During the Joseon period, family life underwent a transformation as the Confucian patriarchal system increasingly became dominant. Patrilineal descent became the norm as the authority of the patriarch became virtually absolute. While the husband provided for the family and handled its external affairs, the wife focused on the household. This division of gender roles was ingrained in language; for instance, a Korean term for a husband and wife was *naeoe*, a combination of the two Chinese characters for ‘inside’ and ‘outside.’ The relationship between husband and wife was one of the Five Relationships mentioned in the *Mencius* as well as one of the Three Bonds. This was an indication of how central the subordination of women was to the constitution of the Confucian family. In fact, a woman’s life was to be completely governed by men; according to the notion of the ‘three obediences,’ she was to obey her father before marriage, her husband upon marriage, and her son after her husband’s death. As long as the social opportunities for women were limited, they had no choice but to live within the family under the protection of men.

Initially, the Confucian family system was restricted to the yangban class. For the common people, there was no special education for girls, and the rules for the separation of husbands and wives were not strictly observed. Because the women had to work alongside men in the fields, it would have been ridiculous to follow these rules. Education for children was impossible; they were tied to a tree trunk or placed in the care of their older sisters while their mothers worked in the fields. Over the course of the Joseon period, institutions for the maintenance of the patriarchal family, such as ancestor worship, spread throughout society as it was increasingly seen as the basis for the social order. Gender distinctions were even evident in daily life. Houses were separated into inner and outer quarters with a gate in the middle that was used only on special occasions. It became natural for men not to discuss household affairs and for women not to mention external affairs. Married couples had separate wardrobes and wall shelves to prevent the mixing of clothes. Unable to leave the house freely, women could only go out at night with a candle for light and had to cover their faces. When walking on the street, men always walked
on the right, and women on the left. In the process of these developments, the nature of marriage changed for women. This chapter is a brief examination of the status of women in the Confucian family system and the institution of divorce which served more to maintain patriarchy than to provide an escape from it.

Trained to be Dutiful Wives

The inequality of the sexes was ingrained in children's minds from birth. When a male child was born, his parents laid him on a table, and he was given beads to play with. But a female baby was laid on the ground and given spools as toys. This was to instill the idea that women were lower and weaker beings meant to exist under other people and that they needed to be diligent. As children grew older, boys were instructed to respond promptly to adults, whereas girls had to respond slowly. Belts for boys were made of leather, while those for girls were made with thread. Even the content of their education was completely different. At the age of six, boys were taught numbers and the four directions, and nine year-old boys learned about the principles of the calendar, such as the sexagenary cycle and the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month. Ten year-old boys were taught by a teacher who came from outside the household. On the other hand, when girls turned ten, they stayed at home and were taught cotton-spinning, sericulture, and silk-weaving by a female teacher. They also learned how to perform other duties of women, such as making clothes and helping to prepare the memorial rites.

During the Joseon period, the objective of marriage was to honor the ancestors and to ensure the continuation of the family line. Since a housewife had to live in her husband's house, women had many responsibilities, but her primary mission was to continue her husband's family line. Parents gave their daughters practical life lessons on adapting to married life, including sex education. The focus of practical education was mainly on proper speech, behavior, and other kinds of etiquette. Girls were taught to take steps no longer than the length of their foot when walking in the in-law's house and to walk backwards in front of adults without turning their back on them. They also practiced how to initiate and finish the chants at ancestor rituals and funeral rites and how to force themselves to cry whenever a situation called for tears.

The purpose of sex education was to bear sons. Young girls were taught to avoid food that negatively affected men's virility, such as buckwheat or