

A STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND DINING CULTURE IN KOREAN SOCIETY: THE CASE OF  
HONBAP (혼밥)



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การศึกษาการเปลี่ยนแปลงของสังคมและวัฒนธรรมการรับประทานอาหารในสังคมเกาหลี กรณีของ

HONBAP (혼밥)



วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

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การศึกษาค้นคว้านี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาทำความเข้าใจ การเปลี่ยนแปลงของสังคมและวัฒนธรรมการรับประทานอาหารของชาวเกาหลีโดยมุ่งเน้นไปที่กรณีของ Honbap (혼밥) หรือที่หมายถึงการรับประทานอาหารคนเดียว (Eating Alone) ในสังคมแบบคณาธิปไตย (Collectivism) อย่างเช่น สังคมเกาหลีซึ่งมีความแตกต่างจากประเทศในซีกโลกตะวันตกที่เป็นสังคมแบบปัจเจกนิยม (Individualism) ในสังคมแบบคณาธิปไตยของสังคมเกาหลีมีความเป็นกลุ่มเป็นก้อนกันมายาวนาน ในด้านวัฒนธรรมการรับประทานอาหารก็นิยมรับประทานอาหารกันเป็นกลุ่มมากกว่าการรับประทานอาหารคนเดียวเช่นกัน การรับประทานอาหารคนเดียวจึงเป็นสิ่งที่แปลกตาในสังคมเกาหลี แต่ปัจจุบันในยุคที่มีความเจริญทางเทคโนโลยี ความทันสมัย เกาหลีมีการรับวัฒนธรรมจากประเทศฝั่งตะวันตกเข้ามาในประเทศมากขึ้น แนวคิดแบบปัจเจกนิยมมีมากขึ้นเช่นเดียวกัน ส่งผลต่อการเปลี่ยนแปลงค่านิยมต่างๆ ในสังคม ทำให้เกิดการแต่งงานล่าช้า อัตราการเกิดล่าช้า ก่อให้เกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางโครงสร้างประชากร จำนวนครัวเรือนคนเดียวมีมากขึ้น นอกจากนี้ยังส่งผลต่อวัฒนธรรมการรับประทานอาหารของคนเกาหลี ทำให้เกิดการเลือกรับประทานอาหารคนเดียวมากขึ้น จึงเป็นที่มาของการศึกษาค้นคว้านี้

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ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....

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KEYWORD: Honbap Eating alone Confucianism Collectivism and Individualism  
Single person household

Nutnicha Somporn : A STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND DINING CULTURE IN  
KOREAN SOCIETY: THE CASE OF HONBAP (혼밥). Advisor: Asst. Prof. Yong  
Yoon, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study is to understand the social change and dining culture in Korean society by emphasizing in Honbap (혼밥), which means eating alone. In Asian countries as Korean society is a collectivism society which people are strong in-groups for a long time, unlike the Western countries where people are in individualism society. The influence of collectivistic values includes the dining culture in Korean society as eating out. Normally, Korean people usually prefer to eat with friends, family members, colleagues rather than eating alone. Eating alone in public looks strange like an outcast, it is hard to find Korean people eating alone in a restaurant. But nowadays, the prosperity of technology, modernization and westernization affects Korean society, the individualistic values also expand among Korean people through the Western culture and also impact to values and demographic change such as late marriage, low fertility in Korean society. The value change not only affects the social change, but also affects dining culture, and eating alone trend gradually occurs in Korean society.

Field of Study: Korean Studies

Student's Signature .....

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Historically, Korea was shaped by the influence of Shamanism, an ancient religion which is a spiritual practice by person who can communicate between spiritual world and human world for control the nature and human life (Arevik 2015). Besides Shamanism, Confucianism also shaped Korea, especially behavior pattern and structure of family and community (Park and Cho 1995). Confucianism is a part of culture which is important to drive the economic development in East Asia (Hofstede and Bond 1984). By the influence of value system which made Korea to become homogeneous country, this homogeneity was one of the reason that led Korea to transform agrarian society to industrialized urban society within a single generation (Park and Choi 2015).

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Although, Korea has a strong family value, the increase of single-person household gradually rises in Korea society nowadays. According to Statistic Korea, Future population estimation, the proportion of single-person households increased from 9% in 1990 to 23% in 2010 (Statistics-Korea). There are many effects that influence the increase of single-person households, including economic and socio-cultural factors. For example, employment opportunities for women, late marriages,

longer life expectancy, low birth rate, aging population and individualism (Kim, Lee et al. 2018).

According to Hofstede theory; a cultural dimension for standard for understanding cultural differences, some part of his theory defined Individualism as “a situation in which people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only” while Collectivism, is defined as “a situation in which people belong to in-groups or collectivities which are supposed to look after then in exchange for loyalty” (Hofstede and Bond 1984). Hofstede theory explained individualism and collectivism in many countries around the world. Asian cultures are more collectivism while the Western cultures are more individualism. In individualism dimension of Hofstede theory, Korea got a score of 18 which defines Korean society as a collectivistic culture in which family, school and institutions encourage sharing of food, feelings and places (Buja 2016).

Korea is a collectivistic society but the economic fluctuation affected the increase of unemployment rate in society and also impact to the demographic change. Due to socio-economic changes, the phenomenon of ‘Solo Economy’ also occurred in Korean society. The increase of solo activities in Korean society created a new word by use hon (혼) which means alone, to be the first syllabus with other Korean words to describe solo activities. For example, honbap (eating alone), honsul (drinking alone), honyeong (watch movie alone) and honkeul (clubbing alone).

This research emphasizes on a new phenomenon of dining culture change which occurred recently in Korean society. Eating alone is a new phenomenon created by socio-economic changes in Korean society. Eating alone is not unusual behavior in other societies as in the Western countries but it is relatively strange in East Asian countries especially in South Korea.

Eating alone, in Korean called “Honbap” is a portmanteau word from 2 words in Korean language, “hon” means alone and “bap” means rice and also refers to meal, Honbap is directly translated into eating alone. In Korean society, eating is a social activity. Korean people usually eat together with their family’s members, friends or colleagues. Because of the large portion of Korean food that it is proper for sharing together. The rising of single-person households was main character that lead to eating alone phenomenon in Korean society.

South Korea Correspondent, Chang May Choon of Singapore's Straits Times said "What they fear is losing their chaemyon (reputation) if people think of them as a wangda (loner), and that's a big taboo". Even eating alone at restaurant in a public is uncommon in Korean society but nowadays Korean people has courage to overcome their fear to eat alone (Chang 2016).

## Honbap trend in Korea

### Restaurants for honbap

Due to the change of Korean society especially demographic change which impact to the rising of single person households, many restaurants response to the honbap trend by offering menus with small portion for one serving and rearranged big table for group to a small table with one or two chairs for people who come alone can seat without uncomfortable feeling when staring with others.

Figure 1 McDonald's



These photos were taken from a popular fast food restaurant, McDonald's in Hongdae branch. There are many notable seats for people who come to eat alone and worry about others' staring. The first type is the yellow boxes with stool chairs even it looks strange but it is good for who need privacy and feel comfortable to eat

alone without make eyes contact with other people. Another type of alone seat is a small wall seat with partition.

Figure 2 싸움의고수 Restaurant



This restaurant has many branches in Korea, all of dishes are proper for one serving with rice, meats and side dishes by serving in lunch box. This restaurant is popular for people who come alone or who need to eat quickly due to they have no time. The restaurant arrange seats by using counter bar for their customers, it makes you feel less awkward when you eat alone.



### Entertainment media for honbap trend

There are many Korean entertainment media which show the attractive side of living alone and eating alone through Korean entertainers.

Figure 3 | Live Alone (나 혼자 산다)



Source: MBC Entertainment, 2018

“I live alone” is a television program to show the single lifestyle of Korean entertainers through the concept of real-variety show. According to the rising of single person household in Korean society, one-third of Korean entertainers are also not in relationship and still in ‘Single’ status.

“I live Alone” is reveal the daily routine of single life of many Korean entertainers who live alone, the popular episode is 247 which broadcasted in 2018 with Hwasa, member of Korean popular girl group “Mamamoo (마마무)” has appeared as guest.

In this episode revealed the real daily routine of Hwasa with the completely different look when she off the stage. Some part of this episode, Hwasa went to Gobchang (곱창) restaurant (Grilled intestines restaurant) by herself, sit at outdoor table and ordered the dish of intestines for 2 servings and MCs was surprised when they saw Hwasa ate Gobchang alone because this dish is proper to eat as group . After this show broadcasted made “Hwasa effect” or “Hwasa Gobchang (화사 곱창)” went viral on social media by over 270,000 views in a week on MBC’s Facebook official clip (Korea Herald, 2018). Eating grilled Gobchang alone is not easy due to Korean people usually eat as group and Hwasa effect made grilled intestines become a popular menu among young people. (MBC 2018)

Figure 4 Hwasa during enjoy her alone meal at Grilled intestines restaurant



Source: MBC Entertainment, 2018

MCs was surprised when they saw Hwasa went to Gobchang restaurant by herself, they taught that sounds tough to eat alone. Hwasa revealed when she wants to eat grilled intestine or pork belly, just go and eat alone by herself.

## Honbap-stagram (혼밥스타그램)



“혼밥스타그램 (Honbap-stagram)” is a variety show about recommendation restaurants for eating alone by give missions for Korean idols to eating out alone and broadcasted through Vlive.tv and Vlive application, Korean live video streaming service that KPOP idols can communicate with their fans. This variety show has two seasons with MCs from two Korean idol groups, Lovelyz Mijoo & Yein and JBJ SangGyun & Donghan. “Honbap-stagram” presents that eating alone in public is not strange through KPOP idols to eat alone and recommend menus and restaurants where proper for people who eat alone.

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Figure 5 Honbap-stagram’s JBJ’s Sanggyun and Donghan



Source: Vlive.tv, 2018

JBJ's members Sanggyun and Donghan shared their experiences about eating alone, Sanggyun said he used to eat alone when he moved to Seoul for chasing his dream. He used to live in Goshiwon, a tiny one-room unit, there are a lot of people who eat alone in Goshiwon and he always goes out for eating alone and does not feel awkward to eat alone. JBJ's Donghan also used to eat alone when he was a trainee, he always watched a lot of variety show while eat alone in order to enjoy his alone meal (Vlive.tv 2018).

There are many kinds of food were chosen to present and recommend for eating alone in this show by started with Dosirak (lunch box), Samgak-Gimbap (triangle Gimbap) in convenience stores is the best way for people who need to save time and portion of food in convenience stores is proper for one serving. Most of convenience stores have table for eating inside or in front of the store for eating.

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Figure 6 Honbap-stagram's Lovelyz's Mijoo



Source: Vlive.tv, 2017

Figure 7 Honbap-stagram's Lovelyz's Yein and JBJ's Sanggyun



Source: Vlive.tv, 2017, 2018

Samgyeobsal (삼겹살, Grilled pork belly) and Dakgalbi (닭갈비, Korean spicy chicken stir fry) these two kinds of food usually serve in a large portion and proper for 2-3 or more person than one person. But in this variety show that you can eat and enjoy with these kinds of food alone by yourself in public restaurant and to present honbap or eating alone is not strange behavior and every one can enjoy in nowadays.

### 1.1 Research objective

1.1.1 To study the characteristic of Korean culture in terms of social and lonely behavior of Korean people

1.1.2 To analyze the value change that impact on dining culture change in Korean society

## 1.2 Research questions

1.2.1 What is the trend of characteristic of Korean culture in terms of social and lonely behavior of Korean people?

1.2.2 How value change affects the dining culture change in Korean society?

## 1.3 Research hypothesis

1.3.1 The economic and demographic change in Korea impact to dining culture change in Korean society

1.3.2 Collectivistic value is very strong in Korean society and Korean people continue to struggle with an idea of Honbap.

## 1.4 Scope of research

This research focuses on eating alone trend in Korea by explaining the overview of Korean society in terms of dining culture change. By collecting secondary data from previous researches and Statistics Korea, this research describes the related traditional culture, beliefs, demographic change and behavior of Korean people and refer to theory related to social values to explain characteristic of Korean culture.

### 1.5 Expected findings

To understand the background of Korean culture in terms of values and behavior of Korean people which are related to dining culture. Understanding the turning point of dining culture change and explore the response of Korean people about the expansion of eating alone in Korean society.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Shamanism

One of the most ancient belief in the world is Shamanism, which is a traditional religion about spiritual practice in human life by communicating with supernatural things through a person who acts as a center to communicate between people and spiritual world called Shaman.

According to Arevik's research, Shamanism is the most powerful religion in Korean society and exist on Korean peninsula since the archaic period, before 1,000 BC by blending with other religions such as Buddhism. Shamanism was found in Korean history since Silla dynasty (356-935), Koryo dynasty (918-1392) and Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) (Arevik 2015).

Shamanism was suppressed throughout the Korean history with the increase in Christian believers in society. However, Shamanism was revived and still in a part of everyday life in Korean society. According to Arevik's research, Shamanism has adapted to different religions and another reason is the human being want to be blessed and pray for other's blessings according to Shamanistic principles. (Arevik 2015)



## 2.2 Confucianism

Confucianism refers to the value system that has spread throughout East Asia countries: China, Japan and Korea, which derived from combination of traditional values by Kung Fu-Tzu, a Chinese philosopher and his followers. Kung Fu-Tzu, is known as Confucius in Western countries.

The five moral disciplines which Kung Fu-Tzu taught to his students:

1. Justice and righteousness should mark the relations between sovereign and subject
2. There should be proper rapport between father and son
3. Separation of function between husband and wife
4. The younger should give precedence to the elder
5. Faith and trust should reign over relationships between friends

(Wang 2016) จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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According to Wang's research, the five disciplines of Confucianism indicated the five relationships of sovereign and subject, parents and children, husband and wife, brothers and sisters, and friend and friend. Confucianism also emphasizes on duty, loyalty, honor, filial piety, respect for age and seniority, and sincerity (Wang 2016).

The significance of Confucianism is shaping the behavior pattern and structure of family and community (Park and Cho 1995). According to the heritage of Confucianism influenced to the strong characteristic in family, workplace and society.

### 2.3 Single Person Households

The United Nations Statistics Division defined a single-person household as “an arrangement in which one person make provision for his and her own food or other essentials for living without combining with any other person to form part of multi-person household”.

Single-person household drastically increased in Korean society, according to (Kim, Lee et al. 2018), there are many causes of living alone In Korea varied for each age group. In 20s and 30s of single-person households, they were less likely to marry due to job insecurity or lack of saving money. In 40s and 50s, main factors of living alone are divorce and unemployment.

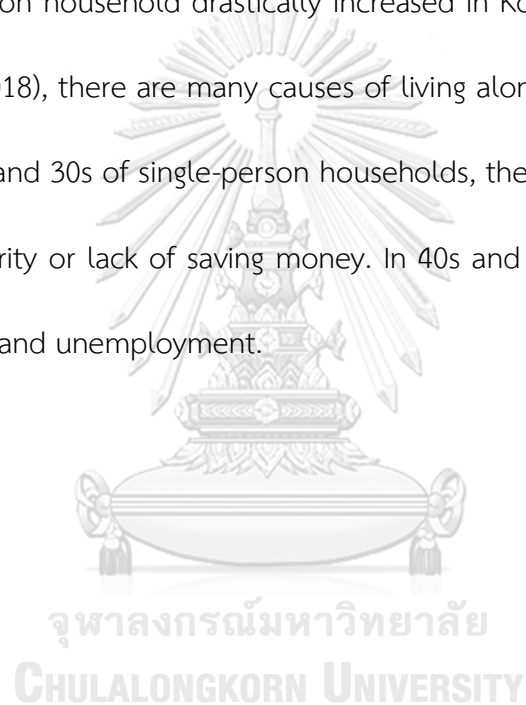
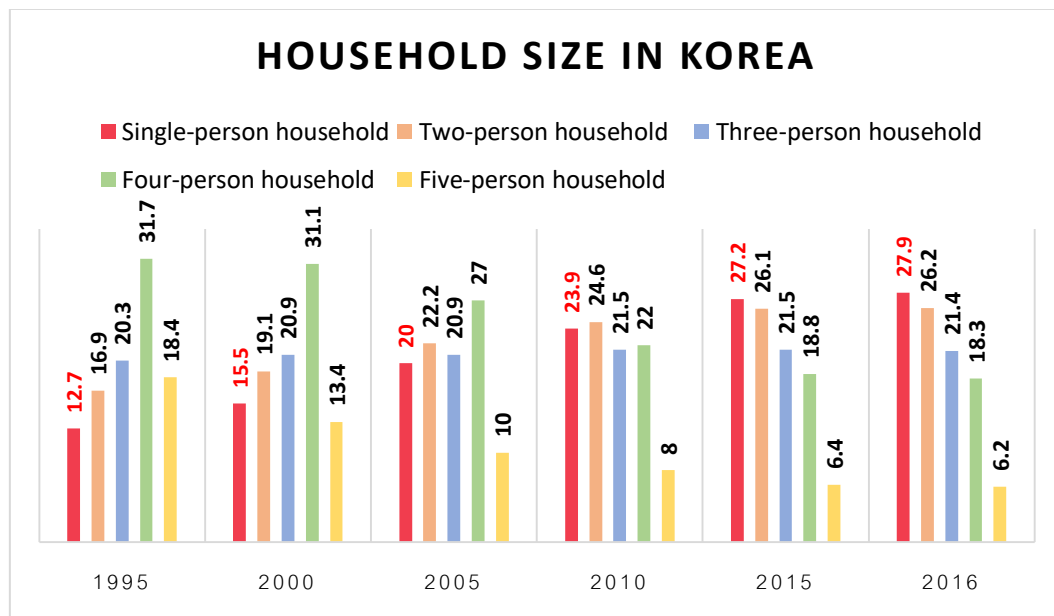


Figure 8 The percentage data of household size in Korea during 1995-2016

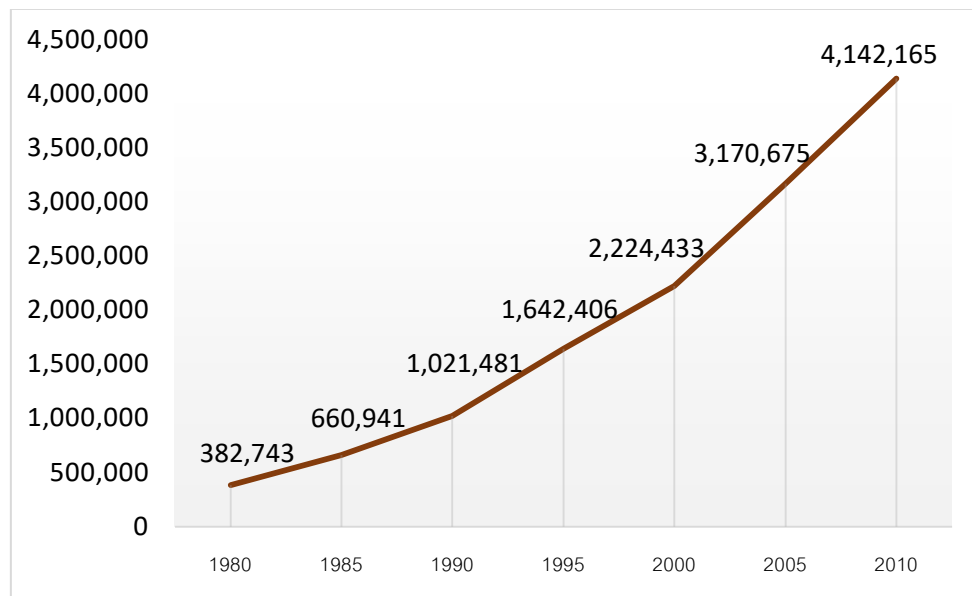


Source: Statistics Korea, 2017 (Statistics-Korea)

According to Statistics Korea, the enumeration results of the 2016 population and housing census showed the comparison of percentage of household in Korea divided by household size. The largest portion in Korean society is Single-person household with 27.9 percent, followed by two-person household (26.2 percent), three-person household (21.4 percent), four-person household (18.3 percent) and five-person or more household (6.2 percent).

And also indicated the rising of single-person households in Korean society from 12.7 percent in 1995 to 27.9 percent in 2016 and two-person household from 16.9 percent in 1995 rise to 26.2 percent in 2016 whereas the three or more person households was gradually dropped.

Figure 9 The number of single person households



Source: Statistics Korea; Korean Statistical Information Service, 2015.

Statistical data showed the amount of single person households by whole country increased quickly. From 1980 to 1985, the number of single person households increased more than 270,000 people, on the other side, from 2005 to 2010, single person households increased quickly nearly 1,000,000 people within 5 years. This statistical data demonstrated the increase of single person households in modern Korean era grew rapidly due to various factors in economic and socio-cultural change, such as the increase of individualistic values, late marriages, decline birth rate, aging population (Kim, Lee et al. 2018).

Table 1 Population census in Seoul (1980-2010)

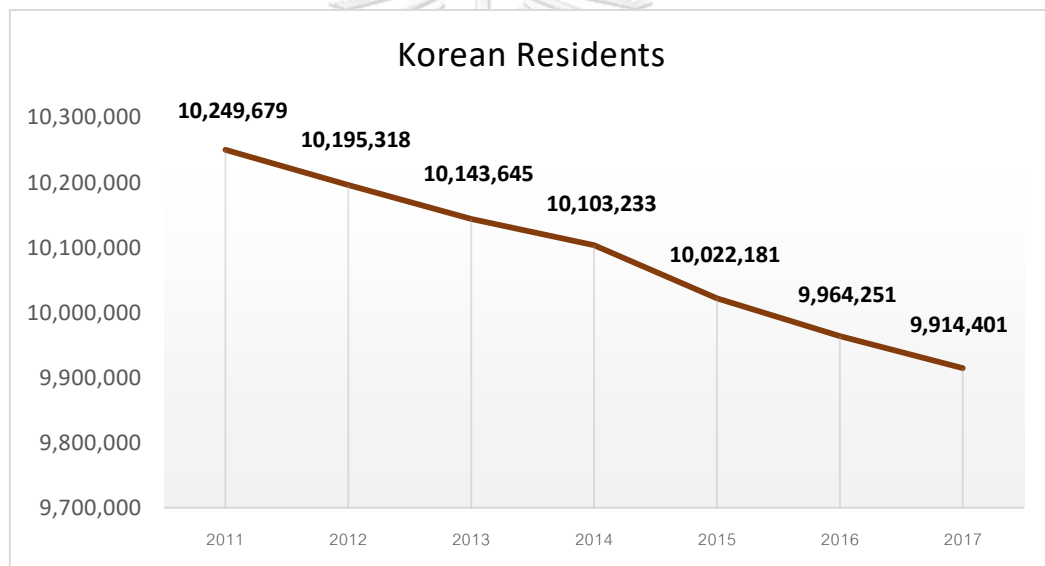
Year	The number of Korean people	Korean single households
1980	8,350,616	82,477
1985	9,625,755	156,207
1990	10,603,250	257,382
1995	10,217,177	382,024
2000	9,853,972	502,245
2005	9,762,546	675,739
2010	9,631,482	854,606

Source: Statistics Korean Statistical Information Service, 2011

Statistical data from KOSIS (Korean Statistical Information Service) showed the number of Korean population in Seoul area. From the statistical data, the amount of Korean population in Seoul area fluctuated by continuously increased to 10.6 million people in 1990 but gradually decreased until 2010 according to statistical data from KOSIS. (Korean-Statistical-Information-Service)

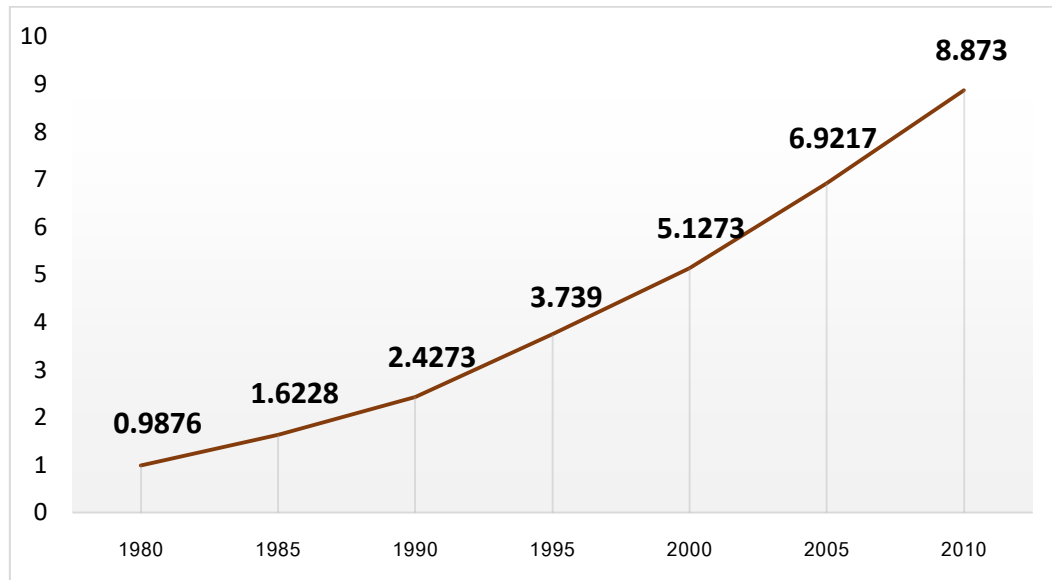
Furthermore, the latest data from Seoul Metropolitan Government reported the amount of Korean population in Seoul from 2011 to 2017, the Korean population in Seoul gradually decreased and in 2016 and fell below 10 million for the first time in 28 years (Won 2016) due to the socio-economic and demographic change and some people moved to other areas caused by the high cost of living in Seoul.

Figure 10 The number of Korean residents in Seoul (2011-2017)



Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2017 (Seoul-Metropolitan-Government 2017)

Figure 11 The number of single person households in Seoul only Korean people from 1980 to 2010 by percentage



Source: Statistics Korean Statistical Information Service

Even the amount of Korean people in Seoul gradually decreased due to many reason such as decline in birth rate, late marriage, but the number of Korean single person households continuously increased in every year from the statistical data, single person households in Seoul area increased from 0.9876% in 1980 rose to 8.873% in 2010 within 20 years.

## 2.4 Cultural dimensions

Dutch social psychologist, Geert Hofstede, developed a cultural dimensions “Hofstede theory”; a cultural dimension for standard for understanding cultural differences with 6 dimensions of national culture (Hofstede 2011);

Table 2 Six dimensions of national culture

<b>Power distance index</b>	Related to the degree of inequality in society among less and high powerful members
<b>Uncertainly avoidance</b>	Related to the degree of members feel uncomfortable when they face with uncertainty and ambiguity.
<b>Individualism versus Collectivism</b>	The high score defines to the degree of individualistic society, and low score defines to collectivistic society.
<b>Masculinity versus Femininity</b>	A high score (Masculinity) represent the competitive society, a low score (Femininity) represent to consensus-oriented society.
<b>Long-term orientation versus Short-term orientation</b>	A high score defines to Long-term orientation, low score defines to Short-term orientation in society.
<b>Indulgence versus Restraint</b>	Represent to the free and suppresses gratification related to enjoying life and having fun.

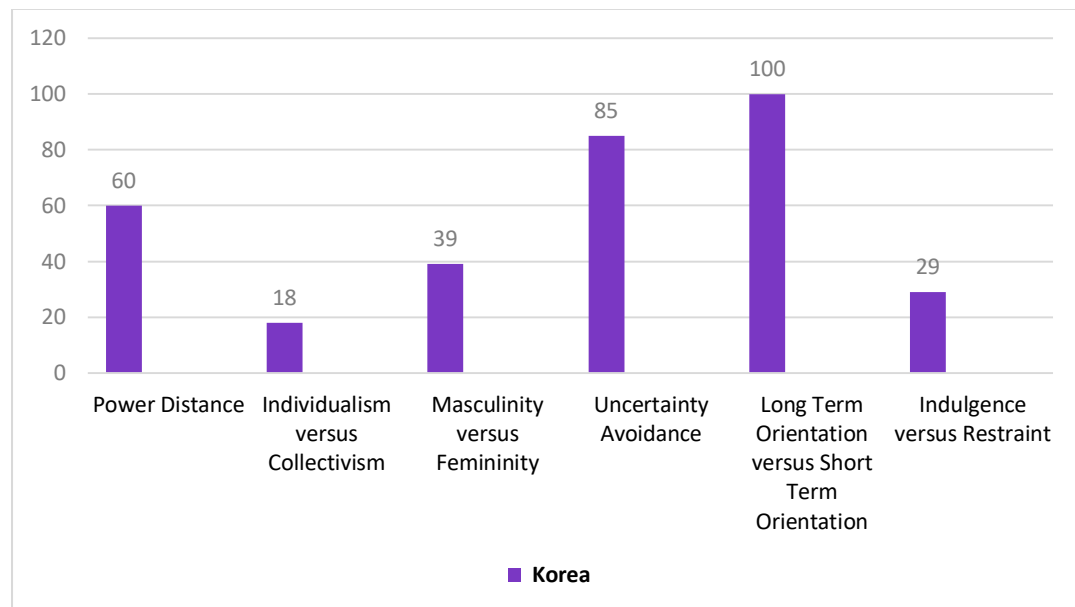
Hofstede defined the word Individualism as “a situation in which people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only” while



Collectivism, is defined as “a situation in which people belong to in-groups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty” (Hofstede and Bond 1984).

According to (Cho, Mallinckrodt et al. 2010) individualism emphasizes on self-reliance and individual goals but collectivism that emphasizes on sociability and giving a group priority over individual. Korea society has been quite collectivism, as Korean people prefers to eating as a group more than eating alone. But from empirical study, the observation over two decades ago, the increase in westernization and individualism in economic, social, politics and freedom occurred in Korean society. From survey in South Korea, the individualistic culture is related to young generation, college education, people who live in Seoul and working for large company. In the other hand, Collectivistic culture related to old generation, people in rural areas outside Seoul area (Cho, Mallinckrodt et al. 2010).

Figure 12 Cultural dimensions in Korea



Source: Hofstede Insights, 2015

Hofstede theory summarized Korean society by divided into 6 dimensions:

Power Distance is define as the extent which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect that power is distributed unequally. By the high score 60, Korea is a hierarchy society with the unequal power refer to the traditional Confucian values which emphasizes on the seniority and social rankings in society, junior must obey and respect to senior or older people who have higher power than junior.

Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV) is refers to the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. Individualist societies prefer to focus on themselves and their family only while Collectivist societies prefer to in-groups. In part of Individualism Korea got a score 18, means in Korean society quite

Collectivist society associate with the traditional Confucian values which emphasizes on in-groups.

Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS) Hofstede defined high score is Masculinity as a society that driven by the competition, achievement and success to be the winner while low score is Femininity defined to society that caring about others and concern about a quality of life and to be the outstanding person among the crowd is not quite admirable. Korea got a score 39, considered to feminine society which Korean people focus on working for life. Problems resolve by compromise and obey to senior's decision.

Uncertainty Avoidance defines to how the society deal with the fact or future. People in society feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situation and try to avoid that. Korea with a score 85, countries with high score in Uncertainty Avoidance have rules and conditions for manage and prevent the risks in unknown situations. Korea is hard working country, precision and punctuality are the important norm.

Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Orientation (LTO) Hofstede defines as how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future, high score as Long Term Orientation and low score as Short Term Orientation. Korea got a score 100 means Korean society is Long-term oriented society, still maintain the old traditions and norms along the social changes in nowadays.

Indulgence versus Restraint is refers to how people control their desire or impulses. Relatively weak control defines to Indulgence, and Restraint defines to relatively strong control. Korea got a score 29 is considered be Restraint, relatively strong control their desire. In these societies, restraint is a social norm and indulging themselves is seems wrong.

## 2.5 Eating Norms

Eating is one of the social activity to eat and share together with other people not only individual activity to fuel his/her body. The researcher explained about eating, According to Claude Fischler (2011), 'Meals regulate social life and individual behavior both at a social and biological level'. Eating is not only for fuel body or survives, it is one of social activity. (Fischler 2011)

Social norms both in many societies regulate meals which ought to eat and share together with other people such as family members, friends, colleagues and classmate. The characteristic of eating at the same table or eating with other people is called Commensality (Sobal and Nelson 2003).

Commensality can produces bonding and brings them closer to each other (Fischler 2011). According to Davidoff, 1976, noted "who partakes (eat or drink something) of the meal, when and where, helps to create the boundaries of the household, of friendship patterns, of kinship gradations. These eating patterns vary

between and help to define the boundaries of classes, ethnic, religious, age and sexual groups.” (Davidoff 1976)

Due to the expansion of individualistic values occurred quickly in modern society nowadays, individualistic values became the main barrier to commensal eating (Sobal and Nelson 2003).

## 2.6 Honbap **혼밥** (Eating alone in Korean)

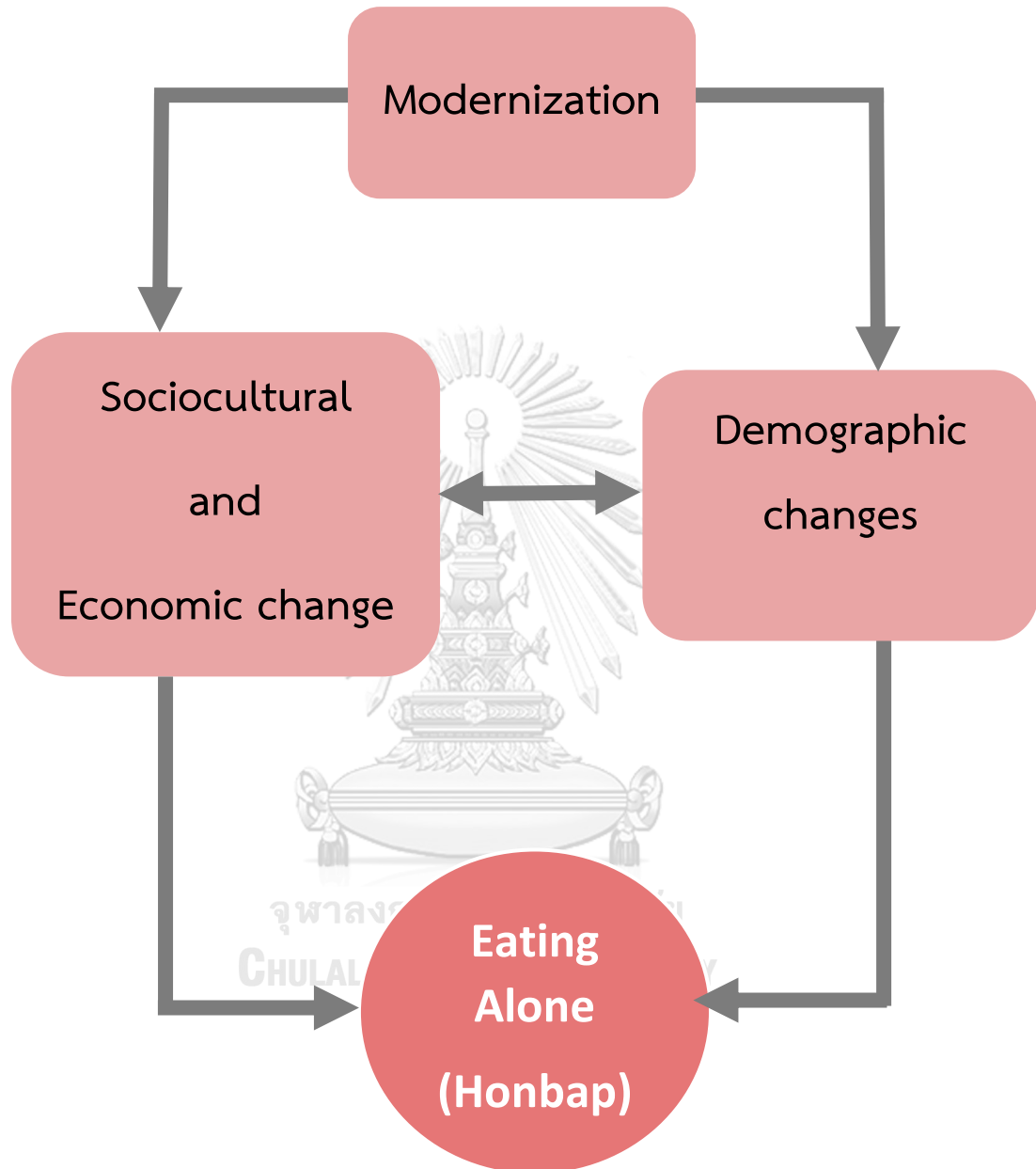
The concept of “Honbap” is a portmanteau word from 2 words in Korean. “hon (혼)” means alone and “bap (밥)” means rice and also refer to meal. Honbap (혼밥) is directly translated into eating alone (Borowiec 2017). The word “Honbap” is used to describe action of people who eat alone.

According to Jessica Rapir, writer, she wrote an article on koreanportal.com that eating alone is unacceptable because eating alone before due to eating is one of a social activity. It is common to eat with two or more people than eat alone in Korean society (Rapir 2018). Many Korean people avoid eating alone because of the fear to be ostracized, similarly, to Chang May Choon, a South Korea correspondent from The Straits Times of Singapore, she wrote that it is not true that Korean people fear to eat alone but “What they fear is losing their chaemyon (Korean for face or reputation) if people think of them as a wangda (Korean for loner or outcast), and that's a big taboo”(Chang 2016).

Nowadays, many people accept the idea of eating alone and overcome their fear to eat alone in public. Due to the social change including economic and social change as the increase of single person households and also people who want to enjoy “me-time”, one's own personal time to be alone, are the impact on the dining culture change in Korean society.



Figure 13 Conceptual framework



## Conceptual Framework

The definition of Modernization is “the transformation from a traditional, rural, agrarian society to a secular, urban, industrial society” (Kumar). Korea transformed from agrarian society to industrial society rapidly. Korean society emphasizes on collectivism, “a situation in which people belong to in-groups or collectivities which are supposed to look after then in exchange for royalty” (Hofstede and Bond 1984). Korea is one of Asian countries where has strong collectivism in family, work places and other groups in society.

The ancient philosophy in Korea since the late of Chosun dynasty is Confucianism, the objective of Confucianism emphasizes on duty, loyalty, honor, filial piety, respect for age and seniority and sincerity (Wang 2016) by indicated in five relationships; ruler and subject, parents and children, husband and wife, brothers and sisters, friend and friend. By the inheritance of Confucianism, Family is very strong in Korean society. The characteristic of Korean family is extended family, more than 2 generations in a house.

Korea is one of countries where rapidly developed, the modernization affected to sociocultural, economic and demographic changes. Many people moved away from their family to the city for work, receive higher education. Family size is smaller than the past, one family only have 1-2 children in a house and single person households also increase in nowadays.



The sociocultural and economic change influenced on social changes such as values, ideas and lifestyle of people. Demography was also changed by the decline of birth rate, many people still enjoy their life and do not want to get married early and do not want to have babies due to the child-rearing costs and time to raise them that affect to the increase of single person households who do not want to get married, divorced or elderly. All of these factors help to support that why eating alone phenomenon gradually becomes a common thing in dining culture of Korean society nowadays.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The background of dining culture of Korean people and the reason why eating alone trend gradually became common thing while eating out alone is so strange in Korean society. This chapter introduce the methodology that use for analysis and explain the dining culture change in Korean society in case of eating alone phenomenon.

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study is a descriptive research which study and describe the background and factors of the dining culture change in Korean society from the traditional norm by eating together into eating alone norm which gradually occurs in society nowadays.

The objective of this study is to analyze and discuss by collect relevant data from various sources such as credible researches, books, news, articles and online media.

## 3.2 Data Collection

### 3.2.1 Document Research

By collecting the previous researches from credible sources such as databases from Chulalongkorn University Libraries and other websites on topic related to Korean dining culture. It is consisted of:

- Background of Korean people in dining culture that influence changes in eating habits and reason to change from eating out together as group to eating out alone.
- Documents from Statistics Korea (KOSTAT) and Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS) to explain the demographic transition in Korea by collecting statistics of Korean households and population data.
- Cultural dimensions topics to explain the difference characteristic of people in Korean society.

### 3.2.2 Online Sources

Eating alone gradually becomes a new trend in Korean society that is oppose to the traditional dining culture. Recently, many news and articles from both Korean and foreign news website represented the facts and showed an idea about eating alone situation in Korean society. Documents from credible websites such as MBC, Korean Times, Korea Portal, The Korea Herald, Vlive.tv, The Straits Times and entertainment media showed ideas of eating alone.

### 3.2.3 Statistics Data

One of the facts that writers and reporters use to describe eating alone trend in Korea is the rising of single person households in Korean society. By using the statistics information from Statistics Korea (KOSTAT) and Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS) to compare and analyze the demographic change in Korea.

### 3.3 Analysis and Presentation of Data

To achieve the objectives of this study, all of data were collected from many reliable sources will review, analyze and discuss in the form of descriptive research and will present in following chapter:

Chapter 4: Results: A study of social change and dining culture in Korean society:  
The case of Honbap (혼밥)

Chapter 5: Conclusion and suggestion

## CHAPTER IV

### A STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND DINING CULTURE IN KOREAN SOCIETY

#### THE CASE OF HONBAP (혼밥)

Honbap (혼밥) is a slang Korean word means eating alone, Honbap is a compound word of 2 Korean words by Hon from Honja (혼자) means alone and Bap (밥) means rice and also means meal, Honbap was used to describe the eating alone activity and people characteristic of people who eat alone. There are many Korean slang words that use the word Hon (alone) to describe solo activity which gradually occurs in current society, for example:

Table 3 Korean slang words

Honyoung (혼영)	Honja (혼자) + Younghwa (영화; movie)	watching movie alone
Honsul (혼술)	Honja (혼자) + Sul (술; liquor)	drinking alone
Honhaeng (혼행)	Honja (혼자) + Yeoheang (여행, travel)	Travel alone

Dining culture of Korean society, according to Eun Young Kim Valdez, the author of the book “A Cross-cultural Reference of Business Practices in a New Korea” explain the traditional dining of Korean people in the past, Korean people usually share and distribute meals and snacks with their neighbors. Sharing meals is likes a sharing relationship bond with other people by eating and talking together. The sentence

“Sharing rice from the same pot” is an expression to show the close relationship among people. Traditional Korean meals consist of rice and soup and they always share soup from a big one pot, eating and sharing their experience together in every meals. (Valdez 1996)

Normally, Korean society is a collectivistic society which is a strong relationship in groups. Historically, the root of Korean values was Shamanism and Confucianism that shaped behavior and structure of Korean community to collectivistic society. The traditional values as Shamanism and Confucianism gradually build Korean society to the collectivistic society with the strong relationship in-groups as workplace and family related to the disciplines of Confucianism.

Confucianism still be part of Korean society as in Korean workplace and family relationship by the social ranking or hierarchy based on Confucian culture and tradition. In workplace, it depends on social ranking and the importance that you need to respect to respected person, elder person and higher positioned person in Korean company.

Not only in workplace but also in the dining culture, according to etiquette scholar website which describe about the table manners, dining culture in Korea also still maintains the traditional Confucianism values in table manners by focusing on social rankings first, the senior member or the most important person will sit in the middle or head of the table and following by second most important sit next and the lowest or youngest will sit close to the door. Food and beverage usually serves to

senior member or oldest person and they begin to eat before and then younger begin to eat and drink and need to finish as the senior or eldest finish, no matter how hungry you are and do not show that you have finished before the senior or eldest finish (Lininger 2007).

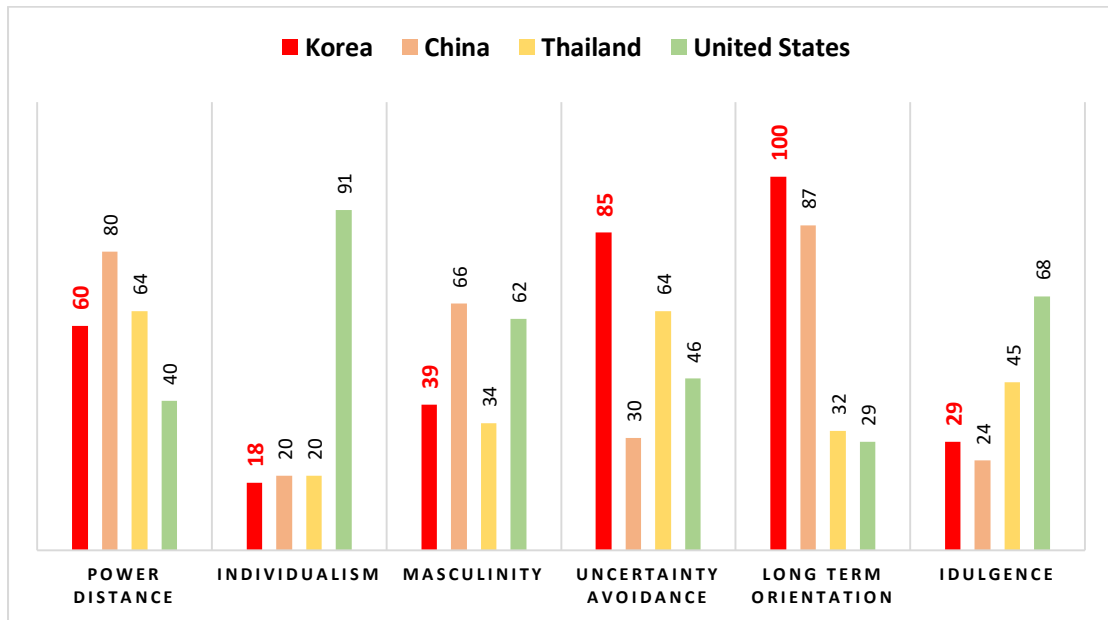
#### 4.1 Collectivistic society by Hofstede Theory

The theory which helps confirmed Korean society is Collectivistic society, according to the study of Greet Hofstede, Hofstede's cultural dimension Theory. A cultural dimension for standard for understanding cultural differences with 6 dimensions of national culture (Hofstede 2011); (1) Power Distance Index (PDI) , (2) Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV), (3) Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS) , (4) Uncertainty Avoidance, (5) Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Orientation (LTO), and (6) Indulgence versus Restraint.

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According to Hofstede insights website, the organization which created in 2017 on the work of Prof. Geert Hofstede by analyze the different culture of each society in many countries around the world, In case of Korea, Hofstede Insights website describe about Korean society through the six cultural dimension model:

Figure 14 The comparison between Korea, China, Thailand and United States by Hofstede theory



Source: Hofstede Insights

According to Hofstede theory, the comparison between Eastern country as Korea, China and Thailand compare with Western country, The United States. Hofstede theory showed the totally different score between two different cultural countries especially in Collectivism and Individualism dimension. The difference cultural of East and West countries made a totally different score and Hofstede theory defined East Asian countries including Thailand relatively are collectivistic society and Korea got the least score in this dimensions while The United States defined as Individualistic society.

Korean society is a collectivistic society with the strong family and community accord with their ancient philosophy, Confucianism.



## 4.2 Demographic change

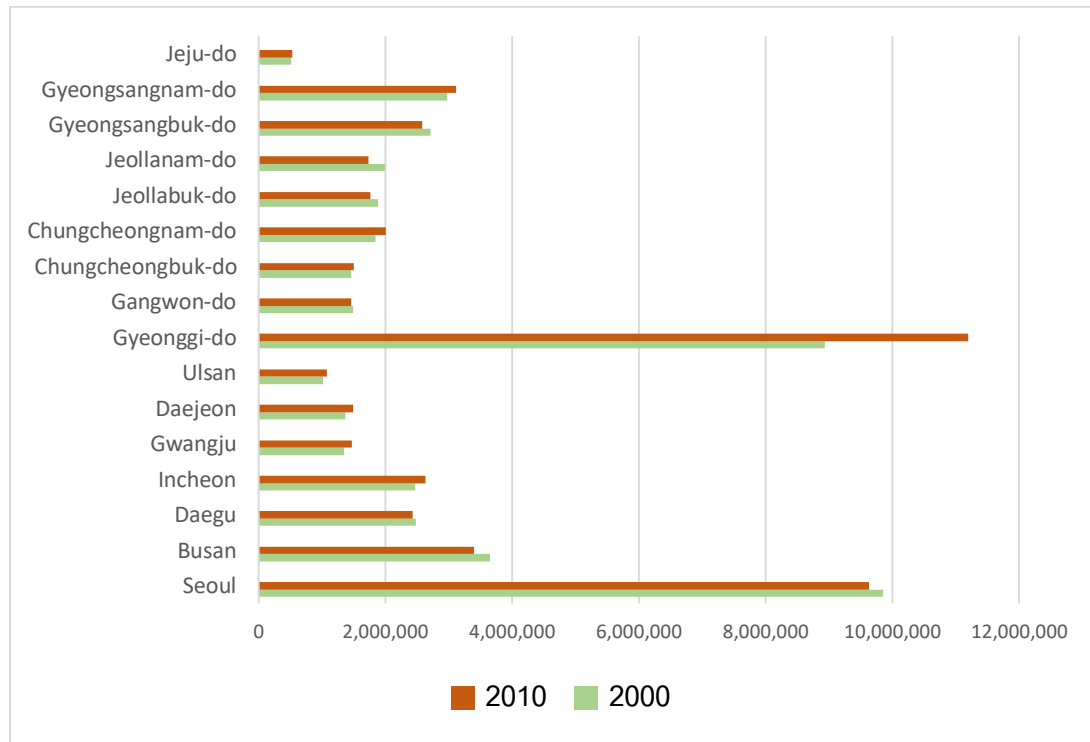
Hofstede theory defined East Asian country as Korea is a strong collectivistic society while the Western philosophy emphasize on Individualistic values as The United States. By the modernization, urbanization, and industrialization affected to economic growth and social change in Korean society and transformed Korea to developed country, the western culture also expanded in Korea through the new technology, cultural exchange with foreigners, entertainment media, commercial advertising and university textbooks especially impact on young generation.

Demographic change also affected not only by the modernization, urbanization and industrialization, but also the economic situation of countries. Economic change impact to the rising of unemployment rates of country made people decided to live alone for maintain their financial situation and marriage and child rearing need to spend a lot of money.

Demography was changed a lot in Korean society as the increase of single person household, low birth rate and aging population.

### 4.3 Statistic of Korean population

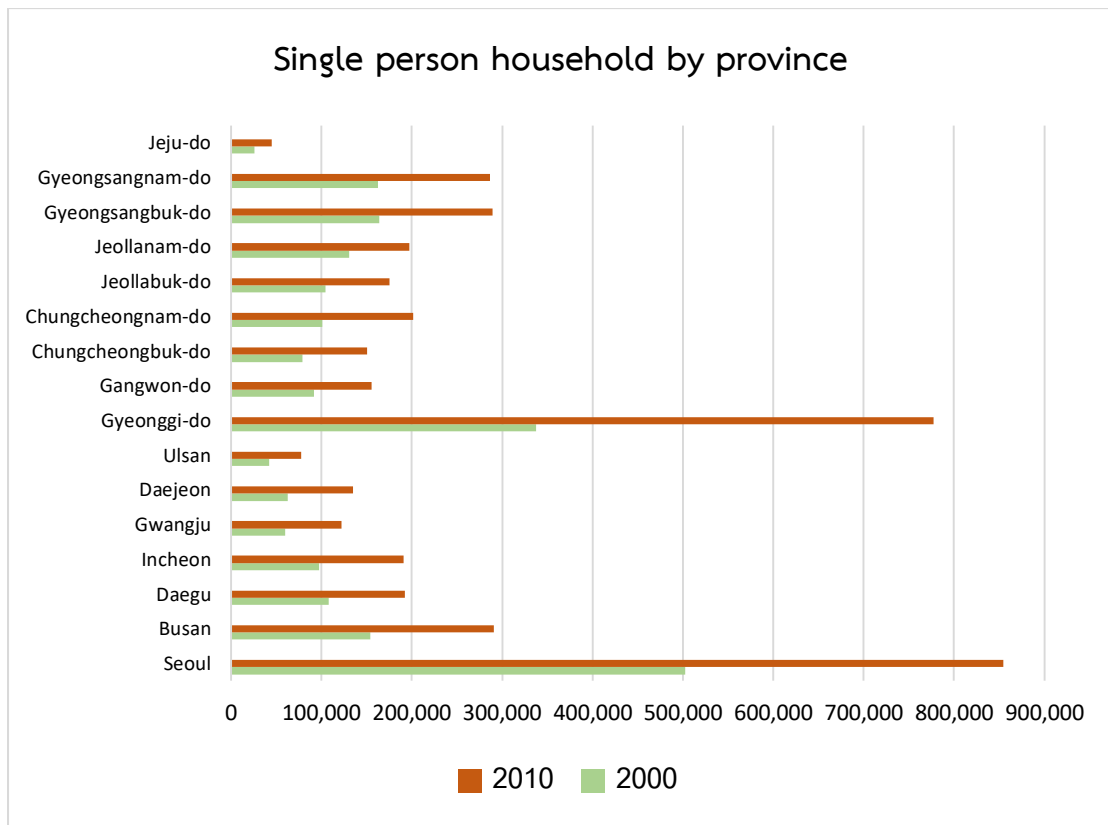
Figure 15 The number of Korean population by province over 10 years



Source: Statistics Korean Statistical Information Service, 2015

Over 10 years from 2000 to 2010, the number of population by provinces rarely changes both in metropolitan and rural areas. But in Gyeonggi-do province the number of population has increased more than other provinces caused by Gyeonggi-do is the largest province in Korea and near to Seoul. Due to the rising of residence prices in Seoul made people need to look for cheaper costs in neighboring as Gyeonggi-do province, with great transportation system also help people come to work in Seoul easily not long compared to those who living in Seoul. Gyeonggi-do province become the popular city for moving.

Figure 16 Single person household by province over 10 years

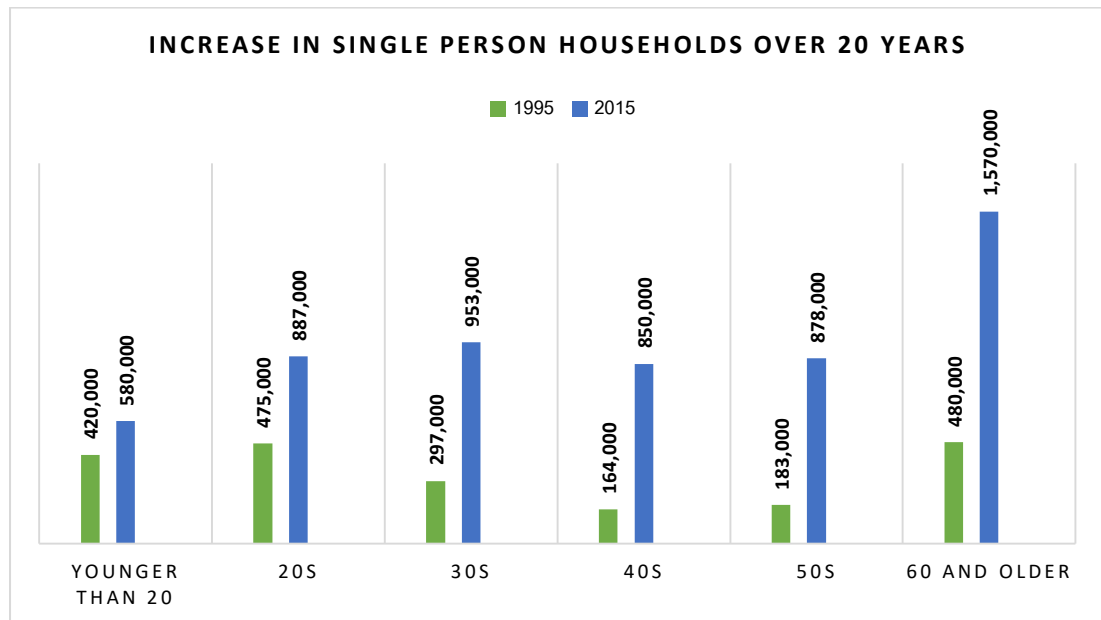


Source: Statistics Korean Statistical Information Service, 2015

According to previous figure, the proportion of Korean population rarely changes over 10 years but the proportion of single person household went up in every provinces especially in the capital, Seoul, the number of single person household increase from 502,245 person to 854,606 person within 10 years. The rising of single person households by provinces caused by many factors as people who living in the cities that move from the rural areas for high education or finding jobs affects to the rising of single person households in the cities area, the older people in rural areas who live alone because of becoming a widower or widow, or children move to other areas for finding jobs.

#### 4.4 Report of demographic change in Korea

Figure 17 The increase of Single person household over 20 years



Source: Statistics Korea, 2016

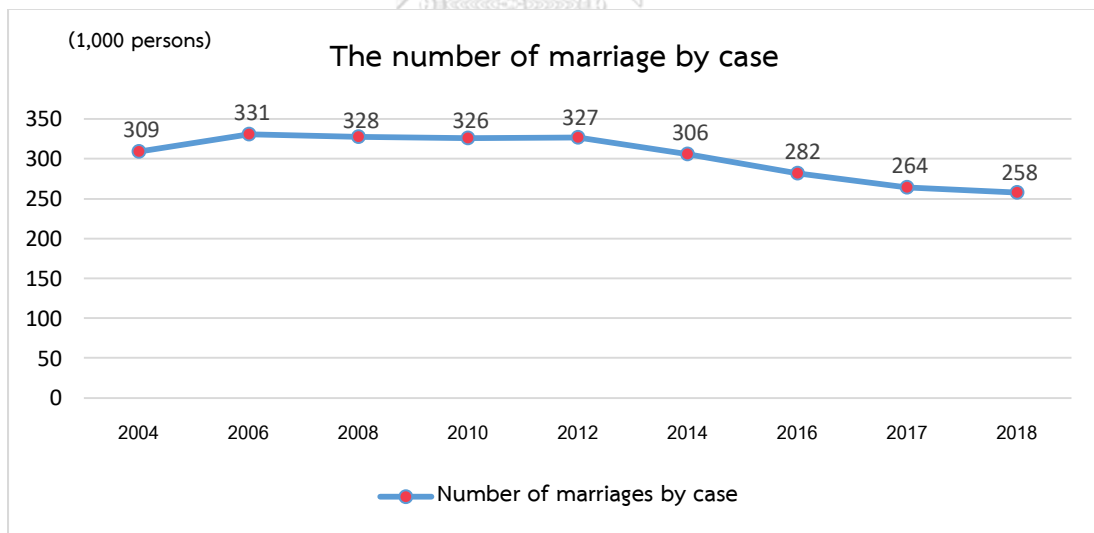
The single person household drastically increase over 20 years. In 1995, the percentage of single person households is 12.7% of total but in 2015, the percentage rise to 27.2% of total. Rates of increase in single person households in each age groups over 20 years;

- (1) Younger than 20 group; Rate of increase 38.1%
- (2) 20s group; Rate of increase 86.7%
- (3) 30s group; Rate of increase 220.9%
- (4) 40s group; Rate of increase **418.3**
- (5) 50s group; Rate of increase **379.8%**

(6) 60 and older group; Rate of increase 228.8%

The above figure shows the drastic increase of single person household in Korean society especially in middle age groups. Single person household defines to unmarried status in common but there were differences how they choose to live alone, in young generation refers to people who satisfy alone life or people who move away from their family or move from hometown to the city for study and work. In middle-age generation not only refer to unmarried people who satisfy the alone life but also refers to some people live alone being widowed, divorced and separated from children.

Figure 18 The number of marriage by case

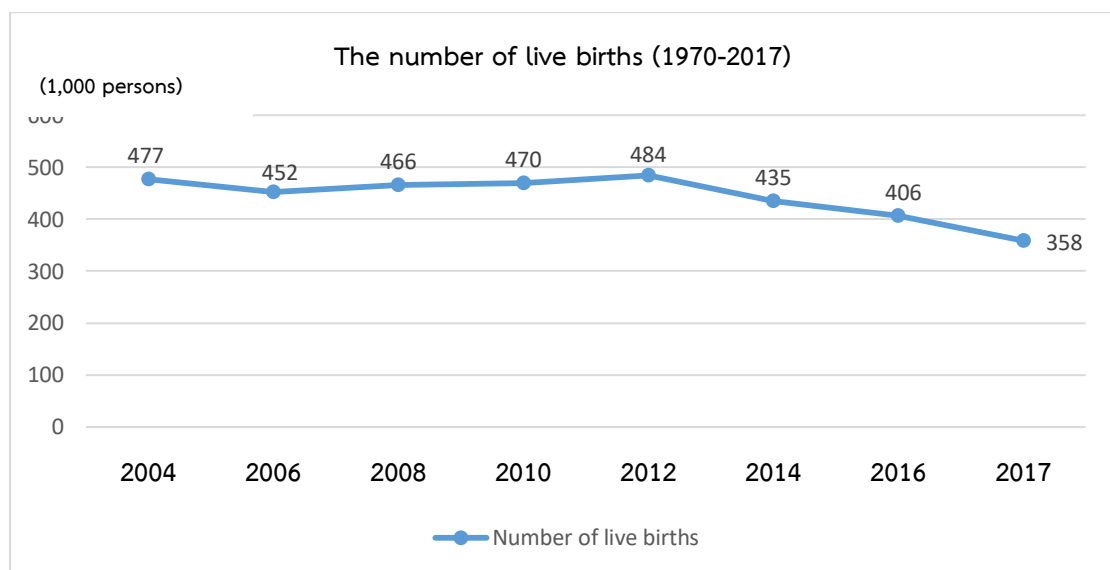


Source: Statistics Korean Statistical Information Service, 2018

The number of marriage by case has continue declined since 2006 and fell to 258,000 in 2018. Hani.co.kr, 2017 reported the decline of marriage was caused by social

and economic factors including poor economy and youth unemployment rate continue rise in every year (Noh and Kim 2017) and the decline of marriage also affected to the number of live births.

**Figure 19 The number of live births (1970-2017)**



Source: Statistics Korea, 2017

Statistics Korea reported in the enumeration results of Final Results of Birth Statistics in 2017 was declined by 11.9% of 2006. Korea's total fertility rate has declined in every year due to the several reason as long hours of working, the high cost of raising the child and unstable financial situation.

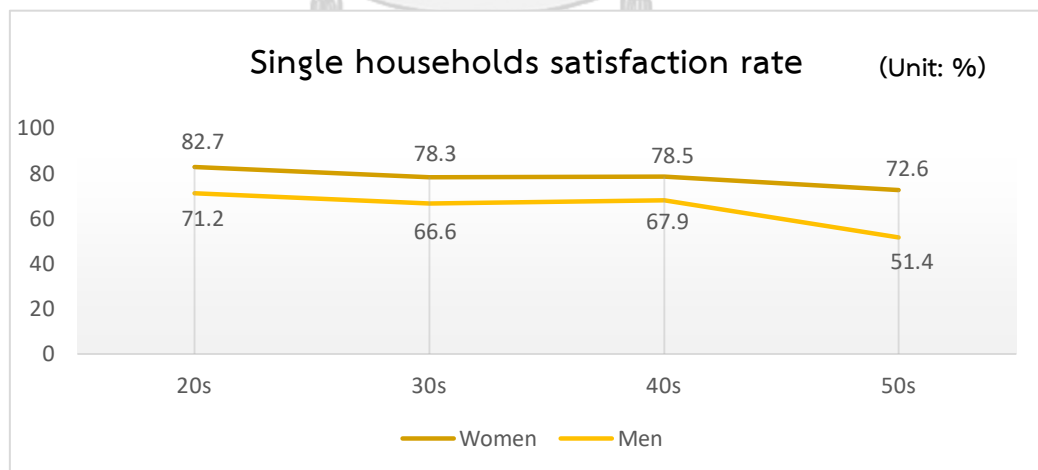
The increase of single person household caused by social change especially demographic change as the consideration of postponement of marriage which also

affects to the low birth rate due to economic uncertainties, unstable financial situation, high-cost of living expense and unemployment.

It is common thing for Korean people who unmarried both men and women live with their families before marriage but nowadays by the privacy and independence increase among young Korean affect to the rising of single person household (Park and Choi 2015). Many people satisfy to live alone according to a study of KB Financial Group institute by survey about satisfaction about their current lives with 2,100 single household with age between 25 to 59 who living in Seoul and Gyeonggi province and metropolitan areas in May 2018.

#### 4.5 Report of single household satisfaction

Figure 20 The percentage of single households satisfaction rate



Source: KB Financial group and The Korean Times, 2018

This study shown the total of 82.7% of women respondents in 20s group satisfied their alone life, followed by 78.3% in 30s group, 78.5% in 40s group and 72.6%

in 50s group. In 20s group of men respondents, 71.2% satisfied to live alone, followed by 66.6% in 30s group, 67.9% in 40s group and 51.4% in 50s group (Lee 2018).

From this report showed many of them satisfied their single status due to they can do everything they want but the percentage decrease in older people. After retirement in single older people, they will face alone with health problems due to their health conditions and they need some people for look after them when they old, financial situation and psychological anxiety or loneliness that also affects to some older people did not satisfied their single status.

Not only independent desire but the economic situation of family force them to live by themselves or move to the city for find job and support their family (Park and Cho 1995).

Due to the increase of single person household in Korean society, eating alone is rapidly grow and change the dining culture in society. Not only single person household drive eating alone trend but many people also desire to spend time alone and enjoy their own me-time. Eating alone is not strange behavior and many Even Korea is a strong collectivistic society but nowadays Korean people accept this trend to eat alone and overcome their fear of their old taboo about eat alone in public. Many restaurants also welcome people who come alone with small table for one and menus for one serving for people who come alone.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

#### 5.1 Conclusion

Honbap (eating alone) or other solo activities gradually expands and becomes a new phenomenon in collectivistic society as Korean society. Due to the root of Korean society is collectivistic society, which influences to dining culture that people prefer in-groups to out-groups and usually eat out with their friends, colleagues, classmate, etc. Korean people actually avoid to eating alone in public due to the fear of looking like an outcast and do not have friends but nowadays many Korean people especially a new generation can overcome their old taboo about eating alone due to social change in their society.

Due to the modernization affects to economic situation and affect each other with demography, for example, the growth of single person household. Single person household increase by people who satisfy to live alone and who must live alone because of unemployment and unstable financial situation and the demographic change also affects to the economic situation in nowadays. The rising of single person households affects to the decline of birth rate and Korean government has tried over the years to solve these issues by declare new policies for boosting country's birth rate by provides benefits including paid maternity leave, fertility treatment and

childcare subsidies, free medical care for babies, etc., but still not successful due to the benefits of policies did not cover all of issues.

High competition in Korean society also is a part of eating alone trend includes students who prepare for attend to the university and workers who work hard, they do not have enough time to eat with their friends or colleagues. They prefer to eat alone because they need to save time for dedicate to work or improve themselves.

Although Korean society has a strong collectivism, Honbap or eating alone is a solo activity and was not accepted by the social in the past, nowadays Korean people more understand and accepted this activity that eating alone is not strange to eat alone in any public restaurants. Not only people who live alone as single person household to drive the eating alone trend, but Honbap also becomes fashionable among new generation of Korean people. There are more than 1.7 million times of people who use hashtag #혼밥 on photo and video-sharing social network service as Instagram application for sharing their enjoyable honbap time, It can be guarantee that Honbap is not a strange things in Korea anymore.

## 5.2 Suggestion

This thesis specifically studied the overview of social change and dining culture change in case of Honbap in Korean society. Due to the limitation of communication in Korean language to Korean people of researcher, further research on this topic

should include find more relevant research in Korean language for support and do a depth interview to understand opinions about Honbap trend through Korean people for supporting this research topic.



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