

The Role of Women Divers in Fishery Villages on Cheju Island

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I . Introduction

The social status of Korean women has been perceived as fairly low in comparison with that of Western women. In fact, the social status of Korean women is legally equal to that of Korean men. Despite this legal equality, however, in many respects Korean women have been treated unequally in society.

This unequal treatment of Korean women is assumed to have been caused by Confucian ethical principles that emphasize the superiority of men in the home and in society. However, the women of Cheju in general, and the women divers of the Cheju Islands in particular, provide an exception to this traditional inequality. The women divers are so responsible and independent that they play a leading role in their homes and in society. Because of their leading roles, the women divers have in fact developed rights equal to men.

Cheju Island is not a separate society within the traditional Korean cultural realm. Certain conservative Confucian traditions continue to be practiced in the region. Consequently, the questions arise: (1) What causes the women divers' positive and independent attitudes toward life and society? and (2) How have they developed their equal rights in the home and in society?

In order to answer these questions, this present research is aimed at analyzing the social and economic conditions of the three types of villages in Chejudo where the majority of Women divers live. My research is also aimed at assessing the role of women divers in their homes and in society.

This research is significant because the equality of women's rights has become a great concern in both the Korean home and in society, especially in light of the successful economic growth which the nation has achieved during the past two decades.

and the increasing participation of women in social activities. Because of this growth and participation, conflicts have arisen between men and women in both the home and society.

There has been great concern over equal rights for women, but little research has been conducted on the women divers of Chejudo, who have achieved equal rights as a result of their positive and independent attitudes toward life and their successful participation in the economic sphere.

The rationale for this research lies in the possibility that the examination of the role of the women divers of the Cheju Islands could stimulate other Korean women who are concerned with equal rights but who show passive attitudes and occupy passive roles in the home and in society. It is hoped that such stimulation will help Korean women in promoting their equal rights in daily life.

My research objectives are: (1) to obtain a better understanding of social and economic conditions in the Cheju Islands, where the women divers live and play an important role; (2) to identify the women divers' roles in the home and community on these islands; and (3) to assess their role in the development of equal rights for women.

My research method was a survey based on direct observation and interviews. The survey was conducted between August and December 1985, and involved four investigations. Two other professors from Cheju National University and I conducted the survey research¹⁾. Marado, Udo, and three villages on Chejudo were selected for the research sites, and in order to identify social structures, they were classified according to three major types of villages, characterized in terms of income sources.

The three principal village types are (1) the island-village whose income sources involve only fisheries for the whole island (Marado); (2) the village whose income sources consist of two-thirds fisheries and one-third agriculture (Udo); and (3) the villages split almost equally between fisheries and agriculture (Chejudo).

II . The Role of Women Divers in Fishery Villages

The social and economic conditions and the role of women divers in the three selected fishery villages are described in the following three sections on Marado, Udo, and Chejudo.

1. MARADO

Marado is the smallest island of this group, with an area of 0.3 square kilometers. It is located eleven kilometers south of Mosulp'o City on Chejudo (shown in Figure 1). The island depends solely on income derived from the fisheries, since the entire island is covered with volcanic basalt lava. However, the coastline is abundant with various seaweeds and shellfishes. The island consists of twenty-five households, comprising forty-six men and thirty-six women. Eighteen of the thirty-six women are divers and they play a leading role in their households, since the people on this island depend on local marine resources for livelihood. This dependence arises because frequent and year-round strong winds on the island make travel to other places difficult. Many young men look for jobs outside of Marado, since the island resources are limited and land is not available for farming. But the island always keeps a population level of around fifty people.

It is assumed that the land has become infertile because of soil erosion and deforestation, due to frequent seasonal typhoons. The land is used for ranches, under collective ownership. This collectivity also applies to the activity of the women divers on the island. These women established an association of women divers, which distributes the marine products that they catch. However, these women divers are still competitive in their work because the income distribution is based on the quantity of the marine products collected. Their work schedule and the places for diving are restricted according to rules set by the association. Violations of these rules are punished in a manner determined by the association.

Men in Marado, in turn, are charged with the general work in the home, since there is no other place for them to work. Their only jobs are the household tasks, such as babysitting, shopping, feeding the pigs, and so on. However, these men become the representatives of the household only when ancestral worship is held. Because they stay in their homes and spend their spare time in the street, Marado men easily become drunkards and ignore the work ethic, thereby causing problems in their community.

The women divers are, in fact, the heads of their families and the representatives in their community. Their positive and responsible life attitudes are assumed to be the result of competition and endurance arising from working at catching marine products under the sea for five or six hours a day. Besides their househead roles, Marado women divers play leading roles in their communities. In order to foster

marine resource conservation, they limit sealine access along the coast by motorboat or ship. Anyone who leaves to marry someone from another region is deprived of her vested rights in the island as a women diver (the rights of resource usage and collective ownership). Such actions have, in fact, been performed by the Women Divers Association. Marado thus is home to a unique social structure in which women are superior to men in social and economic roles.

2. UDO

Udo is another small island, of 6.8 kilometers, about 4 kilometers northeast of Chejudo (shown in Figure 1). The island has 692 households, with a population of 3,294.

Women divers in Udo number 486. They represent 27.4 percent of all the women on the island. The women divers in Udo play a less positive role than those in Marado, since the fisheries in Udo do not depend solely on the work of the women divers. Many young and educated female adults leave the island to seek work in other places. Thirty ships for fisheries have been built and operated by men. Thus the function of the Women Divers Association could not, in fact, be as influential as the one on Marado. The women divers here cooperate with men in their work, both inside and outside of the home. When not diving, they help their husbands in working on fishing ships. The men who are not able to work for the fisheries stay at home and perform the household work or work in agricultural production.

Men in Udo, unlike those in Marado, are not dependent solely on the income of their wives. Rather, these men operate households according to the traditional pattern, which stresses their superiority. However, the women divers are still positive and progressive in their daily life without asserting their complete equality, thus reflecting the cooperative economic establishment. The women willingly go diving in other places, such as Samchonp'ó City, a fishery port on the southern coast of the Korean mainland²

The Udo women divers prefer not to depend on their husbands for livelihood, but neither do they control their husbands. Thus the women divers in Udo have not created a "woman superiority" as the women divers in Marado have done. The role of men and women here seems to have been maintained as a cooperative relationship.

3. CHEJUDO

Chejudo is the largest volcanic island in Korea, and the smallest of its nine provinces. The island is located roughly 145 kilometers off the south-western corner of the Korean peninsula (shown in Figure 1). Because of the geographical distance from the Korean mainland, Chejudo has formed a unique social structure.

Most villages in Chejudo, except the mountainous ones at three hundred meters above sea level, depend on income derived equally from fisheries and agriculture. Men and women in the villages of Chejudo work together year round, farming during the growing season and catching marine products during the slack season.

Among the villages of Chejudo, we selected three as study sites: Hamo-ri (South Cheju County), Bukchon-ri (North Cheju County), and Donggui-ri (near Cheju City). These villages have large populations. Hamo-ri 6,942 residents in 1984, Bukchon-ri had 1,591, and Donggui-ri 1,312. Even before the New Village Movement (*Saemaul Undong*) had begun, these villages had already developed various public facilities, such as electricity, telephone, water supply, and so on. The people in these villages have maintained their self-sufficiency through cultivating barley, soybeans, rape, and sweet potatoes as the main field crops, while the women divers in these villages have engaged in coastal fishing during the slack agricultural periods.

Cheju men, who traditionally have been perceived as working less than the women, have recently become more active in farming and fishing. They have expanded their activities to include economic participation in these spheres following the introduction of modern facilities such as tractors and larger fishing boats, newly built to meet the increasing demand for marine products in the major cities on the Korean mainland.

On the other hand, the Cheju women divers have increased their income from the marine products caught through their diving skill. Through this economic activity, the women divers have established their right to assert their opinion in both the home and in society (through the Women Divers Association). They are positive influences not only in the economic sphere but also in their concern over social matters. The Association has attempted to modify unproductive customs such as gambling, which is still popular among the village men.

III . The Social Structure of Fishery Communities and The Function of the Women Divers Association

In order to gain an insight into the social structure of a fishery community, it is necessary to analyze its individual and group relationships. Our analysis is centered on Marado, which possesses a unique social structure.

1. INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIPS

The villagers in Marado are related by kinship and family bonds. Almost all of the villagers are related in one way or another. These interrelationships create a complexity in organizing communal groups. Therefore, for social benefit the villagers have united by groups according to territorial communities, rather than by kinship or family bonds. The kinship or family relationships are the concern of and maintained only by the women of Marado. Recently the villagers have tended to avoid marrying people from within the island and have preferred marrying residents of other islands.

The family unit in Marado is a nuclear family with two or three family members. This nuclear family is a reasonable structure for this island, in which survival depends on individual diving skills required for catching marine products. Thus the nuclear family is regarded as a "survival strategy."

Diving skill is a condition for a woman's marriage, since the survival of her husband, after all, depends on the limited marine resources. The villagers prefer daughters to sons, and expect them to become women divers in the future. This preference for daughters is unusual, compared with the preference in other regions for sons as family successors.

2. GROUP RELATIONSHIPS

The group relationship is essential in Marado, since villagers on the island have a great need to cooperate with each other because of the limited resources. The group relation is also important to the villagers for the maintenance of peace and order within their society. Individuals are bound together in two types of group relationship.

The first type of relationship is the collective ownership of land and the shar-

ing of marine products. The sharing of benefits is fairly equal in the case of women divers, according to the quantity of their catch. This collective ownership appears strongly in group activities and is affected when a woman diver leaves the island.

The second type of group relationship is the relationship formed according to kinship or family bonds. For instance, the villagers who have the same surname are grouped together. However, this type of relationship has created complexity in effectively organizing the group. Therefore, in order to avoid complexity, villagers prefer to be grouped by territorial relationships.

A representative group relationship is the association of women divers. This association has actively contributed to the development of the island. It has not only contributed to the revenue of the island, but it also helps maintain social order by, for example, prohibiting the sale of liquor.

IV. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the role of the women divers in the three different types of social structure found within fishery villages, we can see the significant role of women and their positive participation in the home and in society. They establish their economic independence through hard work, and thereby transfer their independence to positive participation in society.

The role of the women divers, however, varies according to the different social and economic conditions in their societies. Women in Marado, a village engaged in fisheries alone, are superior in both the home and in society, due to their importance in the economic establishment. In Udo, a village involved in both fisheries and agriculture, the role of women is limited to the fisheries and social matters related to the fisheries. The other major social matters are handled by men. Chejudo women play a less significant role than the women in Marado and Udo. The men in Chejudo have increasingly expanded their economic and social activities and play a leading role in their society.

The result of this survey research suggests that women's equal rights can be established through positive participation in the home and in society, based on their participation in the economic establishment.

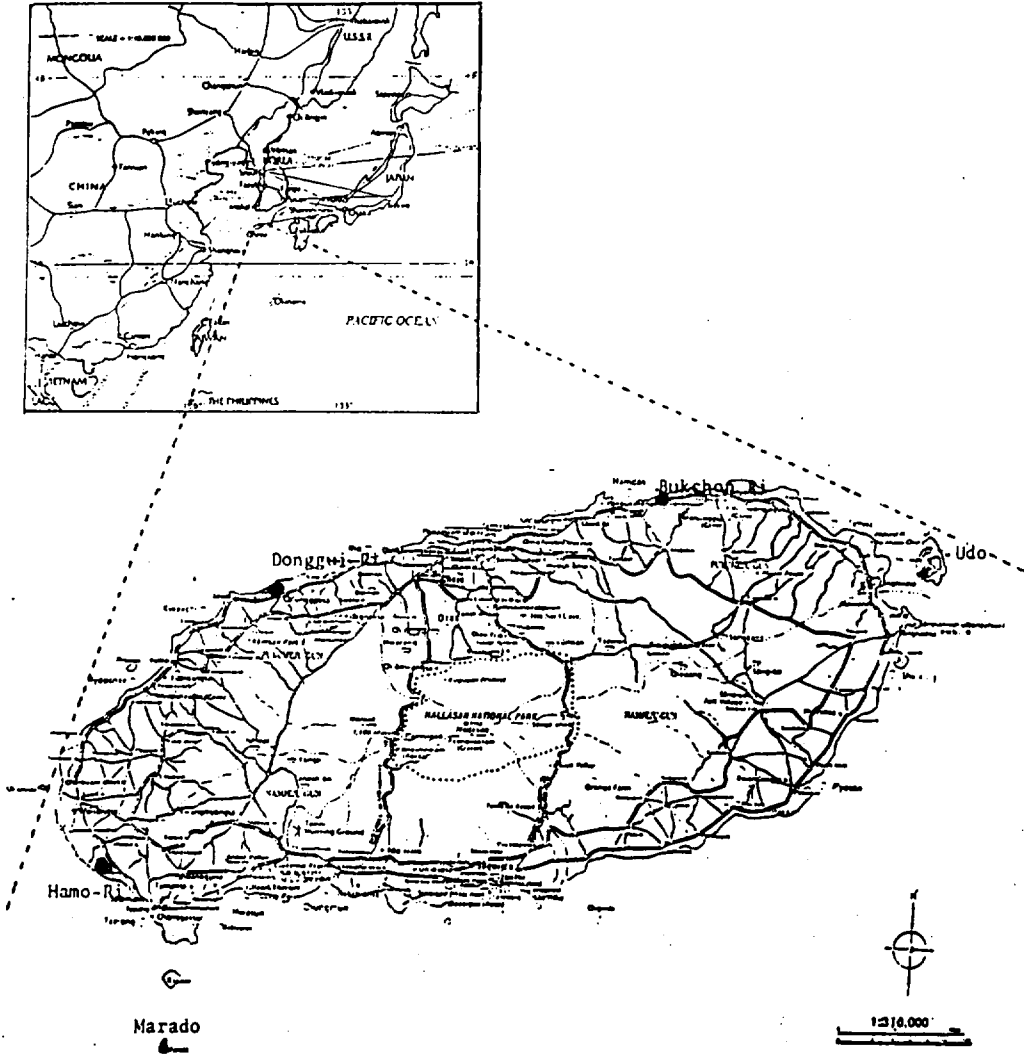
< NOTES >

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2. Ki-Uk Lee, "An Island and Island People," *The Study of Chejudo* vol.1 (The Society of Researches for Chejudo, 1984), p.171.

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Figure 1. The Location of Chejudo, Udo, and Marado



Source: Korea National Tourism Corporation's *Republic of Korea*, which is based on 1:1,000,000 scale Map issued by the National Geography (Printed in June, 1986), Seoul, Korea.

討 論 (Ⅲ)

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(*) ○○○: 동일한 전문경력을 지닌 도시계획가의 입장에서 저의 첫번째 질문은 基本假定에 관한 것입니다. 오아후섬내 두 가지 사업계획의 배후에 있는 기본가정은 屬傭이란 관점에서 자체수용적 (self-containment) 인 개발이라는 것입니다. 제가 아는 한 새로운 시가지개발은 결코 자체수용적인 것이 못됩니다. 호놀룰루에서의 주요 고용이란 면은 제쳐 놓고 이 두 지역에서 휴양지와 주요한 고용중심지를 연결짓는 어떤 대중교통 수단이 있는 것 인지요?

저의 두번째 질문은 한국에 관한 것으로서 한국은 더욱 더 민주화가 될 것입니다. 示威도 민주화 과정의 일부인 것입니다. 어엿한 지방자치가 앞으로 도입될 것이고 국민들의 목소리가 보다 더 커질 것입니다. 관광지 주변의 지역주민들을 휴양지와의 공동체적 관계로 통합시키는 데는 어떠한 방법이 있는지요?

(*) John P. Whalen: 두 지역 가운데 규모가 큰 혹은 밀도가 높은 Ko Olina 휴양지는 궁극적으로 호놀룰루의 교통체계에 이어질 고속교통망에 연결될 계획입니다. 최종 결정절차 및 그에 관한 시기는 아직까지 시의회에서 이루어지지 않았읍니다. 장기계획에서 비추어지는 바대로 저희는 지금 타당성 조사를 계획하고 있는 중입니다.

중국에 가서 Ko Olina 휴양지에 연결될 통행체계에 대한 첫째 요소로서, 사실상 그 휴양지 계획안 가운데 휴양지내에 위치한 두 곳의 통과정류장을 볼 수 있습니다. 당분간은 민간 및 공공용 버스에 의해 통행이 이루어질 것인데, 거기에는 관광교통을 맡고 있는 대규모의 관광버스회사들이 있는 것입니다.

더우기 두 휴양지는 말씀하신 대로 전체적으로 자체수용적인 것은 아니지만, 이미 건설되

있거나 또는 건설예정이거나 간에 어떤 지역특성이 있습니다. 예컨대 섬의 북단에 위치한 Na Honolani 휴양지에는 ‘폴리네시아 문화센터 (Polynesian Cultural Center) ’라 불리는 대규모 단지가 있는 바, 그것은 위락시설이자 교육·문화시설인 것입니다. Ko Olina 휴양지 다음으로는 현재 시의회의 심사가 진행중인 주제공원 (theme park) 의 계획안이 있습니다.

그리하여 비록 완전하게 자체수용적인 것은 아닐지라도, 관광객을 유치시킬 것들을 휴양지 근처에 이미 건설했거나 혹은 건설하는 중입니다.

(*) Arnold Morgado : 도심교통을 어떻게 할지에 대해 짚막하게 언급해 보겠습니다. Ko Olina 휴양지 및 Na Honolani 휴양지에서의 요구 가운데 하나는 러쉬·아워가 아닌 때에도 기타 형태의 교통수단이 꼭 들어갈 것이라는 고려하에 보다 광범위한 주변지역에서 호텔들이 근로자에게 교통수단을 제공한다는 것이었습니다.

그런데 호놀룰루나 일터로 가는 러쉬·아워의 교통체증은 줄어드는 반면, 저희가 러쉬·아워가 아닌 때에 오가기를 바라는 사람들이 휴양지를 오고가게 될 때 여전히 교통체증이 빚어지는 것입니다.

지역사회의 통합에 있어서 이 지역의 선도자는 Na Honolani 휴양지였습니다. 휴양지개발에 앞서 노동쟁의가 있었는데, 경영 및 고용주에 대한 노동쟁의의 결과로 지역사회와 더불어 일하며 지역사회의 주민을 호텔업무에 알맞도록 교육시키는 일이 정착돼 왔습니다. 회사기금으로써 주민들은 비서역, 사무작업 및 회계업무 등을 전수해 주는 지역사회의 대학기관에서 공부하였고, 따라서 그들은 일에 대한 자신감을 얻을 수 있었습니다. 그리고 열심히만 한다면 휴양지 주변에서 고용될 기회가 많았던 것입니다.

(*) 이덕희 : 감사합니다. 지역사회 또는 개발자가 어떤 사업계획을 원하지 않았거나 혹은 승인하지 않았던 경우를 말씀해 주실 수 있을지요. 시의회는 어떻게 대처하고 있습니까?

(*) Leigh-Wai Doo (?) : 만일 그러한 상황이 일어났더라면 개발자로서 매우 골치아픈 상황을 맞았을 거라고 생각합니다. 어떤 개발에 반대하는 대중적 감정을 갖게 된다는 것은 대중적 감정을 돌이키기가 매우 어려운 일이기 때문에 심각한 문제인 것입니다.

저희는 Whalen 氏가 이미 언급했던 바대로 여러가지 상황을 겪어 왔습니다. 저는 Ko Olina 에 관해 모르는데 West Beach Project 의 경우 지역사회가 그 사업계획에 대해 만

민참게 반대를 했으며, 생각하전대 어떻게 사업계획에 접근하지 못하는가에 관한 매우 좋은 예라고 할 수 있습니다.

저는 여러분께서 지역사회의 연루를 체계적으로 — 혹은 은밀히 — 취급하는 경우 개발이 필요한가 또는 바람직한가 하는 매우 기초적인 문제해결 수준으로부터 출발할 거라고 생각합니다. 그 질문에 대한 답변 다음에 여러분께서는 어떻게 개발을 그 지역사회에 적용시킬 것인가에 대해 대답해야만 합니다. 구체적이고도 매우 현실적인 정보로 인하여 지역사회란 최상의 척도가 되는 것입니다. 그 뒤 일어나게 될 일은 개발자와 지역사회간에 매우 인간적인 관계를 설정하는 것이라고 생각합니다. 여러분께서는 그들의 계획이 무엇인가에 관해서는 공공대중과 더불어 충분한 의견교환을 행할 수가 없습니다.

저는 또한 이 시점에서 정치적 지도층으로서의 저희가 섬에 살고 있다는 사실을 이해한다는 게 아주 중요하다는 점을 말씀드리고 싶습니다. 이 두 휴양지에 관해서 앞서 언급한 바와 같이 침체지역에 때때로 고용기회를 제공한다는 점을 간과해야 할 것으로 생각합니다. 이것의 정치적 측면이란 저희가 섬에 살고 있기 때문에 침체지역 또는 잠재적인 침체지역이 저희들의 관심만으로 보장되어질 수 없다는 사실입니다. 다시 말해서 정치적으로 이 섬의 모든 정치적 지도자들이 나누어 보아야 할 관심인 것입니다.

간혹 저는 휴양지가 자신의 지역사회에서만 고용기회를 줄 것으로 믿는 잘못된 생각들이 있다고 봅니다. 과연 그런 휴양지가 섬전체를 개발하기 위한 종합개발계획에 알맞는 것인가요? 이 섬의 주민들에게 어떤 종류의 고용기회를 줄 것인지요?

그리고 이런 관점에서 이들 휴양지를 둘러싼 지역사회에서 어떠한 고용기회가 즉각적으로 유용될 수 있는냐는 데로 서서히 전환해 갈 수 있는 것입니다. 여러분과의 질의응답은 그것이 일반적으로 이 섬에 어떻게 영향을 줄 것이냐는 의문과 함께 출발해야 할 것으로 생각하는 바입니다.

(*) ○○○ : 저는 Hilo의 사업계획이 더욱 더 악화되는 것으로 알고 있는데 자세히 알고 계시는지요?

(*) Barbara Kim Stanton : 네, Hilo에서 발견되는 문제는 날씨, Kona와의 경쟁 및 관광객 활동의 부족 등입니다.

Hilo가 경제적인 침체지역이기 때문에 저희는 이를 조정하는 길로 Hilo에서의 간선도로사업을 지원하고 있으며, 아울러 하와이내 특수지역인 Hilo의 특성 내지 속성을 강조하기 위해 Hilo town의 설계에 노력하고 있습니다. 즉, 또 하나의 Waikiki로 만들어지는 대신에 그것의 독특성이 강조되고 있는 것입니다. 저희는 섬의 그 쪽 면에 위치한 옛 town을 일으켜 세우기 위해서 간선도로

사업계획에 22만 5천 달러의 예산을 제상했습니다.

(*) Arnold Morgado : 저는 市의원으로서 여기서 말씀드리고 싶은 것이 있습니다. 즉 호놀룰루시는 州정부가 관광으로부터 거둬들이는 종류의 자금을 갖고 싶어 하는데, 객실 이용세 · 물품구입세 등은 모두가 州정부의 收入인 것입니다.

그렇지만 호놀룰루시는 관광산업에 있어서 버스타든가 혹은 교통기반에 대해 책임을 지고 있습니다. 도로의 유지 · 보수와 관광객들로 넘치는 휴양지내 모든 화장실은 시정부의 관할에 속합니다. 저희는 이러한 책임을 모두 지지만, 그 일들을 수행하는 데서는 아무런 收入도 얻지 못하고 있습니다.

市의원으로서 저의 문제는 호놀룰루의 사회생활을 취급해야 한다는 것입니다. Barbara 여사는 서기 2005년에는 관광객의 50%가 보다 외곽에 위치한 섬들로 가게 될 것이라고 말씀하셨습니다. 현재 저희는 호텔객실을 과다 보유하고 있는데, 만일 2005년에 관광객의 절반이 외곽의 섬들로 가게 된다면 저희가 이미 수많은 기반시설비용을 투입했던 그런 휴양지에는 어떤 일이 벌어지겠는지요?

호놀룰루는 으뜸가는 관광행선지입니다. 여기서의 저희 문화에 있어서 관광의 영향에서 비롯되는 생활의 질은 어떻겠습니까? 생각컨대 저희는 지역사회가 궁극적으로 다뤄야 할 문제 — 즉 현존 주민의 생활의 질 — 에 매달리고 있는 것입니다.

또 하나의 언급은 이제는 1950년대 및 1960년대에 있어서 저희가 누렸던 만큼의 수익을 주지 못하는 농업산업 — 특히 사탕수수과 파인애플 — 을 어떻게 바로잡을 것이냐는 것입니다. Barbara 여사께서는 농업이 관광객에게 녹지공간(open space)을 제공해 주는 매우 중요한 역할을 한다는 사실을 강조하셨습니다. 여기서 저희가 경험하는 문제는 지역사회에 커다란 이익을 주어왔던 이들 지역 — 원시적 농경지들 — 을 개발시킨다는 엄청난 압박이 있다는 것입니다. 그리하여 어떻게 저희가 이러한 휴양지, 농경지, 주거지 등의 모든 것을 균형있게 바로잡을 것이냐가 문제인 것입니다.

(*) ○○○ : 徐교수님께서서는 여성들이 어떻게 경제적인 역할을 하는가에 따라서 여성들의 지위가 결정지워질 수 있다는 그런 말씀을 하셨는데, 제주도만이 아니고 국가적인 차원에서 볼 때 경제발전이 과연 여성의 지위를 높여주는 역할을 했겠는지요?

그리고 해녀들이 자기 딸을 앞으로도 과연 자기처럼 해녀로서 살도록 할 것인지에 대해서도 말씀해 주십시오.

(*) 서경립 : 제주도에서 경제개발이 이루어지고 경제력이 향상됨으로 해서 여성의 지위가 더욱 올라갈 것인지 혹은 그렇지 아닐 것인지에 대해서는 여러 나라의 경우를 보더라도 여성의 지위가 확대되면 확대됐지 향상되지 않은 예는 거의 볼 수 없다고 할 것입니다. 어쨌든 명확하게 얘기할 수 있는 것은 여성들이 스스로 직접 참여를 해서 소득을 높이는 경우에 있어서는 당연히 발언권이 높아가고, 사회에 대한 참여도 역시 마라도라든가 우도라든가 그런 곳에서 보는 것처럼 점차적으로 여성의 지위를 높여 줄 것이라는 얘기입니다.

두번째 질문도 상당히 중요한 것으로서 이것은 부녀들의 인생에 대한 가치관이라고 말할 수 있겠습니다. 바다에서의 고된 노동을 통해 소득을 얻는 그런 여성들은 대개 자신의 소득으로 자식을 교육시키며, 이 경우 교육받은 여자 — 즉 자신의 딸 — 를 해녀를 시키지는 않습니다. 그래서 지금 제주도에서는 해녀의 수가 계속 줄어들고 있는데, 현재 20대 해녀는 한 명도 없고 40대, 50대 여성이 가장 많다고 합니다.