture can affect social actors to produce a certain type of social actions, or how culture can be used as a strategy of solving problems.

Meanwhile, empirical studies on the transnational families mostly focus on the life experience of the migrant mothers (Abelmann and Kang 2014; Cha 2010; Finch and Kim 2012; Jeong et al. 2013; Kim and Deschambault 2012; Lee 2010), such as their gendered roles in taking care of children in English-speaking countries (Chiang 2008; Chang and Darlington 2008; Huang and Yeoh 2005; Waters 2002). Some research explores the caregiving fathers and their life experiences and identity reconciliation (Finch and Kim 2012; Kang 2012; Waters 2010). For example, Chinese fathers left in Canada transformed from businessman to homemaker who provided the emotional care and parental guidance (Waters 2010, p. 63). Furthermore, Korean "wild-geese" fathers in Singapore behaved

² According to Bourdieu's view, academic credentials and language proficiency are institutionalized as well as embodied forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986).

³ There have been several debates to uncover the background of the extreme educational investment in the modern Korean society; (1) social mobility in the transformation of modernization; (2) the modern meritocracy emphasizing credentialism; (3) the class and cultural distinction of academic credentials; (4) state-centered project for modernization; and (5) gendered division of labor and education manager mother (Lim 2007; Park and Abelmann 2004; Park 2007; Sorenson 1994). These conditional factors have historically developed the excessive educational fever in South Korea.

as an unconventional caregiver for children, but they attempted to redefine their caregiving as a gender-neutral activity to secure their identity as a breadwinner (Kang 2012, p. 269). These studies focus on fathers who are relocated in the new countries, and approach the fathers' identity within the domain of gender. Little research pays attention to the fathers who are left behind in the home country and the perception of their separated family lives. While prior research illustrates the changing gender roles of fathers, little has been known about their emotional hardships and its strategic management.

Drawing on the online data and narrative analysis, this article investigates how the wild-geese fathers identify themselves and reconcile emotional conflicts. This article uses the conceptual framework of filial piety in Confucianism to explain the psycho-cultural process of the wild-geese fathers in reconciling their identities. On one hand, this article tries to show how individuals adhere to the Confucian culture or tradition as their motives through their social interaction in cyberspace. On the other hand, this article aims to explain how wild-geese fathers utilize the Confucian tradition or culture as a tool to reconcile their challenging situations and overcome emotional difficulties. Through a two-way approach to culture, this article will interpret the source of transnational parents' motive and unveil the process of its actual practice in a daily routine.

2. Confucianism and its Psycho-Cultural Impetus

An emphasis on education is an important element of Confucian ideology. In Confucianism, self-cultivation and education are deemed as preconditions for regulating the family and governing the state (Tu 1996; Zhang 1999, pp. 179–80). A well-known ancient story about Mencius' mother, who moved home three times to provide her son with good teachers, neighbors, and peers, epitomizes the close connection between education and Confucianism (Huang and Gove 2015). It has a semblance with contemporary East Asian parents who devote themselves to a good education for their children (Kim 2009).

Why then does Confucianism put such a great emphasis on children's education? Interestingly, its moral base is drawn from their filial piety toward their parents. Sociologists argue that high investment in education is a shared characteristic between East Asian countries that experience fast economic development, claiming that it is a determining factor in this development (Lew 2013; Lim 2007; Oh 2010; Ong 1999). Among many concepts of Confucianism, "filial piety" (*xiao* in Chinese) is an important construct. Originally, filial piety refers to children's (or descendants') moral duty to look after the physical needs of their parents, as well as showing reverence to them (Ho 2003, p. 291).⁴ According to Mencius and Confucius, filial piety refers to children's (or descendants') willingness to serve elderly parents, even the sacrifice of one's own private interest. For example, Mencius condemns those who are selfishly attached to wives and children, neglecting their duties to serve their elderly parents. Responsibilities to elderly parents take precedence over other competing moral obligations (Bell 2003, p. 230).

Still, a puzzle remains about the ways in which the traditional definition of filial piety, duty to ancestors, is transformed into high investment in children's education. Lew et al. (2011) provide an answer, by treating filial piety as a psychological equivalent to the religious concept "salvation in Christianity," dealing with the issues of death and immortality.⁵ Fundamentally, Confucianism denies the idea of personal immortality through an afterlife. Nevertheless, the norm of filial piety obliges the descendants to "remember and represent" their ancestors through periodical rituals, which guarantees the eternal existence of ancestors: it can be called "social immortality" (Zelizer 1978, p. 604).

⁴ Also, filial piety was an apparatus to govern the hierarchical relations, such as father and son, older and younger brothers, and rulers and citizens during the Chosŏn Dynasty as well as Imperial China. As the norm of filial piety was extended from family, the family was considered as a microcosm of the moral order under Confucianism (Hahm 2003).

⁵ This process is very similar to how the Protestant ethic stimulates its believers to engage in secular activities for the glory of God. It can be said that Confucianism in the Korean society has been functionally equivalent to Protestantism in Western societies (Lew et al. 2011).

By positioning individuals' eternity in the continuance of the family lineage, Confucianism rationalizes the concept of eternity in human lives.

The religious imperatives for remembrance and representation of their ancestors strongly stimulate descendants' economic motives. [Lew et al. \(2011, p. 182\)](#) argues that a psychological mechanism implied in filial piety can be transferred into the three types of economic pressures: developmental representation, successive representation, and collective representation. Among those three pressures, we particularly need to focus on the "successive and developmental pressure" to understand the relationship between filial piety and educational investment⁶. Individuals, as a part of the family lineage, function as an intermediary link between their ancestors and descendants. Individuals, therefore, have to pass on their responsibilities to remember and represent ancestors to their descendants ([Lew et al. 2011, p. 183](#)). Given this logic, not only are reproducing and raising children a priority but also developing children's capacities is pivotal in fulfilling filial piety. Well-educated children with good credentials and knowledge evince that parents have met the duty to prepare their descendants to continue the family lineage, and their children are guaranteed a higher possibility to represent ancestors better⁷.

With this background, the parents perform an important social role by educating their children. Their life is important in the context of the family lineage. The meaning of their life is constructed not only within a personal realm but also a social realm that leads the parents to commit to the role of reproducing descendants ([Sorenson 1994](#)). In this context, the parents' identity is heavily dependent on their assigned position as an intermediary link between ancestors and descendants. Therefore, filial piety is a fundamental basis of the psychological mechanism for parents to pursue their children's education.

However, the parents' role in raising and educating their children assigns different roles to the father and mother. The gendered division of labor in Confucianism is derived from two principles regarding the gender distinction: the *nei-wai* (inner-outer) and *yin-yang* (dark-bright) ([Chan 2003, p. 312](#)).⁸ The first distinction, the *nei-wai* polarity, designates the separated domains between both genders: the males are primary in the outer (social/public) sphere while the females are primary in the inner (domestic) sphere. The modern ideology of separate spheres, which means man as economic provider and woman as emotional caregiver, also appeared among Western middle-class families during the Industrial Revolution and continued even after women's increasing employment ([Cott 1997; Hochschild and Machung 2012](#)). Despite its universality, the gender distinction in the Confucian tradition puts an extra emphasis on men's and women's social roles in families, working together to continue the bloodline through reproduction. Therefore, relationships between parent and child, such as father and son and mother and children, are interlocked with the Confucian bond, filial piety ([Chan 2003, p. 315; Lebra 2010](#)).

The second distinction is applied to the different personalities or virtues shared between fathers and mothers when educating children: the male should be strong and sturdy, while the female should be docile and mild. *Yang*, meaning the male gender, is associated with hardness and strength; while *Yin*, meaning the female gender, is associated with softness and weakness ([Chan 2003, p. 313](#)). Based on the *Yin-Yang* polarity, one of the Confucian Three Bonds (*san-gang*), the bond between father and son, expects that fathers should be the role models for sons ([Chan 2003, p. 315](#)). Hence, the Confucian ideal

⁶ According to [Lew et al. \(2011\)](#), education is one of the objectified rituals of successive and developmental representation. As accumulation of wealth was perceived as a sign of salvation in Protestantism, children's high achievement in education was taken as a sign of better remembrance and representation of ancestors in Confucianism.

⁷ In the Chosŏn Dynasty, education was the only route to get a position in the state bureaucracy: likewise, in modern Korean society, it is the most efficient way to guarantee a higher position in the labor market, and, thereby, enable upward social mobility.

⁸ Yin is associated with darkness, coldness, female gender, night, the moon, the earth, the direction west and north, the orientation right, behind and below, with softness and weakness, and with waning and death. Yang is associated with light, warmth, male gender, day, the sun, the heavens, the direction east and south, the orientation left, before and above, with hardness and strength, and with waxing and life ([Chan 2003, p. 313](#)).

of a father is characterized not only as a breadwinner who supports his dependents financially and offers a material base for children's education, but also as a man who has an iron will and unflappable emotion; he is never expected or allowed to show his private feeling in public as well as private sphere. This ideal requires fathers to commit themselves to supporting children's education, eschew expressing the feelings of exhaustion and fatigue, and handle their emotional turmoil and hardships.

Meanwhile, other scholars take a counter position against Confucianism, by arguing that the role of Confucianism in East Asian people's investment in education and socioeconomic development has been romanticized (Cha 2003; Kwon 2007; Yun 2010). Some scholars claim that it is a mundane argument to connect high investment in education and human capital with economic development (Becker 1964; Coleman 1988). Others also point out the negative effects of the Confucian legacy of education on societies, for example the high value placed on bureaucratic examinations that manifest the Confucian tradition of elitism (Hall and Ames 1999, p. 171). There are various accounts that explain to what extent Confucian tradition has influenced modern parenting in Korea. For example, Lee (1998) explains that young mothers develop "no coherent idea" of parenting style, by keeping the traditions of Confucian discipline in their children's education, but also displaying overprotection and excessive permissiveness (Lee 1998, p. 257). Given this, one might doubt whether Confucian norms are still operating in modern Korean society.

This article is not intended to blindly champion the influence of Confucianism, or to consider the Confucian tradition as a static entity that has survived intact. Rather, to better explain wild-geese families, we employ a two-way approach to understand culture, especially Confucian culture, as a deeply-rooted normative and moral orientation on the one hand, and a repertoire of strategies on the other. The first meaning of culture, following the Weberian and the Parsonian traditions, refers to a subjective and coherent meaning system shared by all members of a society, for example beliefs, norms, values, or ideologies (Alexander 1990; Alexander and Smith 1993). This classical conception cannot however explain why people, despite sharing the same cultural values and facing the same structural constraints, differ in their actions. The second meaning of culture is something that can be utilized as a "repertoire" or "tool kit" from which individual actors construct their "strategies of action" or "repertoires of strategies" to solve various problems (Swidler 1986, p. 273). This concept of culture implies the actors' voluntary and autonomous choice of actions.

In the following section, we will apply the concept of filial piety to analyze how wild-geese fathers construct their identity as "intermediary links" who connect ancestors and descendants as well as "Confucian fathers" that control their emotions for educating the descendants. It will scrutinize how the Confucian culture is practiced on two levels: first, how wild-geese fathers' behaviors are motivated and directed by Confucianism, and second, how wild-geese fathers reconcile their identities and overcome the sufferings and hardships by justifying with Confucian principles.

3. Data and Method

This article uses narrative analysis to trace the identity construction process of the wild-geese fathers. Narrative analysis has been viewed as a useful method to reveal social life at every level of interaction, including talks, conversations, and discourses. Narratives and rhetorical accounts are a useful means to explore wild-geese fathers' self-identity, including their emotions, feelings, and cultural perceptions (Abell et al. 2000).

This article utilizes online communities as a source for the narratives told by wild-geese fathers. Thanks to the latest technological developments, the online communities offer a convenient way for everybody to interact with one another with less cost. Also, they are regarded as a useful source of written texts, which are more solid and robust than verbal texts. Moreover, the anonymity of internet allows wild-geese fathers to expose their private lives (Kim and Kim 2004). By sharing similar backgrounds within the internet community, wild-geese fathers feel more comfortable to confess their private stories associated with their personal life decisions and emotions. In this regard, the internet

community is a good source for data collection since it offers a useful way to capture wild-geese fathers' implicit and unpublicized identities.

It is undeniable that the online identity is controversial regarding the debate on the virtual world's reflexivity of the reality. We depend on [Capurro and Pingel \(2002\)](#)'s claim that the online identity constructed in the virtual world reflects an ontologically meaningful self. The digitalized self shown through 'the life project' in the online medium may not typify the permanent identity, but remain important in relation to bodily identity. In this respect, the online forum shows us the process of identity construction and reinvention of wild-geese fathers, particularly through the emotion management project with other users. Therefore, we posit that the online narratives depict the reality of the wild-geese fathers as well as the presence of cultural persistence ([Burman and Parker 1993](#); [Potter and Wetherell 1987](#)).

Our data is collected from the writings posted on bulletin boards in one particular community, called "the open community of overseas parents"⁹. Established in one of the Korean portals, *Daum*, in July 2002, this community has more than 5500 members. Anyone can join the community as a member, and it has several subcategorized forums where members can participate in the conversation and upload postings and pictures according to their interests and concerns. Some of them are open to all members; others are limited to authorized members. For example, forums that contain important information on universities entrance, education expenditure, or family relationships are accessible only to high-ranked professional members. For this limited accessibility, we utilized the articles posted on forums which are open to all members.¹⁰ In the process, we performed a targeted collection of articles posted by wild-geese fathers that reflect their life experiences. The data was collected from October 2010 to March 2011. As a result, we have collected 280 articles containing a huge amount of text, mainly articles and comments on articles, which show the interaction among the members of the website.

The pool of data includes articles that reflect the identities of wild-geese fathers, and the data was identified using two major categories: emotional and utilitarian. The majority of articles contained emotional expression, particularly negative emotions such as depression, loneliness, sadness, and feelings of loss, failure, and regret during the time of separation. Yet some positive emotions, including pride, thankfulness, joy, and fulfillment, appeared as well when negotiating negative emotions. Articles delivering instrumental coping strategies, such as sharing practical and utilitarian information, played a significant part as well. After careful examination of the pool of data, the authors concluded that website forums are places where fathers participate in identity creation through honest conversations about their emotional vulnerability, as well as by negotiating their difficulties. Based on this major theme, the following analysis includes four representative articles and replies, which demonstrate collective efforts toward a narrative construction of wild-geese fathers.

4. Identities of the Confucian Fathers 1: Strong Father Controlling Emotion

Covert Sorrow: Fathers Don't Cry

In this section, based on the collected data, we will present how wild-geese fathers develop their identities using Confucian culture and utilize it as the main strategic repertoire to justify or reconcile

⁹ To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, we used a pseudonym.

¹⁰ Forums of the website include several categories, such as free chat, joke/humor, music and movie, notice, picture, useful information, graduated wild-geese family, and anonymous boards in which the users' names are not disclosed. Regarding the ongoing debate on whether the online community is a public or private space and the consequential ethical issue related to the data collection from the internet, we collected the data from the two forums, "free chat" and "graduated wild-geese family," since they are open to all members, which means that they are virtually public narratives. In fact, the two forums are fuzzy spaces where privacy coexists with publicity, but we agreed that publicity is more widely acknowledged. In order to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the wild-geese fathers, we deleted their nicknames in the presentation of the raw data. Also, we translated each article originally written in Korean into English.

the problems that they encounter. First, we seek to illustrate the wild-geese fathers' perception of their situation, which is fundamental in constructing their identities.

Wild-geese fathers mostly feel lonely, lost, and empty. The economic pressure and physical isolation from their wives and children lead to devastation and emotional discomfort. However, what damages the wild-geese fathers' emotional well-being the most is the fact that their emotions cannot be publicized. Several postings reveal the hidden sorrow of the wild-geese fathers.

Article 1: Cannot tell my wife and kids ...

I have always pretended to be cheerful and happy, but in reality felt vacant mentally because of the unfilled loneliness. I missed my kids and wife and wanted to cry, but could not cry ... I did not have the heart to tell my wife and kids about my feelings ... so I just appreciate the community manager for opening this board and allowing me to share my story.

L reply 1: I recommend you to cry when you are so exhausted. When you cry, the toxic components come out of your body so you will feel much better. This is proven scientifically ... Cheer up. This separated life is for our children's future, so we should cheer up. Fighting!!!!

L reply 2: Everyone cries when they are separated from family members. How can we suppress it? Just cry when you want to. It was shameful but I was crying at the airport, on the flight, and in my bed, too.

L reply 3: Well ... we should cry in secret.

L reply 4: Cry when you want to ... do not pretend. You will feel much better after crying. Just I hope you can express this since everybody also has those feelings. Love is to express ...

L reply 5: Everybody lives their life with such patience. Even though you now live in loneliness and aggravation, later you will have good memories about the current difficulties.

In the article above, titled "cannot tell my wife and kids," one father expresses his covert sorrow on the online community. Although the separation at the airport had deeply distressed the father, he did not open up about it to his family members. In Korean context, it is little wonder that a father endures an emotional pain while admitting the covert sorrow. The verbalized expression of the "secret" (reply 3) symbolizes the Korean society's expectation for the fathers, including wild-geese fathers. Crying in the public place as well as in front of families is "shameful" (reply 2): they believe that controlling their emotions in a public sphere is a social norm. The confession of grief and misery should be postponed since patience ensures a successful completion of the separation. The narrative of wild-geese fathers reflects an ideal male image in the Confucian heritage; the loyal and stable breadwinner for family, but also emotionally strong man in public and private sphere.

The article 2 also exhibits the typical narrative of lone wild-geese fathers.

Article 2: Everything goes well ... but ...

I don't know why I feel the emptiness suddenly. My children got accepted to the best high schools and my wife has also adapted well there. I also live here without any major problem ... but this Saturday I felt blurry and empty like the color of the sky ... I tried to call my children, but I put down the phone and sat in the computer room. It has been only one month since I visited my children ... I should not feel this already ... Only two years have passed. I don't know how many times I should confront this feeling again. I am sick of my work ... I should not be like this ... I should be stronger for the comfort of the six eyes that stare at me. I am not doubtful that my family is always on my side. I should bring up some energy.

L reply 1: You can cheer up by talking to your family on the phone. Why don't you talk about daily routines, not about big things?

L reply 2: Loneliness gets you exhausted and sick. My husband always drinks alcohol. I judge his drinking by seeing his face and hearing his voice. My heart is broken. He says that he wants to finish the separation within half a year. Before this becomes too difficult and serious, I believe that couple should talk to each other. When we have a healthy relationships and situation, children can be healthy as well. Children will learn how to build a good family.

In the article above, the narrator describes his emotional difficulties, emptiness and loneliness and his desire to live with his family. The first half of the article mostly describes a tragic situation, in which he views himself as a tragic hero. However, remembering the six eyes, which indicate his wife and the two children, he puts on his social self again. His identity as a responsible father is presented here and seems to be more optimistic in order to handle his emotional fatigue. At the moment of exhaustion, the narrator strives to face the challenging situation, instead of avoiding or hiding from it. He tightly equips himself with a strategy to overcome his difficulties similar to a warrior in a battlefield. Eventually, he tries to reach a stage in which he resolves his inner tension. It is the social role as a father that enables him to reach the reconciliation between his personal self and his social self.

Interestingly, reply 2, presumably written by a wild-geese mother, is quite different from other replies by wild-geese fathers. Contrary to reply 3 in Article 1, which underscores oppressing the emotion, she reveals the opposite view of the emotional management and expresses pity and anger about the wild-geese fathers including her husband, for not sharing his feeling with his family and drinking alone. Unlike females who express the emotion to handle hardships, the overt expression of emotions is not a virtue for fathers in Korean society. In the contemporary Korean family, as the breadwinner, fathers spend most of their time outside the house and barely have time to fulfill his emotional role as a father and husband (Lee 1998, p. 257). In the economic development period, fathers were often depicted as a strong man who never shows tears to financially survive in the hard economy. In short, the fathers in the urban family have lost his traditional “position of authority” (Lee 1998, p. 257), but have kept the endurance and perseverance as the breadwinner.

The prototype of wild-geese fathers is similar to that of the fathers of the Confucian culture, and its variations in the contemporary Korean society. Given that Confucian culture imbues individuals with the duty to serve for their families economically and conceal their inward agitation, the wild-geese fathers seem to preserve similar features as the traditional fathers in Confucian culture. However, this does not mean that they have fully internalized the fathering practice expected in the Confucian culture from the start. The fathering practice of the Confucian culture has been partly remained and reinvented through the interaction among the wild-geese fathers to survive in a difficult and lonely situation.

Compared to the real world, where economically responsible and emotionally stable Confucian fathers are idealized, the online community is a suitable space to share and expose emotional turmoil, including agony and heartbreak. The online community serves as a shared field for the fathers to reveal their true emotion in detail, leading others to sympathize with them and establish emotional bonds among them. Through collective consciousness, they can expose their private stories, which cannot happen in the real world.

They agree on the fact that the online community should be the only space that allows them to reveal their inward emotions. In this way of interaction, ironically, they share and strengthen the social norm that fathers should not cry. They can shed tears in a cyber space but not in the real world: they cry here not to cry there. In this respect, the internet community functions as an outlet for the wild-geese fathers to display emotions, which are not revealed in the real world, as well as a powerhouse of the Confucian paternal identity in the real world.

5. Intermediary Identity 2: Connecting the Generation

Good Future for Children and Imagined Communities

While they lament the present hardship, many wild-geese fathers expect their future to be bright and hopeful. Instead of being bounded by the negative feelings, they try to present a narrative strategy of reconciling difficulties. The wild-geese fathers' perception presented in the online articles shows contrasting views on the present and future. Several articles show that their narratives go through a transition from misery to hope. In article 3 below, one father epitomizes the wild-geese fathers' life strategies: dedication, perseverance, and determination to sustain the separated life.

Article 3: My admiration for goose dads

After having a drink, I check articles posted on the websites to figure out how people in the same situation as me adapt to their new lives. Are there any more things that I can do to provide for a better education and life of my family? ...

As a pioneer of the educational investment in our children's future, I tried hard to improve our life quality by searching information about the educational institutions, international finances, and socio-economic situations of other countries and by evaluating this information.

Our family could finish the separated life by achieving a definite life goal. The past life has become a precious memory for me to remember. I close my eyes and try to remember the past ... I love wild-geese dads and moms. I have been proud of myself for being a goose dad.

L reply 1: Korea is such a small country on the world map, but for our kids, the world is their stage. Even though this community is small now, I believe that we will produce intelligent human resources to lead Korea to a better future. Our proud goose senior, ... I respect and love you!

L reply 2: Cheer up, Korean dads ...

L reply 3: I also believe that this small meeting room will be a place that supplies and supports the global intellectuals of the future. I am sure that there will be time to proudly shout ... "I was a goose dad" ... !

L reply 4: A place to produce global intellectuals. Thank you for this wonderful expression.

In this piece of writing, the narrator's inner dialogue is more saliently unveiled, illustrating how he reconciles and conquers his emotional difficulties. In truth, the motivation to provide better education operates here as the moral justification, which equips fathers with patience for the separation. In order to overcome the hardships, the narrator focuses on the bright future that will compensate for his current agony. He is tightly locked in the familial responsibilities of Korean parents and in the necessity of a globalized education. Under these circumstances, settling upon the ideal goal, "a better life", is a strategy to reconcile the internal tension within him. This strategic discourse on the bright future allows him to cope with his suffering.

This article presents the inner dialogue of reconciliation between the solitary present and the bright future. The first part of the given narrative above has tragic description. However, the way he reconciles the tragic situation undergoes a transition from the misery to hope. What he mentions after his tragic situation is a set of descriptions on globalization and his strategy to deal with the trend. In the description, he has not remained passively as a tragic hero, but rather has actively worked to overcome the hardship and achieve his goals. His efforts include collecting information, helping his family arrange their affairs, and supporting them financially. His reaction to the unavoidable circumstances is colored by the narrative of successful hero, who actively defeats the sufferings. The wild-geese fathers are even considered as the pioneers in a globalized environment.

Numerous comments following this article elevate the identity of wild-geese fathers to the national dimension. In Koreans' mind, the globalized arena is not a field of competition for stateless individuals.

Instead, their national identity plays out as the motivation to go forward in the world. The identity of a wild-geese father as a family supporter is also related to this kind of nationalism. The identity of a successful hero is further reinforced by comments which appraise wild-geese fathers as patriots who contribute to the production of the national prosperity as well as cosmopolitan intellectuals who will eventually benefit Korea.

As such, wild-geese fathers' tragic and covert sorrow is followed and replaced by the presentation of a successful hero. Their former identity as a tragic self stems from the separated situation, while the latter, a more hopeful self to navigate futuristic outlook, is driven by the familial responsibility to provide better opportunities and bright futures for their children. It shows the reconciliation of two identities, seemingly contrasted but common in nature. Then, why do they internalize the motives to their sacrifice for the children's future? The narrative below, posted by the founder of the website, denotes the psychological mechanism of the fathers, suggesting the Confucian impetus originated from their relationships with their parents and ancestors.

Article 4: A year after opening the internet community

For a long time, because of our children and their English education, we, the parents, have chosen to become a goose family to make their future more successful. Some will say in this way, and others will say in that way, but our future will definitely be better than now.

As our parents did, we should educate our children well. That is our asset to inherit and to pass on to our descendants. I am certain that our superior education can change the world, as the history of Korea shows.

We can't throw away the social habits of the Koreans, the respect to our parents and ancestors. We also should make children know the sacrifice of their parents. There is nothing to develop without sacrifice.

In particular, affection is the best thing we should give to our children. We should raise our children with courage. This is all part of the process to broaden our worldview. We should make sure our children have a chance to volunteer to improve their society.

We cannot change our mind and face, and this means that we are Koreans forever . . .

Here, the narrative advances to the presentation of the meaning of their sacrifice. The parents' decision to separate for educational investment and persevere the emotional difficulties, is associated with their psychological debt and commitment to the previous generation. The narrator suggests that sacrifice has been a historically repetitive norm required to raise children who will constitute a family and country. Throughout the endless chains of generations, a wild-geese father is situated between their ancestors and descendants. The parental generation is therefore an intermediary link to pass on the endeavor and glory that ancestors achieved to their children. By highlighting the perpetuation of sacrifice throughout the generations, the parent gears himself as a guard in charge of educating children. The wild-geese father in the current generation, therefore, produces a new generation and ultimately contributes to the historical practice of sacrifice. This narrative presents that wild geese fathers are under the pressure for the successive representation, the remembrance and representation of their descendants. Educating children abroad is one of the "objectified" rituals, which are equivalent to the religious preparation of "better representation" in a global context.

Moreover, wild-geese fathers undertake a duty to develop society. While Korean society forces the parents to emphasize education, the narrator despairs yet conforms to the social forces by reconciling social conditions of Korea in a global context. Parents' educational investment in English reappears in the transnational context, and the awareness of their social roles is expanded from the family to the country. The wild-geese fathers identify themselves not just as a mere intermediary link to glorify his family but as a patriot to contribute to his motherland by cultivating human resources.

Sorenson (1994) specifies the gist of Korean education, which distinguishes itself from that of the other countries; Korean students attentively concentrate on their studies, as it is pressured by the society.

Although Sorenson takes an initiative to explain the pressure from the students' perspective, it is interchangeably echoed by the parents' pressure from familial duty. When we approach the phenomena from the parents' perspective, it can be interpreted that the parents' responsibility is reproduced as a part of social norms, the socially constructed ethos from Confucianism (Lew 2013). Filial piety, emphasizing the representation of ancestors, is translated as an emphasis on better education for the children. As they worship their ancestors through periodical rituals, which symbolizes repaying endless debt (McCreery 1990), they also educate their descendants for the same reason. For Korean parents, Confucianism, as a religious ethos or value, is deeply internalized to motivate them to accept their costs of sacrifice to educate children.

It evinces the operation of a two-way culture in producing and crafting the Confucian fathers in a global setting. First, wild-geese fathers are bounded and constrained by social expectations imposed by the Confucian culture. The Confucian ethos, the pressure for the successive representation (e.g., connecting lineages and building the nation), provides wild-geese fathers with meanings, rationale, and motivation for sacrifices for their children's overseas education. Second, wild-geese fathers use the Confucian ethos as a tool kit or strategy to endure and mitigate their miserable situation and reconcile their identities. Continuously recalling their moral debt and duty for families and country (e.g., parents, ancestors, and nation), fathers tend to delay the overt expression of negative emotions and endure the sufferings. This strategic use of the Confucian ethos is strengthened and reproduced through endless interaction in the online community.

6. Conclusions

This article investigates how Korean transnational fathers, the wild-geese fathers, interpret their identities from the framework of filial piety in Confucianism. According to the narratives from the online community, wild-geese fathers struggle between their personal emotional difficulties and the social norm of the Korean fathers. On the one hand, fathers suffer from the feelings of loneliness, emptiness, and fatigue, but avoid the overt expressions of those emotions. By doing so, they conform to the ideal image of strong man who has an iron will and unflappable emotion. On the other hand, fathers produce the mixture of tragic and hopeful narratives to overcome their difficulties. The transition from tragic to hopeful narratives can be viewed as a reconciliation strategy to endure difficult separations.

These complex narratives of wild-geese fathers illustrate the operation of Confucian familism in today's globalized era. Wild-geese fathers continuously attempt to overcome their hardships through switching their narratives and reaffirming identities imbued by Confucian culture. Wild-geese fathers are willing to sacrifice for their children and it is apparent by the fathers' psychological duty to serve as intermediary links between his ancestors and descendants. They are the actors who maintain their ancestors' family honor by reproducing descendants that are capable of continuing the prosperity of the family and country.

However, there may be a debate on the narratives of wild-geese fathers suggested in this article. Perhaps, the feminist perspective would interpret that the description of heroism is parallel to the application of machismo, which emphasizes the strength of a male. This approach may reason the emotional isolation of wild-geese fathers with the protection of male image and boosted ego.

The wild-geese fathers in this article may be the unique samples who are more actively motivated to maintain and operate a family than others. As shown in their narratives, their strong motivation and dedication to their family enable them to console themselves and resolve their difficulties. Therefore, this may not be applied for every wild-geese father in Korea. Given that we have only explored some fathers who voiced actively on the internet, the argument cannot be generalized for all Koreans.

Nonetheless, the narratives depicted by wild-geese fathers and their interactions in the online communities imply that the Confucian culture provides a clue in understanding the Korean education fever, ever strengthened in a transnational context. In this sense, the online community offers a valuable forum informing how the Confucian culture is still durable and constantly recreated and reinvented through the interactions of social actors in the Asian society.

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