

THE LUCK OF THE DRAW

For a married woman in Korean society, support or hindrance to a woman's activism often rests in the hands of her husband's family. The luck of the draw was in Heisoo Shin's favor as she was blessed with parents-in-law who were very out of the ordinary.

In 1974, her husband-to-be, active in the anti-dictatorship struggle, was imprisoned. While he was jailed, Heisoo supported him in whatever way she could—from visiting him in jail to attending prayer meetings. No stranger to difficult situations, Heisoo had been interrogated by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) in 1972. She proved to be a source of strength for her fiancé's parents, whose youngest son was also imprisoned for his involvement in the student movement.

Heisoo and her husband married in 1975 but their struggle for social transformation in Korea was only beginning. He would be imprisoned two more times and she would undergo another round of interrogation by the KCIA before the anti-dictatorship movement—with a vibrant women's movement integral to the struggle—would celebrate its success with the fall of the military dictatorship in 1987.

The anti-dictatorship movement and subsequent civil movement have been Heisoo's husband's priority. She has carried the double burden of both the civil and women's movements. She says firmly, "I share his dreams for social change. That has kept us together."

Her parents-in-law have also made a significant contribution toward the transformation of Korean society. The couple lived with his parents until early last year. "My mother and father-in-law took care of the children. They were very supportive and different from ordinary Korean parents-in-law. All my friends say that I married into a good family," states Heisoo.

Child care support was certainly critical in helping Heisoo pursue societal transformation for women. However, her parents-in-law's support extended to active interest and dialogue regarding Heisoo's activities. She would talk with them about her involvements in the comfort women issue, sexual and domestic violence, prostitution issues and her traveling to Geneva for the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Heisoo recounts how her mother-in-law would see her to the door, wishing her good



Heisoo: What goes around comes around

luck and success on her endeavors when she had to travel, and greet her upon her return to hear the news. Whenever the newspapers print anything about Heisoo and her husband's activities, her father-in-law clips the articles and makes copies to send to all the relatives—including those living abroad. There were times when the kitchen sink was full of dishes and her father-in-law would do them, telling Heisoo that she had more important things to do. "He would even fry me an egg in the morning when I had to rush to work," she fondly recalls. "He's very old now, 91 years old. I really respect him. Now you know why my friends say I'm lucky."