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Edging Toward Full Empowerment? South Korean Women in the Workplace and the Political Arena

EDITED BY MICHAEL KUGELMAN

ABSTRACT This Special Report examines the status of South Korean women in the country's work force, corporate world, and political realm. **Seungsook Moon** contrasts the ideals of the Equal Employment Law with the reality of female employment in South Korea. **Jean R. Renshaw** addresses the lack of Korean women in corporate management, underscoring their importance and suggesting why there are so few female managers. **Kyung-Ae Park** offers possible reasons for women's underrepresentation in Korean politics, highlighting in particular political party elite attitudes and women's role conflicts. And **R. Darcy** explains how electoral features such as party lists and quotas can benefit Korean women in politics.

INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL KUGELMAN

This past January, a South Korean army photograph captured a group of women massed together. Clad in fatigues and wielding rifles, they appear to be training their weapons on a distant target. These Korean women—housewives, teachers, and office workers—are members of the army's new female reserve force, participating in a training exercise outside Seoul.

One could argue that this photograph, exhibiting the presence of women in a traditionally male-dominated institution, is symbolic of growing women's empowerment across South Korean society. Indeed, in April 2006, parliamentarians confirmed Han Myeong-sook as South Korea's first female prime minister. During her confirmation hearings, Han—a former minister for gender equality—promised to use her post to promote the status of women. And about one year before her confirmation, many applauded the decision of South Korea's Constitutional Court to abolish *hoju*, a family registry system that identifies the head of household as a male and that obliges family members to be registered under him. It was a decision that many believe portends improved women's status in matters of family and marriage.

Recent statistics support the contention that Korean women are faring relatively well. They are active in the economy; as of May 2006, according to South Korean government figures, there were nearly 10 million women in the country's labor force—a number representing nearly 50 percent of all females in South Korea aged 15 and over.[1] Meanwhile, a 2005 Population Reference Bureau report portrays Korean women as highly educated and blessed with optimal reproductive health care services; an overwhelming majority of them are literate, attend secondary school, and give birth in the presence of skilled personnel.[2]

However, while these examples describe women's status as favorable, other indices of women's empowerment in South Korea tell a different story. For example, a 2005 World Economic

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Forum report measuring women's equality in economics, politics, and education assigned South Korea a ranking of 54th out of 58 nations. Only Jordan, Pakistan, Egypt, and Turkey received lower marks, while most of the developed world (and some developing nations) fared much better. Not surprisingly, South Korea earned relatively high rankings on women's economic participation, educational attainment, and health. It was South Korea's strikingly low scores on economic opportunity (55th) and political empowerment (56th) that accounted for its overall low women's empowerment ranking.[3] The first of these two categories measures opportunities available to women—such as maternity and childcare leave—once in the work force. The second category gauges the number of females in positions of decision making and policymaking.

Similarly, the 2005 United Nations Human Development Report ranks South Korea 59th out of 80 countries in its gender empowerment measure—one of the lowest rankings for a developed country (and also lower than several developing nations in Latin America and Southeast Asia).[4] This empowerment measure takes into account a country's percentage of female parliamentarians, managers, and professional and technical workers, as well as the ratio of estimated female to male earned income.

In short, South Korean women are well-educated, active in the economy, and healthy, yet also underpaid, poorly represented in leadership and decision-making positions, and faced with limited opportunities once employed. This edited report, the outgrowth of a February 2006 Wilson Center event (hosted by the Asia Program), examines and seeks to explain these apparent contradictions. The publication focuses on South Korean women's status in the country's labor force, corporate world, and political realm—areas where women face some of their biggest challenges.

In the 1980s, Korean women's movements began shaping legislation that promoted women's causes. In the first essay, **Seungsook Moon** of Vassar College analyzes the Equal Employment Law (EEL), a piece of legislation closely watched by Korean women's groups. The law, broadly defined, seeks to promote equal employment opportunities for women. Originally enacted in 1987 and revised five times, it stipulates equal treatment in recruitment, hiring, training, and promotion; recognizes childcare and maternity leave; authorizes affirmative action to increase the number of female employees; and prohibits sexual harassment. Unfortunately, Moon concludes, the EEL's success has been limited, a casualty of the gap between its ideals and the continued realities of women's employment.

The reality of women's employment, Moon contends, is "dismal." According to her figures, as of December 2005 around 70 percent of Korean female employees were "irregular" workers—that is, employed in temporary positions or as day laborers. South Korea's percentage of female employees who earn wages (as opposed to those who do unpaid work for their families or who are self-employed) is one of the industrialized world's lowest, and women who do earn wages make significantly less than men.

Given that South Korean women are so well-educated, Moon asks, why is the women's employment landscape so troubled? One answer lies in the pressures of marriage and family, especially the lack of "reliable and affordable" childcare facilities. When women turn to the government or their employer for childcare services, they are particularly disappointed. As of June 2003, public childcare facilities comprised only 5.7 percent of South Korea's total childcare services. Meanwhile, legislation revised in 2004 requires companies of 500 or more employees to institute childcare facilities—yet by 2005, most had not done so. Additionally, many working

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women have not been properly granted childcare and maternity leaves (as authorized by the EEL), particularly the 70 percent of working women employed by small companies that cannot afford to pay for this leave. In sum, family demands—and the lack of government and employer assistance in accommodating them—prevent women from making sustained commitments to full-time employment. Compounding this all, Moon reports, is the continued presence of workplace discrimination—particularly sexual harassment. The EEL's regulation of discrimination often does not extend to the small and informal employment arrangements in which many female workers find themselves.

Moon's somber appraisal of Korean women's employment is echoed by a recent study of employment trends in South Korea. This study stresses the country's large number of irregular workers. Further, it underscores the high levels of discrimination faced by South Korean women in hiring, pay, and promotion—and it attributes this discrimination to the low number of Korean women holding managerial positions.[5] Indeed, there are relatively few Korean women in management, where decisions on workplace policies are often made. In the second essay, **Jean R. Renshaw** of AJR International Associates describes this lack of women managers as South Korea's "unacknowledged corporate scandal." While concerns about low economic growth and corporate corruption are amply discussed in Korea's public sphere, she maintains that little is said about the fact that women comprise less than 5 percent of the country's managers.

Renshaw's figures are striking: while the percentages of women managers across much of the developed world number in the 30s and 40s, South Korea's percentage has been mired at less than 5 percent since 1985. In a recent sample of 1,443 Korean companies, 64 percent had zero female managers—while only 4 percent had at least two. The irony of all this, according to Renshaw, is that women managers benefit the firm's bottom line. She cites studies finding that companies with two or more female managers attain better market share and profits than those without at least two women managers. Firms with women managers also successfully exploit new product and market opportunities. Many talented Korean women, envisioning few prospects with Korean companies, have either started their own businesses or taken high-level corporate positions abroad.

Why the paucity of South Korean women in management? Renshaw, drawing from interviews she conducted with Korean women managers in 2004 and 2005, suggests both structural and attitudinal factors. Corporate hierarchies with "glass walls and glass ceilings" prevent lateral or upward mobility—especially with opaque corporate governance that eschews job descriptions or promotion criteria. Renshaw's interviewees believe that men are resistant to the presence of women in management because of a fear of losing both power and their female support systems. Women themselves hesitate to commit to the long hours of corporate management because of their view that they must assume their "exclusive role" as wife and mother.

The number of Korean women in leadership positions is low, but they do exist. One such individual is Prime Minister Han, a woman who also bucks South Korea's historic trend of low women's representation in politics. While her position is often dismissed as ceremonial relative to the nation's presidency, Han is nonetheless South Korea's top legislative figure. Some observers point to the unique trajectory of her political ascent: she has neither benefited from a family dynasty nor succeeded a murdered or incapacitated father or husband—an independent path rarely taken by other Asian female political leaders.[6] Nonetheless, Han presides over an assembly whose female parliamentarians number only 13 percent (in fact the largest percentage in the assembly's history). This trend of women's underrepresentation is not just limited to national politics; in this past May's local elections, female candidates won only 13 percent of the 299 total contested seats.

As the University of British Columbia's **Kyung-Ae Park** asks in the third essay, "why so few" women in South Korean politics? Park identifies two possible reasons. One is discrimination by political party elites. Using data from past National Assembly (NA) elections, she illustrates how party chiefs nominate women for electoral races that they have little chance of winning; rarely are women nominated for "safe" seats in party strongholds for which a victory is nearly guaranteed. Additionally, even with recently passed quota laws, which require that a set percentage of electoral candidates be women, the number of females nominated by political parties remains low—and political parties often disregard these laws altogether.

Park asserts, however, that such discrimination is restricted to South Korea's political elite. Ascribing discriminatory attitudes to voters is misguided; surveys reveal that large majorities of men and women would vote for qualified female candidates. And the notion that women are "socialized" into thinking of themselves as passive and family-oriented—and hence unfit for political life—is also erroneous. On the contrary, female politicians are politically ambitious—as evidenced by surveys showing that women parliamentarians are just as likely as men to seek political office again.

Park's second possible reason for women's underrepresentation in politics is the existence of women's role conflicts. Korean women's traditional "role" is one of homemaker; for this reason, many women do not begin participating in politics until both they and their children are older. Park cites data from South Korea's National Election Commission indicating that over the last 58 years, the average age of women in the National Assembly has been around 48. Meanwhile, males enter the political realm at a younger age and gain valuable experience. Historically, male candidates in NA elections have had significantly more political experience than female candidates. This lack of experience weakens women's electoral prospects; Park reports that voters cite lack of political experience as a reason for not choosing women candidates.

Despite these barriers, Park posits that there is reason for optimism all the same. Electoral features often employed in Korean legislative elections—notably party lists—enhance women's political representation in politics. This is so, Park avers, because party bosses seek to make their tickets attractive to as many segments of the electorate as possible. For this reason, women often appear on party lists, thereby increasing the number of female candidates.

In fact, argues Oklahoma State's **R. Darcy** in a hopeful final essay, party lists and quotas both translate into women's electoral success. Women accounted for more than 50 percent of those candidates elected from party lists in the 2004 parliamentary elections—while just over 4 percent of female candidates were victorious in single-member district elections, which did not use lists. Additionally, the total percentage of women elected from lists in the two elections following the introduction of quotas (39 percent) significantly exceeded the total percentage of women elected from lists in the years prior to the establishment of quotas (less than 9 percent).

Another reason for optimism, Darcy argues, is that Korean public opinion is increasingly supportive of women in politics. He acknowledges that Confucianism still colors attitudes, but less so now than in earlier decades. He describes surveys of young Koreans from the 1980s and 1990s, in which majorities of respondents expressed support for women's participation in politics, yet also agreed that while "women should have children and keep house, men should work and have a career." However, by 2000, when asked why women did poorly in recent elections, many respondents listed strictly political reasons—such as opposition to political parties or not being well-known. Very few cited social prejudice, the most commonly cited reason in a similar poll from 1990.

Darcy concedes that South Korea's evolving political situation does not always benefit women. For example, in recent years Korean elections have been "volatile," with one set of political elites swept from power and another set ushered in. Yet because both sets of elites have been male-dominated, women have not benefited from this upheaval. Additionally, in the 1990s, appointed local government structures—also dominated by men—were replaced by a new system of elected governors and councilors. But in elections following this change, women still fared poorly in their bids for these positions.

Darcy notes that there is still work to be done. So how can the status of women be improved? Several essayists bring attention to the lack of enforcement mechanisms undergirding the legislation and institutions meant to help women. Moon bluntly states that the Equal Employment Law "has largely lacked punitive measures serious enough" to prevent workplace discrimination against women. Renshaw points out that the enforcement power of South Korean government committees on gender equality promotion and equal employment "is indeed very limited," noting that U.S. corporations like Boeing improved their policies toward women only after being burdened with enormous fines. In the political realm, Park points out that quota regulations ask only that parties "work toward ensuring" that certain percentages of electoral candidates are women—and parties have often not done so. Empowering these laws with "mandatory stipulations," she argues, would make them more effective.

The essayists also amplify the importance of including South Korea's childcare system in any debate on women's status. According to Moon, many women work part-time or irregularly (earning little pay) because they cannot find adequate childcare. What is required is a major commitment from government and businesses to invest in childcare facilities. According to Park, such a commitment would ease women's role conflicts and enable more women to participate in politics.

Finally, the authors' treatment of Confucianism warrants attention. Rather than being depicted as a crude driver of prejudice against women, it is presented here more as a lingering—yet by no means oppressive—cultural legacy. While these pages discuss barriers to women's advancement, some of which may reflect the vestiges of Confucianism's gender-defined hierarchy, the authors write often of women's progress. Darcy and Park note how public opinion toward women's political participation has grown more positive; Moon explicates the accomplishments of women's groups in civil society; and all authors describe Korean women's stellar levels of education and qualifications for employment. One therefore returns to the contradiction first encountered at the outset: Korean women are greatly accomplished, yet still face great barriers. The essayists suggest that the key to resolving this contradiction may lie in institutional and policy reform, as well as in the passage of laws with teeth—strategies championed in Confucian and non-Confucian cultures alike.

ENDNOTES

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BETWIXT AND BETWEEN LAW AND PRACTICES: SOUTH KOREAN WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

SEUNGSOOK MOON

AUTONOMOUS WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AS A VEHICLE TO CHANGE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF GENDER[1]

During the past four decades, the situation for women in South Korea has markedly changed amid the process of rapid industrialization and urbanization. This change is not merely a byproduct of general structural transformation, but also a result of intentional collective struggle. In particular, the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as a social minority have been facilitated by the autonomous women's movements that emerged in the mid-1980s.[2] Autonomous and "progressive" women's associations concerned with social change would develop in the context of the escalating popular protests against the military regime that occurred in the 1980s. In 1983, when Chun Doo Hwan's regime (1980–87) began to ease its repression of voluntary associations, the Women's Equal Friends Society (yŏsŏngp'yŏng'uhoe) was formed to reach out to grassroots women. In the same year, the Women's Hotline (yŏsŏngŏijŏnhwa) was established to deal with the urgent problem of violence against women. In February 1987, 21 progressive women's organizations with a feminist orientation came together as Korea Women's Associations United (KWAU) (yŏsŏngdanch'eyŏnhap).[3] Initially, their conscious distance from and oppositional stance toward the repressive state set them apart from other women's organizations that already existed or were emerging at the time. However, during the process of procedural democratization in the 1990s, these distinctions became somewhat ambiguous and various women's organizations began to collaborate to achieve such common goals as family law reform and equal employment.

In the context of procedural democracy, the women's movements led by the KWAU have been involved in the institutionalized political process to legislate and revise laws fundamental to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, the KWAU was instrumental in enacting the Infant Care Act (1991), the Sexual Violence Special Act (1993), and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (1998), and in revising the Sexual Violence Special Act (1997) and the Equal Employment Law (several times). These legislative efforts constituted a major type of activism for these women's movements throughout the 1990s. Since all of these laws challenged conventional ideas about gender and sexuality in Korean society, the women's movements had to confront varying degrees of conservative resistance to their legal activism. The KWAU played the leading role in addressing this resistance by vigorously publicizing the laws' issues through local and national mass media; drafting bills in collaboration with lawyers and academics; and lobbying politicians. The KWAU organized numerous formal and informal discussion meetings with experts and political parties; held public lectures; and used major elections to put pressure on the government and the legislature to pass these laws in a form that adequately reflected women's interests. Although the laws that were passed frequently fell short of the bills drafted by the women's associations, even this partial success is a remarkable achievement for the women's movements, especially given their short history and scarcity of human and material resources.

WOMEN IN THE ECONOMY: THE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT LAW AND THE REALITIES OF WOMEN'S PAID EMPLOYMENT

Evolution and Progress

The Equal Employment Law (EEL), enacted in 1987, had a convoluted beginning. The idea first appeared as a potential women's policy issue in 1985, when the Ministry of Labor announced its plan to address employment discrimination against women in hiring,

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promotion, and retirement. Two factors were crucial to the emergence of the state's interest in addressing sex discrimination. First, the developmental state[4] in South Korea, which had dominated the country's economy in the 1960s and 1970s, began to decline in the 1980s in the face of the growing power of the economic conglomerates[5] which had once been fostered by the state. The pressure of the economic liberalization actively promoted by the Ronald Reagan administration in the 1980s also contributed to the decline of the developmental state. As a result, the Korean state attempted to reshape its identity and look for new areas of activity. Second, women's associations had persistently demanded equal employment since the mid-1970s. The Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI), a government-sponsored research center founded in 1983, began to survey equal-employment laws in other countries in preparation for the drafting of an equal-employment bill. However, Chun Doo Hwan's regime did not publicize the result of this KWDI study, presumably because it was "too early" for Korean society to enforce such a law. However, in a major about-face, the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) in December 1986 claimed the issue of equal employment as its own and monopolized the drafting of the bill, without public discussions or hearings. Immediately before the presidential election of 1987—which was being revived after 16 years and posed a threat to the military regime—the DJP abruptly passed the EEL in the National Assembly, intending to use the bill as election bait.[6]

Due to its inadequate and ambiguous clauses, the EEL has been a focus of the women's movements—led by the KWAU—since its implementation in 1988. These movements have been instrumental in contributing to the EEL's revisions—incremental though they may be—in the face of fierce resistance from the powerful Board of Economy and Finance, business owners, and sometimes even the Ministry of Labor. The 1989 revision included the specification of equal pay for work of equal worth; equal treatment in recruitment, hiring, training, and promotion; and the recognition of (unpaid) childcare leave of up to one year, to be considered as an employment period in the calculation of employment benefits.[7] The second revision, in 1995, included the following items: 1) a male worker could request childcare leave instead of his wife if they were both employed; 2) discrimination in training, assignment, and promotion tied to marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth was prohibited; and 3) the Employment Insurance System (koyongbohŏm) would provide partial support for workplace childcare facilities if a private company established them.[8] The third revision, in 1999, added the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace and the definition of indirect sex discrimination.[9] The fourth revision, in 2001, resulted in the increase of maternity leave from 60 days to 90, and in making one month of it a paid leave. It also allowed a man to take paid childcare leave.[10] In the latest revision, in 2005, maternity leave was expanded to include miscarriage and stillbirth. This revision also introduced affirmative action to increase the number of women employees, and required large companies (employing 500 workers or more) to report the gender composition of their work force each year, starting in March 2006. If a company employs less than 80 percent of the average percentage of female workers found in the company's industry, it must submit its affirmative action policies to the Ministry of Labor and report its progress in one year.[11]

The EEL has certainly played a significant role in mitigating a wide range of sex discrimination against women in employment. It has contributed to slowly altering popular attitudes toward women's employment. Working women have become aware of their own rights to take a paid maternity leave and a childcare leave. They have also become sensitized about how various forms of sexual harassment constitute discrimination.[12] Women's organizations have actively publicized EEL revisions and have provided women workers with advocacy services. Meanwhile, the government has exerted some pressure on large businesses to comply with the law. For example, in 1993, the Ministry of Labor required insurance and stock industries employing large numbers of women to abolish (written) discriminatory employment practices.[13] In 2005, a large bank was prosecuted for the first time for committing indirect sex discrimination against women in its personnel policy.[14] The government has also tried to be a positive role model by promoting women's employment in public sectors. Since 1996, it has implemented affirmative action to increase the number of women among lower-grade state employees. In 2003, responding to slow progress, the government raised its objective, to an increase in women's representation to 30 percent of total government employees.[15]

Limitations and Challenges

Nonetheless, the Equal Employment Law has generated only limited successes, even after five revisions,

because the achievement of true equal employment would need to involve the radical transformation of gender relations, with serious implications for the organization of the national economy and of family life. That is, it would necessitate the elimination of various institutional practices coupled with the conservative notion that women are primarily responsible for unpaid care work for children, the infirm, the old, and the disabled. For this reason, the EEL has largely lacked punitive measures serious enough to deter practices of discrimination against women in the workplace. According to the 1999 revision of the EEL, punishments for violating the EEL included fines of five to ten million South Korean won (roughly U.S.$5000), or imprisonment for up to two years.[16]

In the current era of globalization, while the power of economic conglomerates has been fortified by the ascendancy of the market, the power of the nation-state to administer social welfare policies has been in decline. To be certain, South Korea never developed a system of extensive social welfare, and therefore the negative impact of globalization on the welfare state that can be observed in Western societies does not apply in an identical manner in South Korea. Nevertheless, this economic climate militates against the potential for the state and society to develop substantive social services and bodes ill for women in the economy (and for men as well, in different and similar ways).

The overall profile of women in the economy in the twenty-first century is not bright at all. Granted, women's participation in the labor market has grown over time in terms of numbers and quality. Women's economic participation rates[17] have increased from 35.1 percent in 1985 to 50.1 percent in 2005.[18] In 2004, the rate of economic participation among women between 25 and 29 years old reached 67.5 percent.[19] This rate is noteworthy because a majority of Korean women tend to marry for the first time in their late twenties. This suggests that many married women want to stay employed.

A close examination of women's employment in Korea, however, reveals a dismal situation. First, women's employment is characterized by insecurity. In December 2005, only 31 percent of 9.44 million working women were regularly employed; the rest were working in temporary positions or employed as day workers.[20] Paradoxically, because these irregular positions commonly do not provide workers with fringe benefits, only 40 percent of female wage earners had the financial means to join the national Employment Insurance System, which provides some protection against unemployment. A 2001 study of unemployment benefits recipients indicated that 56 percent of male recipients had worked in full-time positions, but only 29 percent of female recipients had worked in such positions.[21] Women's insecure employment is also reflected in the noteworthy fact that South Korea has one of the lowest percentages of female wage earners and one of the highest percentages of unpaid family employees among industrialized societies. In 2003, according to the International Labour Organization, 65.5 percent of employed women in Korea were wage earners, while 16.7 percent of employed women were unpaid family employees.[22] This latter rate was higher than that in Mexico, where it is 12.1 percent. Wage earners in most industrialized countries represent between 80 and 95 percent of working women.

Second, many female wage earners in South Korea receive low wages. In principle, compared with unpaid family employees and self-employed women in small businesses, wage earners should be able to enjoy a regular source of income. In 2005, however, 40 percent of female wage earners suffered from low wages, defined as wages below two-thirds of the median wage in all industries. The percentage of low-wage workers among male wage earners was 15.8 percent. In August 2005, the median hourly wage was 6,332 won (roughly U.S.$6.30); two-thirds of that was 4,221 won.[23] Working 60 hours a week, a female wage earner who received low wages would make around U.S.$252 per week and around U.S.$1,008 per month. An urban worker could barely support herself, let alone her family, with this income. My focus here on low-wage women workers does not intend to deny some positive changes in women's earnings over time. As Table I indicates, the income disparity between women and men with the same levels of educational attainment lessened between 1985 and 2004 among the less-educated (high school graduates and under).[24] The disparities between college-educated men and women without college educations have decreased somewhat as well. At the same time, the earning disparity between women and men who are graduates of junior colleges and colleges grew over the same period. As a result, in 2003, women's average monthly wages remained 63 percent of men's.[25] The wage gap between women and men employed in the 50 largest companies in South Korea has in fact widened by more than 50 percent in the past five years. In early 2005, men's monthly average income was 4,246,000 won, whereas the figure for

Table I. Wage Levels by Educational Attainment and Gender

Note: Reference wage is the wage of high school women graduates.

Unit: percent

Year 2004

Middle school graduates & under		High school graduates		Junior college graduates		University graduates & over	
women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
77.5	126.8	100.0	148.4	104.9	154.1	150.7	222.3

Year 1985

Middle school graduates & under		High school graduates		Junior college graduates		University graduates & over	
women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
76.3	147.0	100.0	179.8	158.9	210.8	259.3	356.8

Source: Republic of Korea Ministry of Labor, *Survey Report on Wage Structure* (1986, 2005).

women was 2,625,000 won. In 2000, by contrast, these were 2,807,000 and 1,746,000 won, respectively.[26] This focus on gender disparity does not intend to overlook the worsening condition of men's employment in the process of the economic downward spiral characterized by outsourcing, insecure employment, underemployment, and unemployment. However, it is worth noting that in these conditions, the quality of women's employment has deteriorated even more rapidly than it has for men.

Third, working women remain a tiny portion of managers in business corporations.[27] Women represent between 4.3 percent and 6.5 percent of managers in big companies, depending on how women managers' presence in corporations is measured; more than half of all the firms in South Korea do not have any women managers.[28] In public sectors, as late as 2005, while women made up a quarter of all state employees, they represented only 5.9 percent of "middle-level" state employees—that is, those occupying fifth-class positions or higher.[29]

These dismal qualitative indicators of women's employment are alarming in light of the fact that the level of women's education has steadily increased and the rate of college attendance among young women has grown (see Table II) much faster than it has for men. Yet in industrialized Korea, education often has not improved the quality of women's employment. The poor quality of women's employment and marriage function like two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, marriage continues to affect women's economic participation negatively due to the burdens imposed on women by the lack of social support for care work. On the other hand, poor employment conditions force many women to opt for marriage over insecure employment. Table III shows that among married women, the level of education is negatively related to the rate of economic participation. In contrast, among unmarried women, the relationship between education and economic participation is positive. At the same time, among unmarried women, junior college graduates have a higher economic participation rate (87.8 percent) than do college graduates (82.3 percent).[30]

Indeed, the most difficult problem for working women in South Korea is the lack of reliable and affordable childcare facilities. Public childcare facilities accounted for only 6.6 percent of total childcare facilities in December 2001, and for 14.25 percent of the total number of children in childcare facilities. By June 2003, the percentage of public childcare facilities had decreased further, to 5.7 percent, and the percentage of children cared for in these facilities had also contracted, to 12.59 percent.[31] Although the Infant and Childcare Act, which was legislated in 1991 and completely revised in 2004, requires large companies (employing

Table II. Educational Attainment among Adults by Gender (25 Years Old and Over)

Unit: percent

Year	Gender	Primary school graduation & under	Middle school graduation	High school graduation	University graduation
2000	Women	30.4	14.3	37.3	18.0
	Men	15.1	12.3	41.6	31.0
	Total	23.0	13.3	39.4	24.3
1990	Women	43.0	20.3	28.4	8.3
	Men	23.3	17.6	38.9	20.1
	Total	33.4	19.0	33.5	14.1
1980	Women	67.0	16.5	12.9	3.6
	Men	42.8	19.8	25.4	12.0
	Total	55.3	18.1	18.9	7.7

Source: Republic of Korea National Statistics Office, *Population and Housing Census Report* (1982, 1992, 2001).

500 workers or more) to establish childcare facilities, an absolute majority of these firms failed to comply with the law. A 2005 study of these large companies commissioned by the Ministry of Labor indicated that 84 percent of 563 companies had no childcare facilities. This has presumably occurred because of the lack of any punishment for noncompliance with the childcare regulations.[32] Overall, childcare facilities in the workplace account for only 1 percent of the total number of childcare facilities in South Korea.[33]

As for paid maternity leave and childcare leave, the EEL has shifted financial responsibility for these leaves to private corporations. As a result, only a limited number of women (and men) have taken advantage of them. According to a 2003 study of the Korean Women's Development Institute, since the fourth revision of the EEL in November 2001, approximately 50 percent of women workers eligible for a maternity leave actually used it, while only 10 percent of those women who took a maternity leave actually received one month's pay during the leave. There were only some 70 men who took advantage of a childcare leave.[34] Small companies, meanwhile, cannot afford to provide their workers with paid leaves. This poses a serious problem for working women, because almost 70 percent of them are employed in small companies, often in temporary positions.[35] According to a study conducted by the Equality Hotline, a nationally networked counseling service for working women which was established in 1995, the violation of maternity leave law by employers has become one of the most urgent problems among working women in recent years.[36] And it should be kept in mind that the women who sought assistance from the hotline were better off, relatively speaking, than those women working in tiny businesses or in irregular positions who did not even reach out to the equality hotline.

Finally, the problem of sexual harassment continues to affect a large number of women in the workplace.[37] In March 2000, the Ministry of Labor commissioned a national survey of firms employing at least 100 employees. Among the female employees of the 502 companies surveyed, 19.3 percent of them replied that they had repeatedly encountered sexually explicit jokes or remarks. Another 9 percent of the women replied that they were exposed to "sexually intended physical contact by their male colleagues or male bosses." The same study showed that sexual harassment was the third most frequent form of employment discrimination against women, following discrimination in promotion (cited by 47.9 percent of women) and forced retirement (30.8 percent). According to a 1999 survey commissioned by the Ministry of Labor to monitor workplace education regarding sexual harassment and its prevention, 61.4 percent of the companies examined provided their workers with this education and 54.2 percent of the companies examined had some mechanism to support those who suffered from sexual harassment. But this study covered only large companies; small and poor companies, where a majority of women are employed, remain outside the state's regulations. Moreover, the EEL has become rather outdated in its definition of sexual harassment, due to the rapidly shifting conditions of women's employ-

Table III. Economically Active Population by Marital Status, Educational Attainment, and Gender (Year 2004)

UM=Unmarried M=Married W/D=Widowed/Divorced

Unit: thousand persons, percent

UM	Economically active population		Economic participation rate		Unemployed		Unemployment rate	
	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
Middle school & under	70	239	6.0	16.3	7	23	10.0	9.5
High school	1100	1626	55.8	58.0	86	166	7.8	10.2
Junior college	653	496	87.8	86.7	41	37	6.3	7.5
College & over	686	680	82.3	82.2	40	53	5.8	7.8
Total	2509	3041	53.3	53.6	174	279	6.9	9.2

M	Economically active population		Economic participation rate		Unemployed		Unemployment rate	
	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
Middle school & under	2192	2308	53.3	73.1	28	50	1.3	2.2
High school	2631	4346	51.0	89.0	57	101	2.2	2.3
Junior college	359	706	46.5	94.9	7	14	2.1	2.0
College & over	778	2791	48.5	91.0	9	35	1.1	1.3
Total	5960	10151	51.2	85.6	101	200	1.7	2.0

W/D	Economically active population		Economic participation rate		Unemployed		Unemployment rate	
	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
Middle school & under	860	225	34.2	55.0	16	15	1.9	6.5
High school	276	205	64.0	78.0	12	13	4.4	6.1
Junior college	16	17	70.6	78.0	0	0	2.4	1.7
College & over	47	55	59.2	67.8	1	2	2.0	3.7
Total	1199	502	39.3	64.8	29	30	2.5	5.9

Source: Report of the Korean Women's Development Institute, http://www.kwdi.re.kr/d/sta_inq_n_modify.php?sub_no=0401050&div=4.

ment in the twenty-first century. While the law addresses only sexual harassment committed by a woman's coworkers and superiors, more and more women are now employed as outsourced or temporary workers and thus interact with people outside their companies and work settings. It is becoming urgent to address sexual harassment by these outsiders.[38]

To summarize, the gap between the ideal promoted by the Equal Employment Law and the reality of women's employment remains considerable. While a small number of educated professional women have entered various occupations that are still dominated by men, and have been in the spotlight for their accomplishments and their novelty value, an absolute majority of working women are caught betwixt and between the law and practices of discrimination in the workplace. Without a transformation in various institutional practices in the labor market, which are tied to a conservative notion about women's responsibilities for unpaid care work, the quality of women's employment will not improve.

Such a transformation will require both a serious collaboration between the state and businesses to build infrastructure for childcare, and a commitment from the state to provide care facilities and services for the infirm, the old, and the disabled. The one-dimensional calculation of immediate cost-benefit analysis in the business sector and the state's policymaking will undermine the very reproduction of the society in the long run; South Korean women of younger generations have already begun to respond rationally to the extreme lack of social support for care work. Not only has the aggregate number of marriages been in decline since 1995, but the fertility rate of Korean women has continuously declined to a point that will lead to population shrinkage.[39] In 2005, the fertility rate of Korean women was 1.16, a figure falling below even that of Italy (1.29) and Japan (1.26). And the number of married couples without children almost doubled between 1985 and 2000.[40] At this juncture, it would be vacuous to label these women who defer their marriage and pregnancy as "selfish." These choices are a rational reaction to the harsh reality of the capitalist job market, which presently does not allow women to care for other human beings in order to support themselves.

ENDNOTES

1. For an extensive discussion of women's movements in contemporary Korea, see Seungsook Moon, "Carving Out Space: Civil Society and the Women's Movement in South Korea," *Journal of Asian Studies* 61 (May 2002): 473–500, and Seungsook Moon, "Women and Civil Society in South Korea," in *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy, and the State*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 2006).
2. Women's movements existed in the beginning of the twentieth century as an integral part of nationalism. With the introduction of communism in the Korean peninsula in the early 1920s, a socialist women's movement emerged. During the 1920s and 1930s under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), there were autonomous labor movements among women workers in rubber, cotton spinning and weaving, and silk reeling industries. But it was not until the 1980s that women's movements with a feminist orientation emerged as autonomous entities.
3. The number of the KWAU's member organizations has fluctuated somewhat over time; it had a total of 28 member organizations in 2005.
4. Commonly used in studies of political economy in East Asia, the developmental state refers to a modern nation-state that actively directs industrialization, closely regulating the market, as well as the formation and development of business enterprises.
5. Economic conglomerates are known as "*chaebols*" in Korean, which are also translated as "big businesses."
6. Seungsook Moon, "Overcome by Globalization: The Rise of a Women's Policy in South Korea," in *Korea's Globalization*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
7. Minwuhoe, *Han'gukyŏsŏngminwuhoe 10nyŏnsa* (*A 10-year History of the Korean Women People's Friends Association*) (Seoul: Han'gukyŏsŏngminwuhoe, 1997), 31.
8. *Kyŏnghyang Newspaper*, 21 July 1995. Since July 1995, the Employment Insurance System has been implemented to mitigate problems of layoffs and unemployment.
9. See information from Korean Women's Development Institute, available from http://www.kwdi.re.kr/board/view.php?db=wifaq&cateroy=2&no=321.
10. *Kyŏnghyang Newspaper*, 5 November 2001, and *Han'guk Daily*, 5 November 2003.
11. *Labor Today*, 4 January 2006, and *Financial News*, 3 January 2006.
12. The Korean Women Workers Associations Council (KWWAC), *1999nyŏn p'yŏdŭngŭijŏnhwa sangdamsaryejip* (*The 1999 Collection of Equality Hotline Counseling Cases*) (Seoul: KWWAC, 1999), and The Korean Women Workers Associations Council (KWWAC), *2002nyŏn p'yŏdŭngŭijŏnhwa sangdamsaryejip* (*The 2002 Collection of Equality Hotline Counseling Cases*) (Seoul: KWWAC, 2003).
13. *Labor Today*, 4 January 2006, and *Financial News*, 3 January 2006.
14. Starting in 2000, Hana Bank used dual tracks for pay and promotion in the name of meritocracy. It separated "general positions" from "FM/CL positions" and remunerated those in general positions almost twice as much as those in FM/CL positions for work of equal worth. FM/CL positions refer to "floor managers" and "clerks" who deal with individual customers, rather than busi-

ness firms. Eligibility requirements for FM/CL positions included a maximum age of 25 and a minimum educational qualification of a junior college degree. These conditions prevented most Korean men from applying for the positions because a majority of Korean men perform mandatory military service for at least two years. As a result, FM/CL positions became a virtually ghettoized sector reserved for women in the bank. See *Labor Today*, 17 October 2005.

15. Sang-nim Choi, "Yŏsŏngnodongbunya chŏngch'aik ch'ujinhyŏnhwang p'yŏngga mit chŏngch'aikchean" ("An Assessment of the Current State of Women's Labor Policy Implementation and Policy Proposals"), in *No Mu-hyŏn chŏngbu yŏsŏngjŏngch'aik 1nyŏn p'yŏngga mit chŏngch'aikjeŏnŭl wihan t'oronhoe* (*A Discussion Meeting to Assess the Roh Moo Hyun Administration's First-year Women's Policy and Explore Policy Proposals*), proceedings, ed. Korea Women's Associations United (KWAU) (Seoul: KWAU, 2004), 17.
16. Kang-ja Chŏng, "Namnyŏgoyongp'yŏngdŏngbŏp mit kŏlogijunbŏp kaijŏngbangan" ("A Proposal to Revise the Equal Employment Law and the Labor Standard Law"), in *Yŏsŏngnodongbŏp kaijŏng yŏndai hoeŭi (A Coalition Meeting to Revise Women's Labor Laws)*, ed. Korea Women's Associations United (KWAU) (Seoul: KWAU, 2000), 22.
17. This refers to the percentage of "economically active women" (who are able and willing to work, which includes both the employed and the unemployed) among the total number of women who are 15 years old and over.
18. Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI), *White Paper on Women* (Seoul: KWDI, 1991), 463, and *Labor Today,* 17 January 2006.
19. *Yonhap News,* 26 December 2005.
20. *Labor Today,* 17 January 2006.
21. *Segye Daily,* 1 August 2005.
22. The remaining 17.8 percent of working women were self-employed. See chart depicting "Distribution of Women Workers by Status of Employment," Korean Women's Development Institute, available from http://www.kwdi.re.kr/d/stat_inq_n_modify.php?sub_no=1003010&div=10.
23. *Labor Today*, 5 December 2005.
24. In 1985, among middle school graduates and below, women earned 51.9 percent of men's wages, whereas in 2004 in this group, women's wages were 61.1 percent of men's. Among high school graduates, while women made 56.6 percent of men's wages in 1985, women made 67.4 percent of men's wages in 2004.
25. *Financial News,* 2 February 2005.
26. *Financial News,* 20 September 2005.
27. This issue is treated in detail in Jean R. Renshaw's essay in this report.
28. *Hangyŏre Newspaper,* 17 January 2006.
29. *Ilda,* 21 September 2005.
30. The table indicates the same trend among men, suggesting certain structural constraints against women and men with higher education in the labor market.
31. Yi Yun-kyŏng, "Poyukchŏngch'aik p'yŏngga" ("An evaluation of childcare policy"), in *No Mu-hyŏn chŏngbu yŏsŏngjŏngch'aik 1nyŏn p'yŏngga mit chŏngch'aijeŏnŭl wihan t'oronhoe* (*A Discussion Meeting to Assess the Roh Moo Hyun Administration's First-year Women's Policy and Explore Policy Proposals*), ed. Korea Women's Associations United (Seoul: KWAU, 2004), 32.
32. *Kyunghang Newspaper,* 8 January 2006.
33. *Chungang Daily,* 6 December 2005.
34. *Hanguk Daily,* 5 November 2003.
35. Choi, 25.
36. *Ilda,* 17 October 2005.
37. *Seoul Newspaper,* 5 March 2005, and *People's Voices,* 21 December 2005.
38. Chŏng, 10–11.
39. Both statistics come from the *Annual Report on Vital Statistics,* 1991, 1996, 2001, and 2003, published by the Republic of Korea's National Statistics Office.
40. Such couples accounted for 7.8 percent of the total number of households in 1985, and they grew to 14.8 percent in 2000. See the *Annual Report on Vital Statistics,* 1987 and 2001.

KOREA'S UNACKNOWLEDGED CORPORATE SCANDAL: THE ABSENCE OF WOMEN MANAGERS*

JEAN R. RENSHAW

South Korea is justifiably proud of its resurgence since the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis. Unfortunately, further economic problems have followed. Growth levels have been low, and Korea's central bank governor, Park Seung, has recently predicted that unless the country radically restructures its economy, it will face a new era of low growth or even a protracted Japan-style recession. Additionally, there are concerns—often expressed by Korean media—about corruption and a lack of transparency in corporate environments, as well as about a lack of confidence in the business sector and in government/business relationships. Finally, indicators of a healthy market economy are often wanting. For example, South Korea's ranking in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index dropped to 29th out of 104 nations in 2004 (WEF 2004). And GNI (gross national income) per capita has hovered around $10,000 for a decade—despite past projections of attaining $20,000 annual per capita income.

These economic woes are recognized and publicly discussed. However, another problem closely linked to these economic troubles is unacknowledged and struggling to be recognized: that is the role of Korean women in the economy. Women comprise 41 percent of the Korean work force, yet less than 5 percent of managers are women. While women are essential to the operation of the economy, business, and the nation, their voices have not been heard proportionately in policy and decision making. This gender gap in management has received less attention than the country's gender gap in earnings that remains at a low 50 percent, compared to the United States' female to male income ratio of 76 percent. One reason for the lack of attention to the dearth of women managers in South Korea might be that data on power relations at work are more difficult to quantify. As a result, this problem has not been systematically explored in Korea.

KOREAN WOMEN MANAGERS: A GLOOMY PICTURE

As Table I demonstrates, an international comparison reveals an embarrassing paucity of Korean women in management. While the percentage of women managers in many countries has increased in recent decades, in South Korea the figure has remained at a very low level—less than 5 percent—since 1985. Forty-eight percent of managers in the United States are women; Scandinavian countries average 30 percent; Spain has increased to 31 percent; and New Zealand to 38 percent. Even in Japan, where barriers are high, the number has increased to 9 percent (Renshaw 1999). Countries with increased percentages of women managers have made concerted efforts to develop awareness. In doing so, they changed policies and behavior to bring women into management. By contrast, in Korea, juxtaposing the terms "women" and "manager" is still considered humorous by many men.

The results of two recent research projects investigating the gender management gap reveal startling data about both Korean women and organizations (see Table II). In a sample of 1,443 Korean companies, 64 percent had *zero* women managers. This compares with 53 percent of companies in Australia and 14 percent of companies in the United States with no women managers. Ninety-six percent of

* Some material from this essay previously appeared in Jean R. Renshaw and Joohee Lee, "Korea's Unrecognized Corporate Scandal: The Absence of Women Managers," *Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper* 104 (February 2005). Available from http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp104.html. Some of this essay's content will also appear in the author's forthcoming book *The Discovery of Korean Women Managers* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Finally, some of this essay's material is based on interviews the author conducted with Korean women managers in 2004 and 2005. Anecdotal material that appears here is drawn from these interviews.

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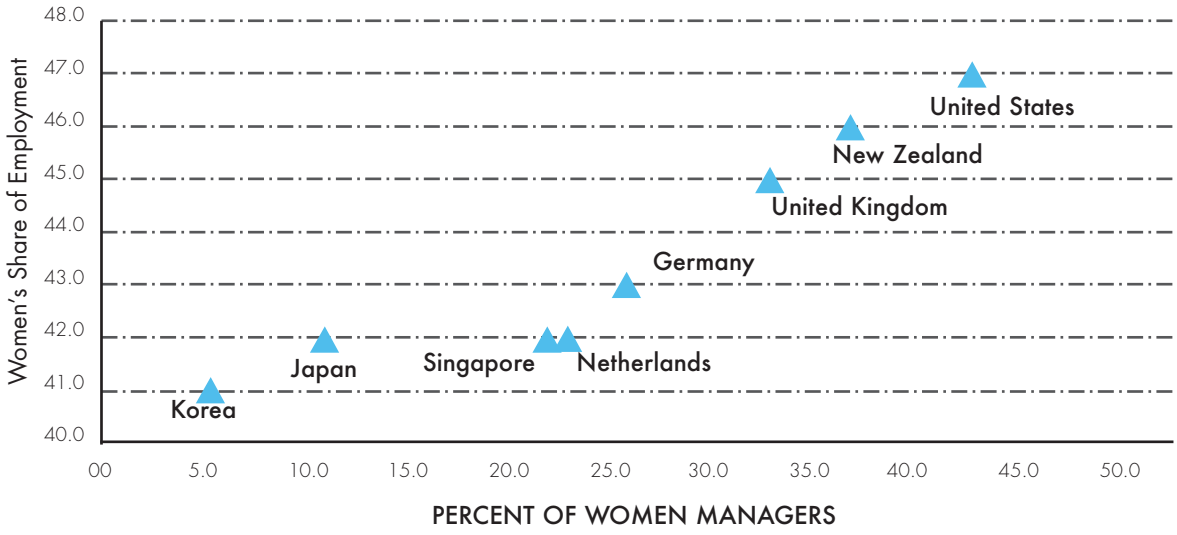
Table I. International Comparison of Percent of Women in Management



Sources: Loutfi (2001), *Women, Gender and Work,* and *Korea National Statistical Office* (2002), *Survey on Economically Active Population*.

Korea's major companies had less than two women managers. It is difficult to imagine, but unfortunately true, that only 4 percent of Korean companies have two or more women managers.

As indicated by Table II, there was a substantial gender gap for each measure of authority, but the higher the level of management, the fewer the women. A survey of 1,000 male and female employees during the fall of 1999 also found a substantial gender gap at all levels of management, with women having fewer opportunities for promotion and when promoted having fewer subordinates (Lee, Chun, and Lee 2004). Thirty-three percent of male respondents had supervisory power, compared to less than 6 percent of the women. Male managers supervised 17.6 persons versus female managers supervising 3.8 persons. This power differential persisted after controlling for independent variables such as personal attributes and employment settings. Firms with less than 10 employees were excluded. Logistic regression coefficients revealed that schooling and tenure slightly affected respondents' chances of acquiring authority, but the power gap between men and women was largely attributable to direct discrimination.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN MANAGERS

Given the dismal picture of South Korean women in management, what difference would it make if more women were managers? Why are women managers important?

First and foremost, the waste of human resources when women are not being fully utilized is costly. After all, South Korean women constitute half the nation's population and are among Korea's brightest, most competent, and most creative workers. Such a flagrant waste of human resources is strange in a country known for its wise and often frugal shepherding of resources. Korean women are articulate and well-educated. They have one of the highest levels of education in the world, but they are notably absent from leadership and decision-making roles in business and government bureaucracies. Even in many service industries where women comprise the majority of the work force, they have not been promoted into management. Korean college-educated women actually suffer from high levels of unemployment. Korean companies prefer non-college graduate women because they are believed to be expendable, less demanding, and eager to serve.

Second, the issue of equity is important. If women provide half of the work of the nation, fair play would award them half the decision making about the policies and practices that affect their lives. Since women make up half of the society and the economy depends on their contributions, they must have a strong voice if solutions to South Korea's problems are to be found. Women are not only requesting but demanding a greater voice in the governance of the economy and the nation. For example, legislation to abolish the *hoju*, or male-headed family registry system, was supported by all 39 assemblywomen and attracted sufficient male members to make passage possible.

Table II. Korean Companies with Women Managers

Breakdown of Number of Women Managers With Korean Companies	
No Women Manager	901 (64%)
One Women Manager	478 (32%)
Two or More Women Managers	64 (4%)

Women in Positions of Authority With Korean Companies				
Position	Total No. of Employees	No. of Women Employees	Percent of Women Managers (Aggregate data)	Percent of Women Managers (Firm average)
Manager	59,073	1,539	2.6	6.4
Head of Dept.	20,031	221	1.1	3.2
Executive	7,470	142	1.9	2.6

Sources: Lee, Chun and Lee (2004), *Shattering the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management,* and Korea Labor Institute (2002), *National Establishment Survey*.

Third, a significant rationale for Korean corporations to employ women managers is the link to profit, innovation, and creativity. Compared to firms without a single woman manager, Korean firms employing at least two women managers have better performance in terms of market share and profits, and more innovative business strategies that aggressively utilize new product and market opportunities (Lee, Chun, and Lee 2004). Firms implementing successful gender-sensitive human resource strategies tend to employ personnel managers who have more equitable attitudes toward women workers. Recruitment methods and performance evaluations in these firms are also more open and objective. Individual merit is considered more important in promotion decisions than sex, age, and tenure.

Research in the United States and Canada conducted by Catalyst, a research and advisory organization promoting inclusive environments and expanded opportunities for women in the workplace, has demonstrated that companies with women in upper levels of management were in the top quadrant of performance and profitability (Catalyst 2004). Japanese companies with two or more women managers achieved better performance than the companies with less than two women managers. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for Korea to reach its goal of $20,000 per capita income without women's work and the input of women managers and decision-makers. When Korean companies do not utilize Korean women managers, other nations' companies will. Korean women are highly sought after by foreign companies; for example, the president of Volvo Korea, Hyanglim Jennifer Lee, is a woman, as is Kwon Sun Jue, CEO of the Korean unit of Stiefel Laboratories, a German company.

Unfortunately, the closed "old boy" networks of Korean corporate governance not only discourage investors but also exclude women and divergent voices from management. The efficiency that has been lauded in Korea associated with having a single, familiar male voice for management has not been balanced by fresh, new creative ideas and innovation. Some consumer product companies have belatedly realized that their major customers are women and have begun to place women in influential marketing, technical, or professional roles, but rarely in management.

The pace of change is too slow for many motivated women aspiring to management. Talented women are starting their own businesses, like Sung Joo Kim, whose prominent retail chain Sung Joo International is respected in many foreign countries. Others are leaving South Korea and making a name for themselves with the United Nations and other international organizations. Some have emigrated to other countries and established successful careers and families. A poll conducted by Shizuoka University recently found that 42 percent of 803 Seoul residents stated they would not want to be born in Korea if they had a choice, but whereas only 35 percent of men answered this way, nearly 50 per-

cent of women did so. The more educated, younger, and higher-income professionals would prefer not to be Korean-born citizens.

A fourth reason attesting to the importance of women managers is a demographic one. Added to the concern over the stagnant economy and lagging foreign investment, the nation worries about a declining birth rate that has dropped precipitously from 2.7 in 1960 to under 1.2 in 2004, while Korean society ages at an alarming rate. According to 2004 figures, by 2050 there will be only two working adults for each person over 65 (McKinsey and Company 2004). Demographics and a slowing growth rate deter economic growth, and are not amenable to a solution without women's perspectives.

Suggestions for remedying these demographic concerns have ranged from forcing women to return full-time to the home, to providing incentives for those having more than one child. Other proposed solutions are more and better childcare; improved housing; and support for education. Most of these proposals have been brought forward by male leaders, but women are asking different questions and proposing a more systemic look at the impact of the falling birth rate and the aging population on society. Some women are even bringing forth the revolutionary idea that men should take more responsibility for home, family, and children. These societal issues are all interdependent and require collaboration between Korean women and men.

REASONS FOR THE ABSENCE OF WOMEN MANAGERS

Given the necessity for collaboration, why then are women not included in management? In interviews, many women contend that the reason for their absence from management is, pure and simple, "men." They blame male attitudes and behavior for the problems facing women in the workplace, saying men are afraid of losing their power, losing their female support systems, or simply spoiled from birth and not wanting to change. While this answer is a simplistic one for a complex problem, it reflects how the situation is seen by many women struggling to succeed. In order to change the status of women in South Korea's corporate world, it is important for both the power holders and those wishing change to understand the larger issues, such as: how the system works; the barriers that exist for women; the fact that some of these same barriers may be a problem for men as well; the need for change; and the benefits of making change. In doing so, both sides participate in defining the process for change.

The barriers facing women are both structural and attitudinal. Structural barriers include a hierarchical corporate structure with "glass walls and glass ceilings" that prohibits women from moving either laterally or upward. Women find the lack of transparency in corporate governance—such as a lack of job descriptions and promotion criteria—particularly difficult. The benefits given to men for their compulsory military service—although no longer required by law—are accepted in practice and women believe this leads to a military-type culture.

In terms of attitudinal barriers, the "old boy" power network is often cited as detrimental to women. Men's networks based on school and military ties exclude women. Women are developing networks, but they do not have the same power networks as men. Corporate culture has traditional attitudes of male preference, privilege, and dominance. Men often view women as supporters rather than actors, requesting and expecting services from women ranging from serving drinks to doing the boss's laundry on trips. Women often have a more difficult time than men in securing a sponsor or mentor (*sunbae*) to guide them through the maze of company norms, because some men are uncomfortable working so closely with a woman.

The norm and practice of long working hours is particularly difficult for women who have families—especially when work hours lack flexibility. The "good mother, wise wife" syndrome that limits women's roles to child bearing and rearing often excludes them from a career. It is not only men that are indoctrinated with such traditional attitudes. Women also have been trained to think of themselves in the exclusive role of wife and mother, so it is easy to stimulate women's guilt and feelings of being neglectful when working long hours and trying to balance work and family. The expected drinking and late-hour after-work meetings are added burdens for many women. Sexual harassment—defined as unwanted sexual attention or touching referred to as "skin slip," and to an environment of sexual innuendo—is a difficult and often hidden issue. Harassment may be obvious or subtle. When women are invited to after-work functions, they feel compelled to accompany (male) colleagues to "room salons" for long hours complete with many "business" drinks, entertainment, and services provided by other women. Most of the women find this degrading—

both for them and the servers—and the servers often resent the businesswomen who they believe do not tip as well as the men.

WHITHER SOUTH KOREA'S WOMEN MANAGERS?

Women have not always been subservient in Korea. Many blame the reintroduction of Confucianism in the fourteenth century for the current plight of Korean women and believe that the situation can and must be changed. A stagnant economy, corporate corruption, undervalued stocks, a declining birth rate, an aging population, the high cost of education, and troubled households are worldwide problems, but each country has a different manifestation. Ultimately, Korea's problems require Korean solutions, and women must contribute to the definition and realization of those solutions.

CEO attitudes are crucial to corporate culture, because they directly influence the attitudes and behavior of the organization. However, public statements about equity without hands-on actions by top management do not lead to greater equity for women. Still, CEOs are not the only determining factor. Inertia and resistance to change are powerful forces at all levels of an organization. Therefore, training and education are necessary for change.

The first step in making any change is acknowledging that there is a problem. Korean corporations have been adept at ignoring the situation of women in the workplace, putting the blame for women's current status on the women themselves or on forces outside the company's control. The value of women, and the loss of profits attributable to wasting the talents of women, have somehow not become recognized corporate concerns. Research substantiating women's value to the firm is apparently either excluded from the reading of managers or discounted. Organizations must take responsibility for problems of corporate governance, whether lack of transparency, corruption, or a lack of women managers. All stakeholders—women, men, corporations, and government—must be involved to create an awareness of the problems women face and to acknowledge the necessity of change.

Like most countries, Korea has adopted legislation prohibiting sexual discrimination in the workplace, such as the Equal Employment Act of 1987. While laws are a necessary first step, they are only the beginning. The lack of penalties for disobeying the laws is cited by women as a weakness, but the laws are available and an opening. Still, the enforcement power of existing institutions, such as the Ministry of Gender Equality's Committee on Gender Equality Promotion, and the Ministry of Labor's Equal Employment Committee, is indeed very limited. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea has more enforcement power, but it has lacked expertise in dispute resolution regarding employment matters. It is worth noting that Boeing and other U.S. corporations made necessary changes only after being penalized with fines of millions of dollars.

Many young Korean men also experience problems in corporations similar to those described by women. These men do not want to follow in their fathers' footsteps and be totally owned by a company. One woman manager described her boss inviting her to have dinner with him after she had already eaten with friends. She thanked him and politely declined, saying she had already eaten. He appeared unhappy and later told her that when the boss invites you to dinner, you go because he has something important to discuss. She stood her ground and said she would have liked to do so, but only if she had been told of the plans before 6 p.m. Later, she noticed a male colleague who she knew had already had lunch, going out for lunch with the boss. She asked if he had eaten again and he said, "Of course. The boss expects it." At some point these men may be able to give greater impetus to the drive for change by collaborating with similarly minded women.

Structural and attitudinal reforms are essential. Drastic changes may be required to utilize the best talents and resources that Korea needs in all arenas—the home, the office, and schools. Korea has shown itself capable of rapid change when the need arises and is acknowledged. Increasingly, citizens are aware of the need for change. A younger generation generally supports changes in business culture and operations that will enhance the quality of life for all, including changes in gender roles. The young also believe the traditional rigid education system has not adapted to the changing world, and some of these young Koreans are organizing to make changes. Programs for leadership development for both men and women are being offered. These are essential to prepare women for leadership and to aid men in expanding their views of the role of the leader. Innovative economists can be sought who

incorporate the latest theories of innovation and creativity with the more traditional thought and discipline of economics to support changes in the economic structure.

The costs of not heeding the need for change are high. Although the changes required might seem risky to some, most Koreans seem eager to do whatever is necessary to improve the quality of life for themselves and the nation.

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SOUTH KOREAN WOMEN IN POLITICS: WHY SO FEW?

KYUNG-AE PARK

According to a 2005 report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which provides information on parliaments worldwide, the average number of women in national parliaments around the world was 16.3 percent. In Asia, the average stood at 15.9 percent. With 13.4 percent, South Korea ranked 76th among the total of 177 countries featured in the report. Although this rate was lower than the Asian average, it marked the best record in South Korean history. In 1996, after the 15th National Assembly (NA) elections, South Korea ranked 105th, and in 2000, following the 16th NA election, it was ranked 90th. Meanwhile, the 2005 UN Human Development Report assigned South Korea a gender-related development index ranking of 28th out of 177 nations. However, it placed only 59th in the UN report's gender empowerment measure, an index that assesses women's participation in political, economic, and decision-making processes.

Between 1948 and 2004, South Korea witnessed a mere 245 female candidates who ran for the NA district seats, a figure representing just 1.4 percent of the overall number of all district candidates. During this period, only 34 seats were won by 21 different women (some of whom were reelected), who represented merely 1 percent of the total NA membership. Among the total of all female-won seats, 10 were secured by women during the most recent NA election held in April 2004, which made a great leap forward by electing a total of 39 women representatives for both district and proportional representation (PR) seats. This represents the largest number of female members ever elected in the history of NA elections, and more than a twofold increase from the 16th NA, in which the 16 elected female assembly members accounted for 5.9 percent of the total membership. The problem of gender imbalance has also been prominent in local elections. From the first local election held in 1991 to the most recent 2002 election, women have occupied between 1 to 2 percent in the municipal local assemblies, and 1 to 6 percent in the provincial assemblies.

What factors could account for the low representation of South Korean women in politics? Studies on women and political participation have suggested a variety of possible explanations for a lack of women's electoral success;[1] however, most of these findings have been inconsistent and inconclusive. The present study will analyze how these contradictory views on women's underrepresentation might explain the South Korean case.

ATTITUDINAL FACTORS

Voter Discrimination

One of the most common explanations of women's underrepresentation attributes the problem to people's attitudes toward women in general: women are discriminated against by voters merely because of their sex. The voter discrimination explanation points out that voters tend to perceive women as less qualified to hold a public office than men and as single-issue candidates, who are concerned only with women's issues.[2] Other studies, however, have found that the blame on voter discrimination is misplaced.[3] They argue that although the voter hostility problem was clearly present in the past, it has largely vanished in recent years. According to the supporters of this view, candidates' gender has almost no influence on voter support, and, in fact, voters tend to respond better to female than to male candidates. Women are advantaged by greater conspicuousness: voters notice female candidates better and remember them much longer.[4]

In the case of South Korea, the attitudes of voters tend to corroborate the argument that voter discrimination is decreasing. In a survey conducted in 1988, 91 percent of men and about 60 percent of women indicated their support, everything else being equal, for male candidates.[5] However, another survey conducted in 1993 showed a conflicting result: 89 percent of both men and women indicated that they would

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vote for women, under the condition that female candidates were more qualified than men.[6] The most recent relevant survey, conducted in 2000 after the 16th NA election, showed some similar results: 85 percent of male and 90 percent of female respondents stated that they would vote for qualified women candidates. It was also found that younger generations tended to prefer women. Clearly, in South Korea, voter discrimination against women is decreasing.

Discrimination by Party Elites

Some scholars have also noted the existence of discrimination by party leaders: political parties, which are generally dominated by men, do not select women for safe seats because they view women as electoral liabilities.[7] In their view, women face difficulties with fundraising and with leading adequate campaigns. Some studies have suggested that women face discrimination by party elites in running for office and are often nominated in hopeless races.[8] It is also frequently found that women assume fewer leadership roles in party organizations. However, the evidence showing such discrimination by party elites has not been conclusive. For example, several studies have not found party elites discriminating against female candidates in their distribution of slating and funding.[9] It is also argued that not selecting women's candidates can potentially disadvantage political parties, because half of the electors are women, and major policy issues, such as health, family, and education require women's expertise and cooperation.

Nonetheless, in spite of decreasing voter discrimination in South Korea, women feel that they are still electorally disadvantaged because party elites give preference to male candidates. Between the 13th and the 16th NA elections, female district candidates nominated by their respective parties comprised only 1.4 percent of the total number of all candidates. In addition, although the 16th NA election introduced a quota system that guarantees a 30 percent minimum representation quota for women candidates running for the proportional representation system, the two major parties, the Grand National Party and the United Liberal Democrats, nominated women for only about 20 percent of seats. In the 2002 local assembly elections, political parties did not even follow the Political Parties Act, which was revised in 2000 to increase the female candidate quota to 50 percent for NA and 30 percent for local assemblies. Furthermore, although women comprise more than 50 percent of the total members of political parties, they only constitute between 10 to 20 percent of party officials in party governing bodies. The expectation that "[W]omen do the lickin' and stickin', while men plan the strategy"[10] still prevails in South Korea. It is thus not surprising that in a 2004 survey, over 40 percent of women pointed to a patriarchal party culture and a male-centered party organizational structure.[11]

In addition, the argument that political parties in South Korea do not nominate women for unsafe seats is questionable. In the 1995 local election, the ruling party nominated only one woman in its stronghold, the Yongnam region, but four in the Honam region, where support for the party was virtually nil: all four Honam candidates lost the election. This nomination pattern was also observed with the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP). One woman nominated in its stronghold, the Honam region, got elected, but all five nominated in hopeless races in the Yongnam region were defeated. Also, in the 2004 NA election, only 30 percent of the women candidates were nominated in the NDP's strongholds.[12] Considering the fact that 70 percent of women who were elected in the 2004 NA district election had previous political experience, and that all of them were nominated in their parties' strongholds, there is no doubt that parties play a crucial role in increasing female candidates' election success rates. Therefore, the finding that women do not face discrimination by party elites does not seem to hold for South Korea.

Socialization

Another controversial view that considers attitudinal factors relates to women's attitudes toward politics. It judges whether women have psychological barriers to entering the "public domain" and whether they are politically less ambitious than men. The socialization theory stresses that women are socialized into being more private, passive, caring, and family-oriented, while men are trained to become aggressive, independent, and assertive. Consequently, women are found not to be ambitious enough to pursue a political career, and when they do try to gain public office, they are destined to encounter psychological barriers, because they are breaking social norms by moving out of their comfort area into a domain belonging to men.[13] However, recently the socialization theory has been increasingly

challenged by feminist scholars, due to its "blame the victim" tendency. That is, the theory is faulted for holding women responsible for their underrepresentation.

In South Korea, the public-private distinction is being increasingly challenged. Even back in 1992, a survey suggested that 88.3 percent of male and female voters believed that able women should run for public office.[14] In 1995, the same attitude appeared to be evident among women voters.[15] South Korean women themselves do not seem to show any psychological barriers. In addition, the South Korean case questions the argument that women are not politically ambitious as a result of socialization. When questioned in various surveys during the 1990s if they would run for a political office again, almost half of the female local assembly members and National Assembly candidates responded positively; the percentage was not any different from that of men.[16] Thus, it is evident that in South Korea women are not less politically ambitious than men.

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

Role Conflicts

Some studies have stressed the impact of situational constraints placed on women as a cause of women's underrepresentation, highlighting in particular the traditional role assigned to women as homemakers, as well as women's perceived low socioeconomic and occupational status. Women have traditionally assumed primary family responsibilities, and the role of a homemaker is believed to inhibit political participation.[17] It is a confining and isolating role that often denies women access to such political resources as time and contacts. Many studies point out that female politicians are, on average, older than their male counterparts, as they defer their political careers until their children are older.[18] However, other studies indicate the possible existence of contrary evidence. Some scholars have shown that the effect of the complex wife-and-mother role is negligible,[19] while others have argued that conflicting role strains affect not only women, but also men.[20]

The South Korean case questions the assertion that women's family responsibilities have negligible effects. Many South Korean women politicians have encountered the problem of role conflicts. One male party leader asserted that party leaders did not have any prejudices in regards to sexual discrimination, but he also added that "if they (women) are faithful to home affairs they cannot be good politicians, never."[21] Role conflicts experienced by South Korean female politicians are primarily reflected in their late entry into the world of politics. According to various South Korean National Election Commission reports on NA elections, among the 105 women who have served in the NA over the past 58 years, the average age at the time of their appointment was 48.2 years. Also, since 78 percent (82 women) of them got elected only once, it seems quite clear that these female NA members had begun their parliamentary careers rather late, only after their reproduction role in marriage was fulfilled.

Women's late entry into politics also handicaps them in advancing their political career because of their resulting lack of political experience. South Korean voters in the 14th National Assembly election, during which all of the 19 female candidates failed in their electoral districts, stated that they did not vote for the women because of both their party affiliations and lack of political experience.[22] Among the women candidates who ran from the 1st to the 16th NA elections, only 45 percent had some previous political experience ranging from local to party politics, while, for example, in the 14th NA, about 85 percent of all male members already had political careers. The fact that all but one of the female NA district members elected in 2004 had political careers shows how crucial experience in political participation can be for women candidates. When women enter political office rather late, they fail to gain the experience that their male counterparts have acquired. The case of South Korean women politicians supports the argument that women tend to start their political careers late, most often only after their children are older, and thus are politically handicapped, as their role conflicts make it very hard for them to catch up with male politicians who are getting a head start.

Eligibility Pool

Another controversial situational factor deals with the limitations of the female eligibility pool. Studies supporting the eligibility pool argument observe that women have a lower educational and occupational status than men.[23] On the other hand, there is an argument that many women lawmakers come from traditionally female professions, such as teaching and

homemaking, and that having a professional occupation is associated with losing, not winning, in elections.[24] It is also contended that women's socioeconomic and occupational backgrounds are more diverse now than in the past.

There is no doubt that South Korean women have a lower socioeconomic status than men and that their occupational backgrounds are not as diverse as men's. Nevertheless, it appears difficult to support the eligibility pool argument in the case of South Korea. One indicator of women's eligibility pool is the level of women's education. In South Korea, female politicians have a higher educational status than their male counterparts. Among the 323 women candidates who ran in the initial 16 NA elections, 71 percent had received at least a college education and 31 percent held graduate degrees. Among the 39 female National Assembly members elected in 2004, all but 3 had some sort of college or higher education; 35 had actual college degrees, and of these, 20 held master's and another 9 had received doctoral degrees. Also, with 92 percent of all female candidates in the 2004 NA election holding college or graduate degrees, educational attainment was very high: 28 percent held master's and another 20 percent had doctoral degrees. Clearly, in South Korea, women candidates boast a higher-than-average educational status.

In terms of occupational backgrounds, most of the female National Assembly members have been professionals. While women remain underrepresented in the pool from which political elites are drawn, there have certainly been more women qualified for political leadership than the 105 women who served in the Assembly in the last 58 years. Furthermore, it appears that high eligibility requirements do not apply as much for local assemblies. In the first 1991 small-unit election, 46 percent of the women candidates and 54 percent of the elected representatives were housewives.[25] The argument that women's underrepresentation in the eligibility pool leads to women's underrepresentation in politics is thus difficult to make in the case of South Korea.

STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Electoral System

Political opportunity structures are cited as another obstacle to women's election to office. Many studies point out that more women are likely to run and be elected in multimember districts with proportional representation and a party list than in single-member districts (SMD). These studies demonstrate that in a SMD system, parties tend to select a candidate who is safe and able to maximize local support—usually a young or middle-aged married, professional male.[26] However, under PR, when a group of candidates runs as a team on a party list, women are often included to balance and broaden the party ticket in order to appeal to as many different segments of voters as possible. Therefore, some studies suggest that the PR system provides the best political opportunity for women. Nevertheless, other studies reveal reservations about this argument, pointing out that some SMDs have elected more women than PR systems.

The electoral system in South Korea appears to support the contention that a PR system with party lists favors higher levels of women's representation than a district system. In South Korea, the initial five NA elections were held under a single-member district system. Before the 6th NA, the electoral system changed to combine local districts and national districts based on party lists. The average number of women in the legislature under a combination of districts and party lists represents 3.8 percent (covering the 6th through 17th NA elections, when both district and party lists were used), while that of the first five assemblies under only a district system was 0.7 percent. Women elected through party lists occupied a total of 96 seats during the period ranging from the 6th through 17th NA elections, while only 34 seats were won by women from districts (during the period between the 1st and 17th NA elections).

Clearly, the significant strides women made in the 2004 NA election need to be attributed to the quota system, which, through the revision of Article 31 of the Political Parties Act, allotted women 30 percent of district nominations and 50 percent for PR. The same pattern can be found in local elections. The 1995 local election, which introduced the PR system, advanced 42 women into the large-unit local assemblies through party lists, while only 13 were elected from districts. Those 42 women represented 44 percent of the total 95 elected proportionally.

District Size

Some studies also suggest that there is a direct relationship between women's representation and the number of representatives per district: the larger the district, the higher the women's turnover.[27] However, others argue

that a large-sized district is not necessarily beneficial to women, as it makes political campaigning more difficult and requires more campaign funds.[28]

In South Korea, the research findings that a larger district magnitude provides more political opportunities for women appear to prevail. Between the 9th and 12th NA elections, which adopted two-member districts, the winning rate of women was on average 25 percent (35.5 percent for men), while under the single-member district system it stood only at 11 percent.[29] As for local elections, the 1995 small-unit assembly election introduced a variety of district sizes: 42 single-member, 60 two-member, 4 three-member districts, and 1 four-member district. In the single-seat districts, 8 women were elected out of 42 women candidates; the success rate of women was 19 percent. On the other hand, in districts where more than two members were elected, 27 out of 65 women won the election, setting the success rate at 41 percent. In sum, large districts elected a significantly greater proportion of women than single-seat districts.

CONCLUSION

This analysis implies that discrimination by party leaders, women's role conflicts, and a limited political opportunity structure for women exacerbate women's underrepresentation in South Korea. However, women's political representation in South Korea could be greatly expanded through some policy and institu-

Table I. Female Legislators in South Korea's National Assembly

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent the elected legislators from electoral districts.

Election	Total	Number of Women	Percentage of Women
Constitutional Assembly (1948)	200	1 (1)	0.5
2nd (1950)	210	2 (2)	1.0
3rd (1954)	203	1 (1)	0.5
4th (1958)	233	3 (3)	1.3
5th (1960)	233	1 (1)	0.4
6th (1963)	175	2 (1)	1.1
7th (1967)	175	3 (1)	1.7
8th (1971)	204	5 (0)	2.5
9th (1973)	219	12 (2)	5.5
10th (1979)	231	8 (1)	3.5
11th (1981)	276	9 (1)	3.3
12th (1985)	276	8 (2)	2.9
13th (1988)	299	6 (0)	2.0
14th (1992)*	299	4 (0)	1.3
15th (1996)	299	9 (2)	3.0
16th (2000)	273 (227)	16 (5)	5.9
17th (2004)	299 (243)	39 (10)	13.0

Source: Compiled from various South Korean National Election Commission reports on National Assembly elections.
*In the byelection of August 1994, one woman was elected for the seat that had been occupied by her husband.

tional changes. In terms of policy changes, discrimination by party leaders is expected to decrease with the recently introduced quota system in the nomination process. The effects of structural barriers can also be mitigated through the same policy change. However, this policy lacks mandatory stipulations. It only recommends that political parties work toward ensuring that 30 percent of district candidates for both NA and local assemblies are women, offering additional aid for those who comply with the recommendation. Given that not all political parties have adhered to this system in nominations, the revision of the law to include mandatory stipulations would facilitate more effective implementation of the law. In addition, as the electoral system is predominantly a district system in South Korea, an expansion of the proportional representation and quota systems would provide more political opportunities for women. The structural incentive system has proved to be highly beneficial even in a Confucian society such as Taiwan that has high patriarchal values like South Korea.

Meanwhile, developing solutions based on institutionalization, even more so than changing attitudes about traditional sex roles, would relieve women's double burdens in political career and family responsibility. For example, in order to alleviate women's role conflicts, mechanisms such as an institutionalization of the childcare system need to be considered. This would entail more government involvement in the childcare system, such as the establishment of a public childcare system; the provision of subsidies for childcare facilities; and the creation of a mandatory childcare system for large businesses.

ENDNOTES

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WOMEN IN POLITICS: KOREA'S PROGRESS

R. DARCY

Korea's modern political history began in 1945 with a sharp, clean break so destructive and thorough that there was no possibility of continuity with the past. New political institutions modeled on international designs came into being. Yet before Koreans could adapt to these new structures, they became involved in an internationalized civil war followed by two periods of military rule. This, in the words of one political woman, made political involvement a "death penalty offense" in the event that someone—male or female—ended up on the wrong side.[1] Nonetheless, women, from a sense of patriotic duty, took the risk and joined both government and opposition.

At any rate, during these first 50 years of modern political life, control over tanks and military units was more relevant than popular appeal or political acumen. So all women were a political afterthought.

By the mid-1990s, however, South Korea had become a modern, functioning, democratic political system. Koreans are now seeking to do politically what Europeans began in 1945: to achieve a functioning democratic society, using the most progressive European societies as models. South Koreans, like Europeans before them, understand that the failure to include women represents a democratic deficit. They seek to accomplish women's political advancement through attitude change and electoral design.

ATTITUDE CHANGE

Democratic and Confucian values are often at odds. Democracy, as it has been understood since the American and French revolutions, seeks to create a society centered on equality of rights and opportunity. With Confucianism, in contrast, one's rights and opportunities are defined by one's sex, among other things. Confucian attitudes have been a part of being Korean for centuries. Today, South Koreans also learn democratic values in school and through the media. Family, social, work, and political lives are arenas where Confucian and democratic values conflict in South Korea. This tension can be seen in Korean elementary school student responses to a 1983 survey. These children overwhelmingly agreed that women should take care of the home and children while men have careers. But, at the same time, these children also thought women should have the same political and career opportunities as men.

Likewise, in a 1990 survey, young adults overwhelmingly felt South Korean women did not enjoy the same rights as men, but only a bare majority felt women make as strong leaders as do men (see Table I).

An emphasis on democratic values, as opposed to Confucian ones, is now emerging as a prominent trend in South Korea. This is driven by both the country's desire for international recognition as a developed and modern nation and by internal political developments. Further, the trend is reinforced in schools and in the media. But the change will not be immediate. Now, and in the near future, democratic values, while favored in the abstract, will continue to clash with Confucian practice.

Nonetheless, we can see some of this change when we compare popular explanations for the failure of female candidates to make gains in the 13th (1988) and 16th (2000) South Korean National Assembly elections (see Table II). In 1990, many blamed social prejudice against women. In 2000, considerably fewer took this view. Instead, in 2000 female candidates were often faulted for being from the wrong party, holding the wrong positions, not being well-known, or hailing from the wrong region. The implication was that a well-known woman of the right party and holding the right views could have been elected.

While the reality was basically the same in 1990 and 2000—that is, few women were elected—the popular explanation cited for this lack of electoral success changed from prejudice to political factors.

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Table I. Attitudes of South Korean Elementary Students and Young Adults Toward Women's Roles

Note: Total number of responses to each question appear at right. "Dk/Na" denotes "don't know/no answer."

National sample of South Korean elementary school students (September 1983)		
"Politics is for men. Women should not be involved in government and politics."		
Agree	18.4%	
Disagree	81.6%	
Total (n)	100.0%	2097
"Women should have children and keep house. Men should work and have a career."		
Agree	68.1%	
Disagree	31.9%	
Total (n)	100.0%	2097
"Women and men have the same opportunities for careers and politics."		
Agree	72.7%	
Disagree	27.3%	
Total (n)	100.0%	2100
National sample of young South Korean adults ages 18–39 (July, October 1990)		
"Women are weaker leaders than are men."		
Agree	35.3%	
Disagree	51.5%	
Dk/Na	13.2%	
Total (n)	100.0%	1494
"It is difficult for men politicians to represent women's interests."		
Agree	51.5%	
Disagree	26.8%	
Dk/Na	21.7%	
Total (n)	100.0%	1494
"Korean women do not have equal rights with men."		
Agree	76.9%	
Disagree	15.7%	
Dk/Na	7.4%	
Total (n)	100.0%	1494

Sources: R. Darcy and Chong-Min Hyun, "Women in the South Korean Electoral System," in *Electoral Systems in Comparative Perspective: Their Impact on Women and Minorities,* eds. Wilma Rule and Joseph Zimmerman (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 173.

Table II. Public Attitudes About Failure to Elect More Women: 1990 and 2000

National survey of South Korean adults, 1990 and 2000		
In 1990, subjects were asked, "What do you think is the reason women candidates failed to make gains in the 13th (1988) election?" In 2000, subjects were asked to complete this sentence: "Women candidates could not win in 2000 (16th election) because-"		
Response	**2000**	**1990**
Women candidates lack ability	27.3%	18.8%
Low qualification of voters		11.7%
Lack of nomination opportunities		7.0%
Lack of quotas for women candidates		5.3%
Prejudice of party leaders		2.0%
Woman candidates not well-known	21.6%	
Voters did not like her party	23.4%	
Voters did not like her positions	3.8%	
Regional prejudice	4.8%	
Social prejudice against women	14.7%	44.6%
Don't know/No answer	4.4%	10.6%
Total:	100.0%	100.0%

Sources: Personal communication from Eun Kyung Kim, Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI), February 2006; and R. Darcy and Chong-Min Hyun, "Women in the South Korean Electoral System," in *Electoral Systems in Comparative Perspective: Their Impact on Women and Minorities,* eds. Wilma Rule and Joseph Zimmerman (Westpost, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 174.

ELECTION SYSTEM FACTORS ADVANTAGING WOMEN

Europe, Japan, and New Zealand view election systems, and the rules under which they function, as factors to be adjusted to reduce the "democratic deficit," one aspect of which is the poor representation of women. South Korea is following this approach to elections.

Generally, there are two formal features of an election system that facilitate the nomination and election of women. These are election from a proportional representation list and quotas. In list proportional representation systems, votes are for a party. Winners are taken from the top of the list down so that the proportion of seats a party wins approximates the party's vote proportion. Quotas can require that a certain percentage of the list be women or that a woman and a man must alternate on the list. List proportional representation and quotas are not without their downsides and controversy. Quotas give advantage to a favored group over merit or qualifications. Additionally, lists and quotas strengthen party bosses, who make the selection against "the people" who might make the selection more democratically.

Nonetheless, since 1963, South Korea has used some form of a party list to elect between 15 (15th elections, 1996) and 33 percent (9th–12th elections, 1973–1985) of the National Assembly (see Table III).

National List and District Elections

Women are more likely to run in, and to be elected from, proportional representation lists than from single-member districts (see Table IV).[2] This is because women candidates have generally been less oriented toward running against someone and more oriented

Table III. Election of Male (M) and Female (F) Candidates by Year and Election Method

Election		Single-Member		Two-Member		National List		All		Grand Totals	
Year	No.	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	Total	%F
1948	1	199	1					199	1	200	0.50
1950	2	208	2					208	2	210	0.95
1954	3	202	1					202	1	203	0.49
1958	4	230	3					230	3	233	1.29
1960	5	232	1					232	1	233	0.43
1963	6	130	1			43	1	173	2	175	1.14
1967	7	130	1			42	2	172	3	175	1.71
1971	8	153	0			46	5	199	5	204	2.45
1973	9			144	2	63	10	207	12	219	5.48
1978	10			153	1	70	7	223	8	231	3.46
1981	11			183	1	84	8	267	9	276	3.26
1985	12			182	2	86	6	268	8	276	2.90
1988	13	224	0			69	6	293	6	299	2.01
1992	14	236	1			55	7	291	8	299	2.68
1996	15	251	2			39	7	290	9	299	3.01
2000	16	222	5			35	11	247	16	263	6.08
2004	17	233	10			27	29	260	39	299	13.04

Sources: R. Darcy and Chong-Min Hyun, "Women in the South Korean Electoral System," in *Electoral Systems in Comparative Perspective: Their Impact on Women and Minorities,* eds. Wilma Rule and Joseph F. Zimmerman (Westport, CT: Greenwood 1994), 171–181; and personal communication from Eun Kyung Kim, Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI).

toward running for themselves and their party. Further, it is easier for parties to gender-balance tickets on national lists than it is in single-member districts.

Women comprise a larger percentage of those elected from national lists in the 12 South Korean elections using lists than those elected from the single-member or two-member district systems. Between the 1st and 16th elections (1948–2000), women averaged 0.77 percent of those selected from districts (one or two person), and 10.28 percent of those selected from national lists.

In 2004, after the introduction of quotas, women accounted for 51.79 percent of those elected from national lists. Unfortunately for women, the proportion of the National Assembly elected from lists dropped from a high of one-third between 1973 and 1985 to a low of 15 percent in 1996. In 2004, 18.72 percent of the National Assembly were elected from lists and 13.04 percent of the elected Assembly were women. If a third had been elected from lists, all things being equal, the 2004 National Assembly would have been 20.01 percent female. Increasing the proportion elected from lists will speed the election of women.

Quotas

Before the 16th (2000) National Assembly election, the law was changed to stipulate that 30 percent of

Table IV. Percentage of South Korean Women Elected by Election System: 1948–2004

Year	Single-Member	Two-Member	List
1948	0.50		
1950	0.95		
1954	0.49		
1958	1.29		
1960	0.43		
1963	0.76		2.27
1967	0.76		4.55
1971	0.00		9.80
1973		1.37	13.70
1978		0.65	9.09
1981		0.54	8.70
1985		1.09	6.52
1988	0.00		8.00
1992	0.42		11.29
1996	0.79		15.22
2000	2.20		23.91
2004	4.12		51.79

Source: author's calculations from Table III.

party lists must have female candidates.[3] Then, before the 17th (2004) parliamentary election, the electoral law was changed again to require that parties nominate women to 50 percent of lists and 30 percent of district positions.[4] Given that district nominations require success in a primary election, and given that women can be nominated in districts in which their parties stand little chance of victory, fulfilling the quota for the districts—much less increasing the proportions of women *elected* from districts—has proved difficult. Nonetheless, the list quotas proved workable and successful, with women making up over 29 percent of those elected from lists in 2000, and 50 percent in 2004 (see Tables V and VI).

Ruling Party

Between 1948 and 1992, South Korean democracy—with some exceptions—was hierarchical and, for a long period, controlled by the military. Opposition parties validated democratic structures without actually having the immediate hope of participating in government. Under these circumstances, the obligation to bring women into political life was felt by the governing party, not the opposition (see Tables VII and VIII).[5]

During the two periods of military rule (1960–1978 and 1981–1988), the governing parties assumed the burden of bringing women into political life, in part as an effort to appear democratic and in part to gain international stature. There was also a sense of duty to modernize South Korea.

In the early 1948–1958 period, government and opposition parties alike had a similar lack of success electing women, with both often experiencing election rates of less than 1 percent. In the Park Chung Hee era, the government party's representation in the National Assembly was almost 3 percent women while the opposition's female representation was virtually nonexistent. Likewise, in the Chun Doo Hwan and Rho Tae Woo eras, the government party's national assembly

Table V. National List Results Before and After the Introduction of Quotas

Elections	Male %	Female %	Total	Number of Cases
1948–1996	91.01	8.99	100	656
2000–2004	60.78	39.22	100	102
Total	86.94	13.06	100	758

Source: author's calculations from Table III.

Table VI. Single-Member District Results Before and After the Introduction of Quotas

Elections	Male %	Female %	Total	Number of Cases
1948–2000	99.26	0.74	100	2435
2004	95.88	4.12	100	243
Total	98.95	1.05	100	2678

Source: author's calculations from Table III.

Table VII. Election of Women by Ruling and Opposition Party

Year	% Women Ruling Party	% Women Opposition
1948	0.00	0.69
1950	0.00	1.08
1954	0.88	0.00
1958	1.59	0.93
1960	0.57	0.00
1963	0.91	1.54
1967	0.78	4.35
1971	3.54	1.10
1973	6.85	2.74
1978	4.83	1.16
1981	5.30	0.80
1985	4.73	0.78
1988	4.00	0.57
1992	na	na
1996	3.65	2.47
2000	7.83	4.43
2004	11.18	14.97

Source: author's calculations from Table III.

Table VIII. Women Members of National Assembly as Percentage of Ruling and Opposition Party Members (Mean Percent of Women)

Period	Government	Opposition
1948–1958	0.94	0.76
1960–1978	2.93	0.28
1981–1988	4.46	0.70
1996–2004	7.67	7.07

Source: author's calculations from Table III.

delegation had 4 percent women while the opposition had less than 1 percent. Today, however, bringing forward women is the felt responsibility of all parties, with both government and opposition parties averaging over 7 percent.

ELECTION SYSTEM FACTORS THAT SHOULD ADVANTAGE WOMEN (BUT HAVE NOT)

Some election system factors that should favor women in South Korea have in fact not done so.

The Political Triumph-Political Disaster Cycle

We can look at the social and the political systems as related in such a way that changes in the one reflect changes in the other. The political can lag behind the social system when the electoral arrangements slow change. For example, the tremendous advantage of incumbents in American congressional elections inhibits women. A correction is term limits. Or, the social can lag behind the political system when the electoral arrangements are appropriately manipulated. Quotas for women are an example of an electoral arrangement for changing the political so that it is ahead of the social system.

One electoral factor that maintains a balance between the political and social systems is the political triumph-political disaster cycle, an expectation of volatility in which, over time, a party will lose a great deal of seats in one election and gain many seats in some subsequent election. The Canadian and New Zealand systems have regularly turned majority political parties into small parties while elevating small parties to majority status.[6] This has the effect of displacing large numbers of elites and replacing them with new faces. For societies that have changed the make-up of their elites between elections, a vote will yield a new legislature reflecting this change. Political stasis, in contrast, maintains the same elites one election after another, inhibiting the ability of the political system to refresh itself. American congressional elections are characterized by this stasis and the election of women has been held back.

South Korea has had a politically volatile recent past. Political parties and regimes have triumphed and collapsed over the past sixty years.[7] In 2004, the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) dropped from 115 seats in the 16th Legislature to 9 in the 17th while the Uri Party, which did not exist in 2000, gained 154 of 299 seats in 2004.[8] However, contrary to what the triumph-disaster cycle would predict, this did not result in dramatic gains for women, and for two reasons. First, the reality for women in South Korean society was such that they could not take advantage of political turmoil. The in and the out political elites were both dominated by males. Second, the political turmoil was to some extent a surface phenomenon. Political party strength changed through political defections rather than electoral defeat. South Korean women, therefore, are not yet poised to join a wave of new faces.

New Political Structures

Venerable political institutions take on the characteristics of their members. Therefore, resembling the incumbents becomes the criterion for new membership in these old institutions. As most political institutions have long been male-dominated, this, in itself, has become a barrier to women. New political structures, however, do not have this problem, as they are in principle devoid of any gender domination. Therefore, if women are otherwise ready they should do better taking positions in new institutions. In the 1990s, South Korea replaced appointed local govern-

mental structures with elected provincial governors, metropolitan councils, and local councils. Because these were new, they could not be said to have acquired male domination.

One would particularly expect these new Korean political structures to benefit women in politics because of the structures' local nature. National government involves great questions of state and war, the public sphere reserved for men. By contrast, local government historically involves primary education, charity, adjudication of private economic disputes, and maintenance of religious institutions—all matters falling into the private sphere reserved in many ancient societies for women. Therefore, these new local political structures better fit the Confucian roles reserved for women than national government.

However, contrary to what would be expected, women fared poorly. In the 3rd local elections, voters elected only 2 governors (8 percent); 14 metropolitan councilors (2.3 percent); and 77 local councilors (2.2 percent), leading Wonghong Kim and Eunkyung Kim to characterize South Korea's government, with regard to women, as an "inverted triangular structure."[9] That is, the higher the governmental level, the more women were elected, and vice versa. In Europe and the United States, the pattern has been the opposite.[10]

In 2003, the National Assembly amended the Political Parties Act to require that political parties nominate women to a minimum of one-third of the proportional representation lists for the metropolitan councils.[11]

CONCLUSION

South Koreans have barely had a decade of normal democratic political life. The society is strongly committed to making a success of democracy, including establishing an equitable place for women. The nation's mass media and schools stress democratic values and the need to provide equal opportunity for women. The government established and funds the Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI), a women's think tank. Nongovernmental organizations such as the Korean League of Women Voters work for women's political access. South Koreans are in the process of achieving a synthesis between being Korean and being democratic.

Electoral arrangements have been carefully studied over the past two decades. We know how to advantage—and disadvantage—women candidates. The South Korean political establishment has accommodated women with quotas and list proportional representation. Female scholars are turning their attention to the candidate selection system and primaries, and these scholars are developing proposals for further reform.[12] There is intense statistical and media pressure for more action. Women scholars repeatedly bombard South Koreans with powerful documentation of their statistical bottom-dwelling in various international indicators of gender progress.

South Koreans are self-conscious about the political role of women and committed to change. They have a reputation for doing the difficult and making it look easy.

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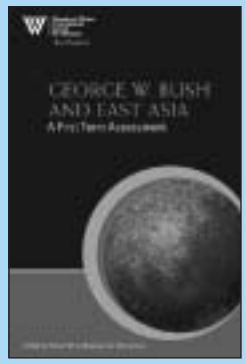

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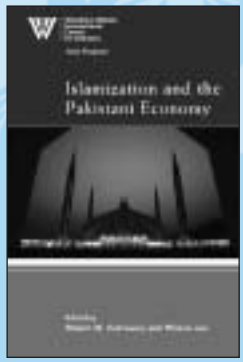

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