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Review Article

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The Impact of Social Changes on the Status of Women in South Korean Society in the Second Half of the 20th Century

Laziza Alimova

Lecturer, Department of "History and Anthropology of the Countries of the East" Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

Abstract: The article examines the history of widespread subordination or submission of women, from this point of view, which in capitalist societies is considered as a deviation from the proclaimed Western social norms of equality, freedom and justice. It is assumed that all problems of gender inequality in society can be solved within the framework of the Western system by introducing legal reforms and changing attitudes towards them. According to this point of view, it is assumed that women can be liberated by being integrated into the modernization process and the social sphere of capitalist structures. Thus, the study of the social status of women in society raises a lot of controversy about the type of social system that is most conducive to the emancipation of women. The Western model of modernization implies that accelerated industrialization removes traditional restrictions for women and will change the traditional sexual division of labor, thereby contributing to the liberation of women. This is due to the fact that the results of modernization primarily affected men working in the public sphere, while women were limited to the domestic sphere.

Keywords: South Korea, gender, reformer, public school, reform education, women's education, Confucianism, social life, politic, sirhak, tonhak, colonial era.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies on women in South Korea mostly highlight discrimination in the areas of work, family, rights and violations of women's rights. The authors define South Korean society as patriarchal and try to highlight its patriarchal cultural identities [12.123]. These same studies show that South Korean women have been active in confronting societal issues.

Among the reasons for the lack of women's participation in the country's public and political life is the Korean patriarchal culture, which was carried over from Confucian traditions and was reinforced by the first authoritarian regimes. From childhood to adulthood, the roles of men and women in South Korea were clearly separated. Most published books and state school textbooks in South Korea are illustrated with pictures of gender divisions: the man is a symbol of workers, and the woman is depicted only as a housewife. Another reason for the lack of participation of women in public life is the difficulty of penetrating those spheres of life where men have traditionally dominated.

The Main Findings and Results

The activities of the first women's public organizations in the 1950s, during the authoritarian rule of Lee Seung Man, were mainly associated with the implementation of state tasks. There were about 20 women's organizations that were mainly engaged in ideological activities, without addressing specific women's issues [11.14].

During the Park Chung Hee administration (1963-1979), women's organizations were actively involved in public works, such as the "new village" movement, which united rural women in the pursuit of rural development [11.14].

Yet, despite the repression, there have been attempts to combat gender inequality in South Korea. For example, a women's movement has emerged to demand reform of family laws.

In the 1970s, a women's labor movement emerged demanding basic rights for women, but they were all brutally suppressed by the authoritarian government.

During the 1980s, women's movement organizations grew rapidly, building on the previous foundations created by the Christian womenɔs movement and the women's labor movement that had become active since the 1970s. The broader alliance of women's organizations formed a significant part of the overall movement for democratization and social change in Korea.

1987 is considered a turning point for Korean society, symbolizing the country's transition to democracy. It was also an important year in terms of the changes it brought to the lives of Korean women. The change in the country's Constitution in 1987 and the process of democratization of Korea that began after 1987 provided a historic opportunity for gender equality and related issues to become part of the broader public agenda.

*Corresponding Author: Laziza Alimova

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The roots of the Korean feminist movement and ideas date back long before 1987, but it was democratization that brought about changes in Koreans' understanding of gender and women's issues [13.4]. In the 1980s, the feminist movement grew significantly, and the empowerment of the women's movement in Korea led to a wide range of improvements in the country's policies and institutions related to gender equality.

In the 1980s, the protest resistance movement gradually transformed into a civil movement oriented towards reform. The strategy was based on "issue-based" - first identifying contradictions that would attract public attention, then turning them into issues through the media to force the government to respond to them. was ideally suited to the demands of women's movement organizations.

With Korean society dominated by male property rights embedded in the traditional patriarchal system, women's movement leaders realized they needed a "fast track" to achieve real change at the national level. Emboldened by the strengthening of democratic rule, which had been consolidated through successive peaceful transitions of power, their movement to reform the country's laws and institutions became even more visible and focused all its energies on what they called the strategy of "state feminism" [14.162-192].

Following the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality (성평등부) and the gender quota system for proportional representatives in the National Assembly, there has been an increase in the promotion of women's activists to high-ranking positions in public organizations and political parties, leading to broader criticism of the "institutionalization" of the women's movement. Critics argued that the inclusion of these activists in the government or the National Assembly weakened the ability of the women's movement to criticize and monitor government policies: it would weaken the organizational strength and level of activity of the women's movement, thereby distorting its original intentions [13.4].

The women's movement pursued a strategy to adopt national policies to address a variety of issues, from employment and gender discrimination to sexual and domestic violence, and worked to persuade the National Assembly and the government to adopt laws and institutions to address these issues. However, these efforts created new dilemmas. Paradoxically, the Korean women's movement has faced what can be called "failure through success". In other words, it achieved foreign policy successes that were widely regarded as highly successful, but suffered from subjective criticism that the movement's domestic strategy failed to influence government decision-making [15.192-213].

To ensure that gender equality became a political agenda, the values of the women's movement had to be aligned with bureaucratic procedures. This is a dilemma largely based on practical considerations, and depending on the circumstances, only some part of the gender equality agenda could be selectively institutionalized. The accumulation of these agenda options could have damaged the coherence and relevance of the overall gender equality policy. For example, the Equal Employment Act (1987) and the Sex Discrimination Prohibition Act (1999) were passed to address the unfair discrimination faced by Korean women. However, when examining the specifics of these laws, including the legal definition of discrimination, penalties and rules prohibiting discriminatory actions, and the establishment of a dispute resolution committee, the range of gender discrimination addressed under these policies has selectively narrowed over time. Similarly, policies to combat employment discrimination, a problem that significantly impacted women's economic independence, and that penalized employers or provided women victims with appropriate compensation, were not effectively adopted [16.195-233].

The governance relationship between women's organizations and the state is highly unbalanced, both in terms of material resources and social influence. While partnerships between women's groups and the government were forged during the presidencies of Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and Roh (Roh) Moo-hyun (2003-2008), subsequent conservative administrations (2008-2017) have seen a significant weakening of women's groups' activities. Government institutions have monopolized the women's movement agenda, which may have diminished the influence of civil society actors.

Taking childcare policy as an example, the Korean Women's United Association has consistently included childcare issues on the agenda of the women's movement in the 2000s and advocated for the "publicity" of childcare or for the government to play a strong role. The Ministry of

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Gender Equality expanded to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and included family policy and childcare as an important part of women's policy. However, the direction of this policy was to support child care and provide public services to so-called "healthy families" to address the problem of very low fertility rates among women. Korea: In this process, the gender equality agenda has gradually been incorporated into the political framework of family policy, which places particular emphasis on patriarchal norms of "healthy families" [6.14-32].

Despite the dynamic changes that have taken place in Korea since the late 1980s, the actual situation of women in the workforce has not improved significantly [19.321-359]. Even the dynamics of the female labour force participation rate have been characterized by long-term stagnation: although there was a slight increase in 1997 to 49.5% from 44.9% in 1987, this figure has fluctuated since the financial crisis. When comparing Korea with other OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, [18]) Korean women's labor force participation rate is still at the bottom and there is still a significant gap with men.

Of course, there have been some positive changes. More women than men are going to college, and more women are scoring well on civil service exams than men. However, the gender issue remains a central criterion determining the balance between standard and non-standard jobs, large conglomerates and small and medium-sized companies, and domestic and foreign labour markets. Since the currency crisis (1987) and the financial crisis (2008), the share of women in temporary work has clearly increased. However, in addition to the differences between permanent and temporary jobs, the gap between the domestic and foreign labor markets significantly overlaps with the gender gap [19.321-359].

Stable, high-income jobs available in the domestic labour market are usually filled by men who have families. Women who are unable to enter the domestic labour market face job insecurity and low incomes, along with very unclear career prospects. For highly educated women, there is little incentive to get a job or stay in their current job. Korean society is currently debating the issue of women interrupting their careers due to childbirth or caring for children. More fundamentally, it is not career breaks themselves but the segregated structure of the labor market in Korea that continually reproduces deep-rooted gender discrimination [20.14].

Youth unemployment is a very serious problem in the context of "Korean economic growth without employment". Conglomerates' ability to employ more people has reached its limits, leaving young people with few opportunities to enter the domestic labour market to become stable breadwinners for their families. According to the traditional upward mobility "script," investment in education and higher education was supposed to lead to stable employment in a large enterprise or in the public sector, followed by entry into a stable middle-class life. However, middle- and lower-class families who are unable to move up the class ladder are forced to either cut back on their consumption or go into debt. The youth unemployment crisis is more of a problem of class polarization and generational conflict, and it is also linked to the persistence or decline of the so-called "male breadwinner model" in Korean society [21.27-52]. Since the late 1990s, discussions related to gender issues have become more active on university campuses, including within women's student societies. After the 2000s, debates about the merits and demerits of feminism became a daily topic in online communities, portal message boards, and Internet blogs.

Anti-feminist sentiment in Korea is generally believed to have begun with a 1999 ruling that the military pay system (additional benefits for men who had completed military service in examinations for government jobs) was unconstitutional.

The military education system, which gave extra credit to men who had completed military service, became a problem for organizations that worked on the rights of both women and the disabled. According to Article 70 of the Law on a Person Worthy of the Nation, men who have completed military service can receive additional points – from 3 to 5% – in entrance exams to state companies. This law was passed to guarantee employment for war veterans and men who had completed military service. In 2008, some Conservative legislators reintroduced the Military Supplementary System Act into Parliament, which provoked opposition from civil society. Women's and disabled people's organizations opposed it, arguing that the restoration of the supplementary military education system would significantly affect the employment of both women and disabled people. Considering the current situation,

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they argued that the number of part-time workers is increasing among women and the disabled in South Korean society, and then restoring the military supplementary education system will only increase discrimination [22.2-3].

CONCLUSION

Young people, who had been under pressure from increased competition for jobs, felt left out by the abolition of the reward system and expressed frustration that they were being subjected to reverse discrimination. The attempt to make the remuneration system unconstitutional was undertaken by the women's movement and was considered an important success of the "gender equality reform" [23.198].

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