

The Social Position of Fishers: South Korea and Poland Compared

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the social position of fishers in contemporary South Korea and Poland. By looking into the historically embedded social structural transformations in the two countries, this paper identifies the following three facts. Firstly, fishers both in South Korea and Poland currently hold low social position. However, unlike Korean fishers whose low social position has hardly changed, Polish fishers enjoyed relatively higher position from the postwar period of World War II through to 1989 when both market economy and democracy system were adopted. Secondly, the low social position of fishers in Korean society is mainly caused by the historically deep rooted generic ideology of Confucianism that played a paramount role to control society members during the *Choson* period (1392-1910); and has paved through up to contemporary times as a basic guiding rule for social practices in Korean society. The Confucius belief system dictates that such physical activity as fishing is only to pursue material interest out of self-centered purpose; therefore lacking virtuous quality. Thirdly, diverse factors are at play to structure fishers' relatively decent social standing in the socialist state of Poland between 1939 and 1989: the socialist ideology to emphasize physical work; fishers' capacity to travel overseas being allowed to carry foreign currency and goods; and their being resourceful by owning seaside resorts as their estate property. However, when the country transformed into a society with market economy and democracy, the structural factors that favor fishers are no longer limited to them; accordingly weaken fishers' value as a decent job holder.

Keywords: fishers, social position, South Korea, Poland, maritime sociology

1. Estimation Criteria for the Social Position of Fishers

It is not uncommon that researchers face subjectivism in their scientific research that specifies an individual's location in social stratification system. They have to determine particular tools with certain criteria in order to define what is significant for the construction of social hierarchy system – i.e. what should be taken into consideration and what may be negligible. In general, earnings (income), power and prestige (status) constitute basic components of social stratification formation: the higher values of these qualities, the higher the position of an individual in a society. However, it should be noted that earnings and power (defined as capacity to exert influences upon others and ascribed to a certain post exclusively in an organization) can be specified by a researcher in a direct way. Income can be determined on the basis of proper data (e.g. income statistics) whilst power, at least in the context of labor market, can be induced from one's position in the structure of an economic organization. It is therefore possible to measure these two factors rather objectively with a specified operationalization. On the other hand, prestige (status), in a social survey setting, is measured with respondents' evaluations on the basis of their due respect or social dignity for diverse occupational professions and ranking them accordingly in a way that certain professions are more respectful and more of dignity, and vice versa. This reflects another aspect of 'subjectivity' in scientific reconstruction of social structure: the aspect of a respondent's subjective evaluation (Domański 1981: 121). Respondents are considered to

apply certain evaluation criteria to a specific occupational profession by assessing its meanings and significance. However, the criteria that respondents use to evaluate certain occupational professions are not directly known to researchers. Researchers only know that the reality is likely to appear to respondents in a particular way and that a certain individual compared to others occupies higher or lower position in socially structured stratification ladder according to respondents' evaluations. However, in order to know thoroughly the underlying mechanisms that affect people to judge others based upon their economic activity, it is necessary to look at a wider context in which cultural, political and economic factors are at work.

This paper is about the social position of fishers in South Korea (hereafter, Korea) and Poland. We aim to identify the social standings of fishing profession in the two countries by highlighting cultural, political and economic backgrounds of the two countries that are significantly different in those terms. Of particular, we aim to clarify factors that locate fishers at a certain place in social stratification system. The selection of the fishing profession for an international comparison may be justified by its significant fluctuation in social mobility in scaling up and degradation throughout the 20th and 21st century. The changing context within which the fishing profession is de/valued through historical timeline is well illustrated in the second part of this paper.

In specifying fisher's social position and reconstruction of criteria for determining their position in both societies, we have to first define the characteristics of fishing work. Above all, it should be mentioned that the social-professional category of a fisher is very diverse in a way to include fishing vessels' captains as well as fishers employed, all of whose aim in their labor is to catch fish as much as possible. Some scholars use broad notions to refer to fishing profession as a single unit. For example, Polańska suggests that: 'In this study the following rule is applied; all workers who are permanent members of a fishing vessel are fishermen. They all belong to the professional category of a fisherman' (Polańska 1965: 20). However, it should not be neglected that social distances among fishers associated with power (the place in structure and the role in an organization), different level of educational attainment, earnings, and gender, to name a few are also significant. The problem of intrinsic diversification of this category and its meaning for evaluating fisher's position in Korea and Poland will be discussed in the further part of this paper. Dulczewski, one of leading researchers on the study of fishers during the period of PPR¹, characterizes this profession in the following way:

Sea fishing is a difficult profession requiring hard work. Fisher's work is almost always associated with a big risk, exposed to the danger in health and life. The professional situation of sea fishers may be compared most accurately in this respect to the condition of miners employed in underground coal mines. To become a fisher, one should be required to possess some necessary psycho-physical qualities, most of all a good health and stamina (Dulczewski 1966: 122).

To be more specific, fishing profession can be characterized by:

- Tough, physical, exhausting characters of work
- Endangering life and health when professional duties are performed
- Working in unfavorable physical conditions such as unpleasant weather, noise of vessel engines, and vibrations of a vessel
- Work outcome depends on the volume and quality of catch. The work of fishers may be characterized by 'lose or win' category, where 'win' means a decent catch
- Team-oriented character of work – due to the dangerous character of fishing work, it requires intensive collaborations and trust among fisher members in a fishing vessel
- For a deep sea fisher, negative psycho-social effects that are caused by a long-term separation from family members can be found.

¹ Polish People's Republic, a term used to refer to Poland under the rule of communist and socialist authorities between 1952 and 1989.

The second part of this paper is devoted to clarifying the cultural, political and economic contexts in which the fishing profession (and fishers performing the profession) is categorized for social stratification system and evaluated in a certain way by society members. The macro level of historical transformation of society being considered, the case of Korea is first discussed and that of Poland is followed.

2. The Social Position of Fishers in Korea

Yoo and Kim' study (2002) identifies that of diverse occupation categories in Korea, fishers are among the least esteemed in terms of socially perceived occupational prestige. In this study, fishers who are involved in deep sea fishing were found to be more respected than fishers who work at costal shorelines, with the former group scoring 63.29 and the latter 50.45 points respectively in a job prestige measure (Yoo and Kim 2002: 48).² This shows significant disparity with other job categories such as university professors (86.88), medical doctors (78.35), and nurses (68.17). In general, those who are employed in the primary industry were identified to be among the lowest evaluated in terms of job prestige in the study. Then, why fishers in Korea are given the low level of prestige for their job profession? In order to answer to this question, this section first examines the legacy of Confucian ideology that governed *Choson* dynasty Korea (1392-1910) and that still holds significant presence to shape the contours of every day practices in contemporary era. It further seeks to clarify the mechanism in which educational institution plays a key role for one's aspiration to acquire higher social position from the 1960s when the industrial transition took place in Korea. Within this context, fishing profession is rather avoided to obtain as a decent job.

2.1. Confucianism, caste system, and fishers' social standing in Choson dynasty Korea

From the King to the lowliest slave, Choson became a rigidly stratified society of hereditary classes. The yangban, a broad group that included anyone privileged to occupy civil and military posts in the bureaucracy, dominated society. The peasant, as always, remained at the heart of Choson society. At the bottom, Choson's slaves and social outcasts lived lives of nearly continuous hardship (Chapter 8 Choson: Status is everything, online source)

Confucianism was introduced to Korea from China in the Three Kingdoms period (57 BC - AD 935). From its introduction through to the *Koryo* Kingdom (918-1392), Confucianism played mainly an educational and ethical-political role for the lives of the privileged. However, from the birth of *Choson* dynasty in 1392, it became the potent, overarching state ideology and religion, which controlled the entire aspect of society formation such as politics, economy, education, culture, and human relations for about 500 years (Lee 2006). Before proceeding to examine the impact of Confucianism upon the social standing of fishers, it is important to point out that *Choson* society operated based upon a caste system that defines one's social location in a strictly hierarchical manner. The system includes four hereditary social groups with *yangban* and *chungin* classes being the ruling and *yangin* and *cheonmin* the subordinated. Each group held different right and duty being engaged in different economic activities for the working of *Choson* society.

² The findings are based upon a social survey that was carried out by Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET) in 2002 involving 3,000 respondents selected through stratified cluster sampling on a nationwide basis. 24 job categories were solicited to the respondents for evaluation of perceived job prestige. For the measurement, a question item was used and it stated that: "people evaluate other's occupations by their own references. Let's say, 'the job of postmen' would be evaluated with the score of 60 points, how would you evaluate the following jobs in terms of social status (with power, wealth, and honor being all considered together)? Please mark the scores for each of the jobs from zero point to 100 points (Yoo and Kim 2002: 48).

The *yangban* class occupied the top rank of *Choson* society.³ They are Confucius scholars with an exclusive access to Confucius knowledge; but at the same they are the political actor producing political debates of how to run the country (Lee 2007). The *yangban* class believed that their *raison d'être* is to sharpen their knowledge of Confucius teachings through every day reading and meditation; and to seek to realize the Confucius ideals in the real world through political involvement. Indeed, their philosophy and interpretations for Confucius teachings exerted an influence in structuring every corner of *Choson* society, which was reflected in the contents of laws, regulations, and customs (Lee 2007; Gye 2012). The *yangban* accounted for about 15 per cent of the population at most (Sorensen 1994). However, they exercised potent power controlling the *Choson* society for 500 years and enjoyed exclusive prestigious rights.⁴ They supported the caste system that worked on a discriminatory principle, justifying it as desirable social order in the name of Confucius notions. The *chungin* class consists of the second upper category to the hierarchy. This class includes those people who carried out managerial, administrative, and technical works holding either central or regional government positions. Also, they worked as an interpreter of foreign languages and a practitioner in the law, medical, and astronomical areas. One became *chungin* by passing the exam which selects technicians.⁵ Hwang (2006) asserts that *chungin* class replaced the *yangban* group from the late 19th century as a leader group in *Choson* society. The *yangin* class consists of farmers, industrial technicians and commoners. Since *yangban*, the *Choson's* ruling class, considered agricultural activity as the foundation of the country drawing upon the worldview of Confucianism, farmers held much greater importance than the other groups that belong to the *yangin* class (Lee 2007). The farmer group within *yangin* class was ensured by law to apply for the exams that enable one to become either the *yangban* and *chungin* class. However, in reality it is virtually impossible for them due to not enough time and wealth to prepare for the exams and the cultural discrimination by the *yangban* and *chungin* class. *Yangin* class carried out all the state imposed services of physical toiling such as military and civil engineering. *Cheonmin* was located at the bottom of the social stratification hierarchy. They consist of mainly slaves that are owned by both public and private bodies. Private slaves owned by the *yangban* class were discriminated greater than public slaves that were registered with regional and central governments (Lee 2011). In addition, monks, slaughters, shamanists, entertainers, handcrafts men were also considered *cheonmin*. *Cheonmin*, meaning the lowborn class, were the most discriminated group in *Choson* society (Lee 2011). They had no rights and no respects. They were simply considered as social outcasts and not protected by the state. The caste system officially saw the end in 1894 when the reformist movement took a root. As such, *Choson* was the very country with strict notions that determine the place of people in a hierarchy ladder upon what they do for living. The governing reference for placement is the Confucianism. As the *yangban* class was exclusively entitled to master and practice Confucius knowledge, they possessed all the power to define rules and regulations for musts and must-nots for the rest of society members (Gye 2011).

³ One became *yangban* by acquiring government positions after passing the government exams which test the Confucius teachings written in Chinese language. Whether or not obtaining government positions is the key referent by which one's *yangban* position is determined (Lee 2011). Previous and present holders of government positions as well as offspring whose ancestors were government officials throughout four generations in a consecutive way were entitled to be *yangban*. However, if one's family failed to bring out government officials continuously through four generations, the family was disqualified from the *yangban* status; and became the *yangin*, the subordinate group along with *cheonmin* (Lee 2011).

⁴ For instance, they were entitled to own slaves who carried out all the chores of physical labor for them; and to own lands. In some cases, they were exempted from the duty of military services (Lee 2011; National Institute of Korea History 2014).

⁵ There were two types of examinations that select a person to become the *yangban* and *chungin* class during the *Choson* dynasty. For the test that selects the *yangban* class is to examine Confucius knowledge; whereas the *chungin* class is to test technical knowledge.

Then, where were fishers located at the *Choson's* social stratification hierarchy? Fishers were members of the *yangin* class (Lee 2011; National Institute of Korea History 2014). Nevertheless, they were not granted a right to apply for the exams through which one becomes either *yangban* or *chungin* class (National Institute of Korea History 2014). In addition, they were mobilized for toiling the physical work of state imposed services, which are averse to other groups of the *yangin* class. The services involve works for which intensive physical labor is of great necessity. In this sense, they were considered as no more difference to *cheonmin* class. However, unlike the *cheonmin* class they resided in districts where the *yangin* class lived together (Lee 2011). Those who belong to the *yangin* class but undertake hard works without payment for the state is called *shin*(身) *ryang*(良) *yeok*(役) *cheon* (賤). The four Chinese characters indicate the meanings as such. The *shin-ryang-yeok-cheon* class was indicated with name labels with suffixes of *gan* and *cheok*. Fishers were called: *haecheok* and *sangseongan* (National Institute of Korea History 2014: 186). In these terms, 'hae' means seawater and 'sangseon' means fresh fish. From the 15th century, the discriminatory suffixation labelling was lifted off; and was given a status neutral term with different suffix, *bu*. *Eobu*, which is currently in use along with *eomin*, was made in the 15th century. In this usage, *eo* means fish.⁶ As such, fishers were disregarded in *Choson*, which causes to paralyze the development of fishing industry. In this reason, technology and fishing skills were underdeveloped; stocks of fishery products were not impressive. Accordingly, the prices were high. Contradictory to the fact that fishers were not respected, the fishery products they produced were of great value so that only upper class people could enjoy (Kim 2002: 17).

It has been clear that physical work did not hold any of importance in *Choson*. According to the Confucius worldviews, of the physical work only agricultural, industrial, and commercial activities are considered as proper occupations; and the rest are humble occupations that are least respected. Once again, even within the three physical activities, there was value laden judgment by the *yangban* class in a way that agricultural activity posed far more importance than industrial and commercial activities.⁷ Then, why did the *yangban* class hold unfriendly attitudes towards physical works? The main reason is derived from their Confucius worldview. They considered that the key aim of their presence as scholar class is to master Confucius teachings through which cultivation of self should be achieved. In this sense, to develop and deepen the sense of virtue is of great importance. They believed that men are divided into the holy and the foolish; and the princely and the small in terms of virtue and talent. However, virtue is more important than talent (Lee 2007: 242). Also, members of the *yangban* class were required to cultivate: compassion, wisdom, justice, courtesy, loyalty, fidelity, and aesthetics. They should not seek worldly gains; but pose themselves with utmost dignity and integrity. They must not deceive others whom they should serve with great faith and efficiency. In this context, getting a job that involves physical work is beyond their imagination even in serious destitute. If members of the *yangban* class worked on any productive/material activity, he was disadvantaged in making friends in the proper circles of other *yangban* fellows, in marrying with a woman from a *yangban* family, and in rising into a government position (Lee 2007: 248). In sum, fishing work was among the humble occupations defined by the ruling class of *yangban* scholar group; and fishers led tough life carrying out state imposed obligatory labored toils. Then, how did this kind of Confucius legacy influence the modern day Korea in occupational status

⁶ Meanings for majority of Korean words are rooted in Chinese characters. Terms for indicating fishers in Korean language is still controversial in relation to the development of fishery industry. Recently, *eoeupin* literally meaning 'a person engaged in fishery industry' was recommend to use with an argument that *eomin* and *eobu* are the terms to hold negative connotations to indicate fishers and to obscure the development of the fishery industry accordingly.

⁷ For them, agricultural activity is the primary foundation of consciousness; and the basis of royal politics of *Choson*. In a case that they were not of success to obtain government positions, they practiced agricultural activity themselves. On the contrary, industrial and commercial activities are considered as a behavior that seeks for private interest only, which was deemed to violate the Confucius value by the *yangban* class (Lee 2007).

system to be structured within which fisher's social standing is determined? The following section examines this.

2.2. Industrial transformation, educational 'fever' and fishers' social standing in contemporary Korea

In contemporary era, Koreans are famous for their strong admirations for educational achievement, which is called 'educational fever' (Sorenson 1994; Lee 2006). This explains the significant size of the market for private education that involves both formal and informal organizations; and present significant psychological distress among school students.⁸ Indeed, Korean school students spend another long hours at private institutions (called, *hagwon*) after the formal schooling schedule in order to prepare for exams and tests at schools. This educational 'fever' is often indicated in a double sided, contradictory, face of educational achievement among Korean students in international settings. Korean students often stand out at PISA (the Program for International Student Assessment) scoring higher in tests than any other peers in the world but expressing lower degree of satisfaction in learning (The Economist 2013). Sorenson (1994) provided a historically examined long term overview upon why this is so. He suggested that Korea's educational institution is created as an integral part of a national project to strengthen and develop the country for national survival (Sorenson 1994: 14). In other words, from the second half of the 20th century after the devastating national experiences of the Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) and Korean War (1950-1953), Korean government has placed paramount importance upon educational institution to organize and facilitate the modernization/industrialization project. It was emphasized that producing 'smart brains' through educational disciplines are of vital to make sure a recovery from the devastating experiences; and to put the country in a right track for prosperity through industrial transformation.

This national project, however, has caused severe competition for educational success (Robinson 1994). Of particular, competition for entering prestigious universities has been getting tougher; and its success in the entrance is found to relate to the upper middle class family background (Lee and Brinton 1996). This is because educational success is intrinsically related to success in obtaining higher social status, which is possible in modern day through acquiring socially desirable occupations. In this sense, one's educational success means not only individual success; but also familial success in a way that one's family status can be upgraded with children's success in educational achievement. Thus, parents invest as much as they can upon their children's educational achievement. This educational fever can be understood within the context of the Confucius legacy. As seen in the previous section, *Choson's* Confucius scholars greatly emphasized learning; and this became among significant elements for Korean culture. However, unlike the *Choson* era in which certain segments of the population can only apply for the test, this being the means to reach to the upper class, the educational institution based modern day selection mechanism is institutionalized to be open to all (Sorenson 1994). This appears on the surface to secure equal competition for educational success. However, in practice, it leads to severe competition with the poor and the rich being all involved seeking for higher status. For the poor, educational success is the only measure by which they can get out of their destitute situation and climb up to higher social status positions; on the other hand, for the rich educational success is of importance to accompany their status value drawn from wealth and to maintain the wealth that has persisted through generations in the family. After all, even if the modern day educational institution secures equal competition, the rich has turned out winning the game outperforming entrances to prestigious universities (Lee and Brinton 1996). This is well explained by their better economic ability than the poor to pay their children for expensive private tutoring, this all being instrumental to prepare better for exams (Kim & Lee 2001). As such, the modern day selection mechanism for elites by opening the door to everybody has

⁸ Suicide attempts among secondary school students caused by suppressed psychological distress from school exams and university entrance exams are not uncommon events in Korea. Suicide among teenagers is the foremost death causing behavior.

exposed unexpectedly negative effect, which after all is getting to deepen the socio-economic gap between the rich and the poor. The educational institution that is meant to be of instrument to boost the national economy through equal opportunity has become the source to create social inequality.

On the other hand, the educational fever strengthens the stereotyped perceptions for jobs, which come from the *Choson* period. As mentioned before, the modern day educational institution in Korea was essentially related to produce workforces that can project and manage the secondary industry based economy from the 1960s; and later on for the tertiary industry from the 1990s. White collar jobs that involve working at offices were produced from this period. In other words, the white collar jobs that utilize either brain or mental power came to consist of the backbone of the Korean economy. Indeed, this industrial transformation reinforces the positive image for the non-physical work, the emphasis made from the Confucius legacy. This was found in Yoo and Kim's study (2002) that occupations that consist of the primary industry are the least evaluated for occupational prestige whereas those employed in the secondary and tertiary industry – of particular, managers and professionals – occupy the top rung of occupational status ladder.

So far, we have looked into the Korean case for fishers' social standing. The following section examines how fishing profession is perceived in Polish society. We first discuss diverse factors by which fishing work receives positive social recognitions in Poland from the postwar period to 1989; and then move on to look at the downturn of fishing profession from 1989 onwards.

3. The Social Position of Fishers in Poland

Generally speaking, the issues of sociological research on sea fishermen are vast and interesting (sometimes even sensational), and constitute the area so far little or almost hardly explored in scientific literature (Dulczewski 1966: 124-125).

3.1. Decent social standing of fishers from the postwar period to 1989

Contrary to the contemporary understanding that work is one of the most desired goods to acquire and 'a good job' signposts one's esteemed position in society, work was considered as rather depreciating than ennobling in the past times in European society. The necessity to work would indicate one's low social position. In the Middle Ages, manual labor was valued only when performed by people of low social position, mainly peasantry. Unless it was sought for the redemption of sins, work was considered degrading. This notion changed in the age of Enlightenment and positivism when labor turned to hold a real value (Król 2006: 20). In Poland, the division between manual blue collar workers and white collar workers was prominent during the interwar period (1918-1939). Even lower ranked white collar posts were considered to hold more prestige than manual posts (Wesołowski 1975: 126). However, this social trend began changing by the post-war period when manual workers were considered important through a nation's program. This change was accompanied with the material (financial) appreciation for proletariat (i.e. manual workers), the development of socialist ideology with the emphasis of crucial significance upon production work, and the approach to manual labor. This change is also evidenced in the findings of social research. Research of social prestige conducted during the period of PPR reported that skilled manual workers started to outdistance white collar workers in socially perceived importance (Wesołowski 1975: 125). The social perception for physical labor (including the work of a fisher) transformed so that it was no more depreciated. This is probably influenced by the fact that Polish society in those days was largely peasantry or rural origin, which is estimated that only 15% of families had no such roots (Wasilewski 1986: 49-51). Also, the way by which peasants' culture (partially stemming from frequent material deficiencies found in the countryside) placed great emphasis upon 'high value and moral duty of work' influenced public perceptions for physical work (Wasilewski 1986: 49-51). The fact that manual work

turned to be given a valued recognition in PPR highlights the backdrop by which the social context of fisher's relatively higher position in Polish society can be addressed.

The second factor concerns fishers' earnings. The precise assessment of fishers' financial capacity is difficult as the income level among fishers is diversely ranged. Fishers are employed in state-owned companies, co-operatives and the private sector. The precise estimation of income levels, especially for the private sector is not possible. The remuneration of fishers depends firstly on the volume and quality of fish catch, this being random factor to a major extent and secondly on an occupied post in a fishing vessel. This factor of probabilistic nature is described by Nikolajew (2000) as follows: 'The quantity of fish catch is crucial for the success of a voyage. However, the catch is always dependent on many other factors so that crew members of a fishing vessel has no direct responsibility. As the volume of fish catch affects fisher's income, fishers' dissatisfaction may be caused by the operating outcomes of the travel of a vessel' (Nikołajew 2000: 106). Nevertheless, their material status is at least higher on average than that of those working in land in different industries (Polańska 1965: 58).

The third factor that makes working at sea attractive to Polish people in the postwar period is a 'foreign currency' allowance that fishers can obtain. Ability to possess money in so-called 'hard currency' in the socialist Poland was undoubtedly one of the most important factors to determine fishers' high social position. Additionally, fishers were legally allowed to bring home certain foreign goods (Nikołajew 1992: 70). This indicates that fishers had scarce (if not luxurious) goods at their disposal. Even some fishers owned estates of seaside resorts and obtained extra income by renting the rooms of resorts to tourists during summertime. All these factors contribute to situate fishers at relatively high position in a material term, both objective and subjective assessments.

The fourth factor concerns the possibility for promotion for fishers. After the Second World War, labor market demand for fishers' work considerably increased⁹. It is estimated that in 1931 there were 1,500 sea fishers in Poland and in 1959 it remarkably increased to 7,500 (Dulczewski 1966: 122). Within the 30 years, dynamic development of the fishing industry, along with the purchase of bigger fishing boats, created possibilities of advancement for experienced fishers. A panel research carried out in the years 1956-57 and 1966-67 focusing on the profession of sea fishers including fishers with their own fishing boats showed that almost all fishers got promoted in the times surveyed. Dulczewski stated about the fishermen's advancement in their career development as follows: 'In fact, the advance encompassed all the cases in which it was possible on the basis of objective respects' (Dulczewski 1968: 75); which indicates that chances of promotion were huge. Thus, working in a fishing vessel guaranteed promotion; and the promotion was associated with the raise in wages. Working at sea represents not only a stable job but also opportunities for professional development. The opportunity to win a managerial position and actual achievement to get the position made this profession considerably more attractive.

The fifth factor that contributes to place fishers at high position in a social stratification system during the PPR period is the character of labor and social perceptions about working at sea. Poles at these times considered that the job of sea vessel crews and fishers was associated with life full of adventures that involved opportunities to visit other countries and to explore exotic cultures. Working at sea, therefore, meant for Poles opened borders which were closed for most of citizens of the countries of the Soviet Bloc. In this context, working at deep-sea implies privileged capacity in mobility in both real terms and recognitions of society members. The dangerous working environment for fishers indicates that fishers are equipped with psychological strength. Thus, being a fisher signposts holding courage as a positive psychological quality. Apart from being brave, fishers are considered to be resourceful. Siedlak and Suszyński (1989: 114) observed that people who visit seaside

⁹ Before the First World War Poland had been under partition for over a hundred years, it gained independence and access to sea (140km) in 1918; and after the Second World War it lost its eastern parts but gained some areas in the west and its coast length increased up to 490 km.

resorts owned by fishers are impressed with beautiful sceneries with sea views there and resourcefulness of fishers who decide to buy property in those places.

One last thing to mention as regards the descent social standing of fishers in Polish society in the period of PPR is Polish's catholic and communist history. Pope John Paul II was a Pole (Karol Wojtyła) and was very influential on the mentality of Polish people, this being particularly the case in the 1980s when Solidarity movement led to the collapse of communism in the Eastern Europe. In his encyclicals *Laborem Exercens* and *Centesimus Annus* he writes about the dignity of a human being which is won and maintained by work. He himself had a war experience of hard manual work which he appreciated very much as a precious experience of solidarity between workers, etc. According to him, people by work of their hands win their daily bread but also the 'bread' of knowledge, progress, civilization and culture (*Laborem Exercens*). Human's work is a most important key to the whole social issue in a way to make human life more humane. Through performing work duty, a human being becomes similar to Creator as they rule over the nature. Work is more important than capital and manual work is the 'purest' form of work as it is not alienated by means of machines, technology, etc. Special attention is given to the dignity of farmers in *Laborem Exercens*. In the book, farmers are portrayed as performing exceptionally hard physical work with low social prestige although they are the very ones who supply the most basic goods for the reproduction of society. In some sense, fishery is equivalent to agriculture (and aquaculture); and a job of fishers is similar to a farmer in respect of hard work and nowadays underappreciated.

All the factors mentioned above contribute to boost fishers' social standing and compensate for the negative psycho-social effects of performing this profession (Durka 1996: 55). An empirical research (Sadaj 1966) on the prestige of occupational professions (including fishing profession) confirmed that the factors mentioned above are significantly valid (Sadaj 1966; Durka 2005). The research revealed that according to the evaluation of respondents for material benefits of occupations, of the 31 professions surveyed in the research fishers ranked 16; behind fishers, priests, factory managers, skilled workers, farmers, police officers, teachers and nurses were located¹⁰. On the other hand, ministers, lawyers, merchant navy officers occupied the top rank (Sadaj 1966: 164; Durka 2005: 55). This research outcome indicates that fishing profession was a relatively esteemed occupation in the period of PPR.

3.2. A downturn in fishers' social standing after 1989 onwards

From 1989 onwards, however, a significant downturn in social perceptions for fishers was observed in Poland¹¹. Most of all, the implementation of lifting borders with other countries makes working at sea less attractive because everyone is free to visit other countries. Also, the economic dimension of working at sea underwent a significant devaluation. Durka (2005) describes the devaluing process in a way that:

In recent years, the prestige of these professions has undergone a radical change, similarly to the position of maritime industry. The profession of a seaman or a fisherman is not as exceptional as it used to be. The image of a well-paid traveler, possessing dollars and wearing foreign clothes lost its uniqueness. Together with borders to other countries being lifted, earnings adjusted to market economy and the normalization of an exchange rate, and the financial advantage from working at sea have been reduced considerably. Even seamen and fishermen themselves say now that they do an ordinary job (Durka 2005: 53).

The downturn of socio-economic position of 'sea' professions is equally observed by Klepajczuk (1996). He stated that: In the process of building a free-market economy,

¹⁰ The research titled, B. Sadaj, "Zawody i stanowiska w ocenie mieszkańców województwa szczecińskiego" – 'Professions and Posts in opinion of Szczecin Province Inhabitants'.

¹¹ This period started in 1989 and the authors assume it lasted for about 20 years however many sociologists argue how long it was or whether it has ended already

professions that went through significant reduction in status value hold at least the following characters: (1) openness coming from continuous contacts with other societies and cultures; (2) earning considerable part of wages as a so-called 'dollar equivalent; (3) elite-like access to commonly desired consumption goods (Klepajczuk 1996: 9-10). Since 1989 when Poland adopted a free market economy, those factors valid in the previous period in a way to define fishers' position as a relatively higher location have lost its significance. Fishers were no longer able to obtain at his disposal what used to be hardly available for others (e.g. foreign currency) during the period of the Socialist Poland. Indeed, fishers themselves noticed this change. Nikołajew's work (2000) identified that fishers themselves considered their profession's prestige having been weakened. The opportunity of fishers that were once available to possess dollars and scarce foreign goods disappeared with the coming of political and economic system transformation. However, it was also identified that the possibility of fishers engaging with foreign territories is still a key factor to maintain fishers' social positions higher in a way that fishers who are employed by foreign companies are better considered than those employed by home based company (Nikołajew 2000: 107). With the development of free-market economy, the position of a fisher in labor market has significantly changed. From a demanded worker he turned to be a person who has to seek a job on his own. The job he obtains is usually worse in many respects than the former ones. Nikołajew (1996) mentioned that the change of previous organizational structure of sea fishing company PPDiUR 'Odra' (Deep-Sea Fishing and Fishing Services Company) vanishes the once privileged position of a fisher. Fishers are increasingly likely to be employed only for a particular single occasion. This type of a contract system creates a new social phenomenon. It is not a ship-owner who seeks fishers to work in their vessels but it is fishers themselves who are eagerly to find a job opportunity in working at vessels because a long stay in land is clearly unprofitable for fishers. The opportunities to get a job at other companies in Poland than PPDiUR home based or in foreign countries are rare. It is not easy to find an employer abroad who could fulfil all the fisher's expectations (Nikołajew 1996: 122). Diverse economic factors that came along with the democratic change from 1989 have weakened the importance of a fisher in contemporary Poland. Among many is that a higher education has become very popular in contemporary Polish society. A major growth in educational attainment has coincided with growing aspirations among young people for it. Indeed, manual work (including fishing profession) has lost its attractiveness in a free-market economy and democratic Poland.

4. Conclusion

This paper has clarified the social position of fishers in Korea and Poland. By identifying factors that determine the social position of fishers in the two countries, this paper pointed to the fact that the identical profession of fishing work can be defined dissimilarly in terms of socially valued perceptions in different cultures and different economies.

For Korea, Confucianism is *the* key factor to define fishers' social position. The overarching cultural, political ideology of Confucianism that was paramount in its influence during the *Choson* period (1392-1910) in Korean history deeply affects fishers' social standing to be humble. The *Choson's* ruling class of *yangban* who practiced exclusively Confucius teachings considered that physical work is inferior to non-physical work; and of physical work, only agricultural activity is proper to their Confucius values in human's work that emphasizes virtual quality. When South Korea rapidly transformed its economy into industrial and later, post-industrial based from the late 1960s onwards, workforces that can fit in playing a role in the changing economy has been of great necessity. In this process, among the social institutions, the importance of education is overly emphasized. The historically deeply embedded cultural ethos of Confucianism that emphasizes learning has met the industrial transformation that asks for workers in an office setting. As a result, more emphasis upon non-physical work is made so that the social standing of fishers has greatly weakened.

For Poland, it is the socialist ideology that defines fishers' social status. The political, economy system in the period of PPR singles out fishing work to be of value and even prestige. Emphasis upon production work by socialist ideology, and fishers' availability to travel overseas and to obtain foreign currencies and foreign luxury goods were all the exclusively enjoyed benefits under the socialist system. However, the coming of market economy along with democratic transition weakens fishers' prestigious post in a way that the previously enjoyed benefits are not available for them anymore. In addition, the reduced opportunity for fishers to find a job in labor market has deepened their difficult situation.

One may consider the future of social standing of fishers, particularly on a global level. We can ask whether the globalization effect on the fishing industry in terms of global enterprises, fisher workers' recruitment on an international base, universal technology equipped in a fishing vessel would alter the currently low position of fishers. Also, the rising price of fish food with the scarcity of fish stocks would lift up the public perceptions of the occupational value of fishers.

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