

The Effects of Patriarchal Kinship Expansion on Differential Mortality between Husband and Wife in Joseon, 1500–1900

Park, Keong-Suk, Heejin Park, Kwangyeol Baek, and YounJung Bae

This study investigates the effects of women's lower status in family on differential mortality between husband and wife after the settlement of Neo-Confucianism in Joseon society since the 17th century. While women live longer than men on average genetically, however, there can be a reverse in mortality between man and woman due to gender discrimination. Until the 17th century, it is argued that women in Joseon society had relatively superior status in family to their counterparts in the West and East Asia including China and Japan based on the equal division of inheritance between sons and daughters and marriage custom of Namguyieoga(男歸女家), which refers to the custom of married couples staying in the bride's family house. Since the 18th century, however, Neo-Confucianism consolidated its firm place as a dominant ideology, which led to the enforcement of the patriarchal kinship system such as with an emphasis on the eldest son's exclusive inheritance and patrilineal solidarity.

As a result, women's family status would have continued to drop since the 18th century in Joseon society. Equal division of inheritance between sons and daughters was replaced with the inheritance practice centered around sons, especially the eldest sons. The custom of newlyweds residing in the houses of wives after the wedding ceremony was replaced with the patrilineal custom of their residing in the houses of husbands. As women lost their inheritance right and married life in the house of the husband's parents became a common custom, women's status in family tended to keep dropping.

The present study examined family genealogy conducted in Joseon to figure out the changing status of women according to the spread of patriarchal culture. As Joseon genealogy contains records about the dates when husbands and wives were born and passed away, it can help to measure differential mortality between husband and wife from the 1500s to 1900. The study also identified the change in the scope of patriarchal kinship generation, which can be measured as a proxy variable to examine the effects of the patriarchal expansion. In Joseon, individuals' names generally consist of family name and first names. In a patrilineal kinship, all the relatives of the same generation would have not only the same family name, but also a common letter for their first names. The same letter of the first name for the same generation, is called as

Hangryeol(行列). The scope of Hangryeol(行列) would be expanded as the patriarchal family order became enforced. The use of a common Hangryeol letter indicates that they were members of the same patrilineal family, meaning the enforcement of the patriarchal family relation.

The present study evinces the effects of spreading Hangryeol on differential mortality between husbands and wives and provides the empirical evidence of the effects of patriarchal kinship system on gender differential in mortality.