

POPULATION PROBLEMS IN KOREA, LOW BIRTH RATE, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S SOCIAL STATUS

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Annotation. This article describes the structure of government in the Republic of Korea, as well as the division, definition and functions of local government. Population problems, low birth rates, gender equality and the social status of women in Korea were also studied.

Key words: gender equality, labor movement, democratization, "Women's Decade" declaration, Korean Women Workers Association, women's labor rights.

In the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, there was a period of struggle for the transition from the military dictatorship regime to democracy in Korea. This struggle brought together all sections of Korean society, including women from different groups. Ordinary housewives, students, and working women participated equally with men in workers' revolts, peaceful demonstrations, and strikes, from low-level demonstrations against the dictatorship. Their activism had an impact on the direction, consequences and strategies of the struggle for democracy in Korea. Women's participation in the process of establishing democracy, on the other hand, influenced the strategies and goals of the growing women's movement groups in the 1980s.

Gender equality and sexual equality, more precisely: equality between men and women, is a concept that implies the achievement of equal rights between men and women in the family and society and other legal relations. According to some researchers, gender equality is the next stage of socio-sexual relations after the patriarchal system. The principle of gender equality is to study and eliminate all social barriers that prevent a person from emerging as a person, as well as to create equal social opportunities for realizing the personality of men and women in all spheres of life.¹

As Korea developed, various currents and views were formed under the influence of globalization and new ideas. While some of these ideas and currents supported Park Chung-hee's regime, most formed the opposition. Diversity of opinions is important for the development of the country - it is useful in finding the most

¹ Jong Lim Nam. Gender Politics in the Korean Transition to Democracy. Korean Studies, Volume 24. University of Hawaii Press, 2000.

alternative solutions in development. Support of rapidly developing industry, provision of enough cheap labor force attracted all segments of the population to this process. Women's emancipation, the idea of gender equality, the equality of women and men in education and career choices made it easier to solve this problem. However, even before the construction of the economic welfare society, the working conditions of female workers were not as good as male workers. As a result, in Korea, like in all other transition economies, workers protested, organized various juntas, and demanded a number of rights, such as higher wages, shorter working hours, and improved working conditions.

Many Korean scholars avoid considering women's resistance demonstrations and their contributions in explaining the outcome of political change and the democratization process in South Korea. However, a new generation of foreign literature in this field, on the contrary, emphasizes that the women's movement played a prominent role in ending military rule and establishing a democratic system; It is a remarkable phenomenon that this situation is naturally beginning to be reflected in scientific research in Korea. Fourth, women's movements and activism in a number of Latin American countries have influenced the direction and content of democratic transitions. Similarly, the process of political democratization in South Korea cannot be fully understood without women's activism and participation, as well as their political protest through grassroots organizations.

Women's activism in South Korea is defined by their role in the struggle against the military dictatorship. In general, there are a number of external and internal reasons that influenced the beginning of this activity. Introduction of "gender mainstreaming" policy by international organizations, in particular, the UN, and introduction of the request to the member states of the organization to join this trend; positive acceptance of the actions of governments in a democratic context demanding gender equality and adopting them into their policies; and finally, the women's movement organizations, not aiming to take over the state, but seeing it as a partner, combining the "politics of struggle" with the "politics of reconciliation" laid the groundwork for the beginning movement to proceed with relatively peaceful and positive results.

South Korea's population will drop to 38 million by 2070 due to a very low birth rate. During this period, the world population is expected to increase from 8 billion to 10.3 billion. This was reported by "Yonhap" agency.

According to the report published by the Korea Statistics Agency, the country's population has decreased from 52 million this year. Currently, 18.4 percent of the population is elderly.

In South Korea, a woman's lifetime fertility rate will reach 0.78 in 2022, well below the 2.1 birth rate that has kept the country's population stable. The report shows that only 249,000 babies were born in 2022, and 480,000 in 2012.

Foreign citizens, who made up 3.2 percent of the population or 1.64 million in 2023, are expected to increase to 4.3 percent or 2.16 million in 2040. In 2022, 43.9 percent of employed foreigners worked in the mining and manufacturing industry, and 18.7 percent worked in the wholesale, retail, food, and residential sectors.

According to the data, in 2021, the number of families with many children made up 1.7% of the total families in the country.

According to Chung Jae-hoon, a professor at Seoul Women's University, women in South Korea bear the heaviest burden of childcare, which makes it difficult for them to advance in their careers.

South Korea's demographic crisis has become a major threat to its economic growth and social welfare system: the country's 51 million population may halve by the end of this century. The problem stems from the high cost of housing and living.

The problem of low birth rate is widespread in the economically developed countries of East Asia. According to the results of 2023, the number of children born in Japan has updated the lowest indicator for the eighth year in a row.

China's birth rate in 2022 fell to 1.09, a record low. The population of the country decreased by two million people in one year.²

In 1987, a large-scale labor movement aimed at establishing democracy began. In the studies related to the process of democratization of the country that took place at the end of the 80s of the XIX century, the participation of women in the struggle against authoritarian rule and the establishment of a democratic society was rejected or ignored in many literatures created on the same topic. In the studies, one-sided approach to women's activities from the perspective of gender, their participation in social and political changes is left aside, and the tendency to emphasize class and ideological struggles in the classical style is clearly visible.

At this point, it is necessary to consider three objective reasons. First, the women's labor movement of the 1980s paled in comparison to the large-scale male labor movement that rose in heavy industry. Their participation in strikes and boycotts did not stand out among the general workers' movement, but as a direction of this movement was considered more insignificant than the men's movement due to their small number compared to the total number of workers in the country at that time. This has led researchers to focus more on emerging male combatants.

Second, the neglect of the importance of gender issues in Korean democratization is shown to be due to insufficient alternative historical accounts. In fact, women's participation in the democratic labor movement of the 1980s has been underrepresented in periodical chronicles, compared to men's, for four main reasons. First, women were unevenly distributed in small firms and received less attention than

² Nancy Abelmann. Narrating Selfhood and Personality in South Korea: Women and Social Mobility. Published by: Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association. American Ethnologist, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Nov., 1997),

in large firms. Second, some union members and political activists did not understand the importance of women's political participation as wives and mothers. Thus, unions and grassroots labor organizations have made little effort to document women's political activism. The lack of interest in gender issues by researchers has combined to exclude women's social protests from the mainstream literature on Korean democracy.

Women's feminist organizations have mobilized against the use of force and oppression by the state, uniting with resistance groups around issues of human rights, social justice, and democratic politics. During the 1980s, various women's groups were involved in grassroots struggles to create democratic labor unions and democratic social systems. Their contributions at the bottom of the struggle made women's unions extremely important in Korea's transition to democracy. Although these groups differed in their goals and objectives, they were united under a strategy of action and resistance to oppose the human rights abuses of the military regime under the dictatorship. However, the participation of women in this process is not well covered in the Korean press and periodical archival documents. The basic information is provided in the periodical press provided by the press service of movement organizations, in the diaries of political fighters and leaders of popular demonstrations, in articles published in academic and alternative journals, as well as in relatively short forms given in human rights documents. This information was collected and published, in part, by the Korean Association of Women Workers and the Korean Association of Women's Organizations. This valuable collection of data serves as an important resource for researching the role of Korean women in building a healthy democratic environment in the Republic of Korea.³

In the 1970s, women's movement groups were filled and controlled by the dictatorial government; these groups were engaged in the limited protection of women's legal, social and political rights and the consideration of women's problems in political life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the serious struggles for gender equality in terms of political rights, even at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, Korea still has a number of problems in this matter. However, with the growing number of intelligent women and the penetration of democratic ideas into the mentality of the population, the importance of the place and role of women in the political life of the state is becoming more understood, and the constitutional rights assigned to them are increasingly being seen in practice. This process itself can be said to be the result of the struggles that took place in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century.

³ Woojin Chung, Monica Das Gupta. The Decline of Son Preference in South Korea: The Roles of Development and Public Policy. Population and Development Review Vol. 33, No. 4 (Dec., 2007), pp. 757-783.

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