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PARTICIPATION OF KOREAN WOMEN IN POLITICAL LIFE

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Abstract

The article examines the history of the formation of the study of the status of women in society, there is a lot of debate about the type of social system that is most conducive to the emancipation of women. The Western model of modernization implies that accelerated industrialization removes traditional restrictions for women and will change the traditional sexual division of labor, thereby contributing to the liberation of women. This is due to the fact that the results of modernization primarily affected men working in the public sphere, while women were limited to the domestic sphere.

Thus, the widespread subordination or submission of women, from this point of view, in capitalist societies is seen as a deviation from the proclaimed Western social norms of equality, freedom and justice. It is assumed that all problems of gender inequality in society can be solved within the framework of the Western system through the introduction of legal reforms and changing attitudes towards them. According to this point of view, it is assumed that women can be liberated by being integrated into the modernization process and the social and political sphere of capitalist structures.

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

INTRODUCTION

South Korean women's participation in politics began with the resistance movement against Japanese colonization. Women actively participated in the independence movement. One example is the First March movement in 1919, during which many women dedicated their lives to the struggle for the country's independence as active supporters and volunteers. However, these independent female activists were unknown until they became the subject of research by feminist scholars [1].

Among the women resistance leaders, three women became politicians in the newly

established South Korean government, namely Shin Yim-yeon, Jeong Pak-soon, and Suk Pak-hyun. After liberation from Japan, the people formed political parties for women. Shin Yim-yeon formed the first political party called Daehan yoja kukmindang (National Party of Korean Women) in 1945, while Jeong Pak-soon organized Konguk bunyo dongmaeng (Women's Alliance for National Construction), which tried to promote women's participation in the construction projects of the South Korean government in 1948, and Suk Pak-hyun organized Ibuk yosong dongiho (Northern Women's Scholarship Association) [1]. The

participation of South Korean women in the political life of the country can be divided into three periods: the period from 1948 to 1961; the modernization period from the 1960s to 1970s under the Park Chung-hee regime; and, the democratic transition from the mid-1980s. According to the observations of South Korean researcher Seo Bong-sook [1], women's participation in politics during the first period was carried out by a few pioneering women. Moreover, they were passive in matters concerning women and did not consider themselves to be acting on behalf of women. In the Confucian tradition, women's participation in politics was very limited, unlike men, who were encouraged to succeed as scholar-bureaucrats with Confucian teachings. Only a few women who belonged to well-known, privileged families and had a high social background were appointed to government positions by the government.

In the second period, some prominent women participated in supporting the authoritative government, but there were also changes influenced by two things. First, from 1982 to 1997, the democratic movement developed in South Korea, which strengthened the understanding of the need for women to participate in political life. During this period, rapid social changes occurred; both low-wage women and educated professional women participated in social and economic activities. Second, the women's movement was influenced by the global wave of women's organizations, such as the proclamation of International Women's Year by the United Nations in 1975, and from that time on, women's movements became more active. In addition, with the introduction of local autonomy, the transition to democratic political government and rapid economic development in the 1980s stimulated women's participation in political life, and this became one of the important stages of the women's movement [2].

Although women are underrepresented in virtually all elected positions around the world, women's participation in the political arena is a growing trend in the 21st century. Until the second decade of the 20th century, only New Zealand and Australia granted women the right to vote in national elections [3].

Since the founding of the Republic of Korea, under previous dictatorial governments (Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan), most civil movements were aimed at establishing democracy and gender issues were not on the agenda. Only since the 1990s have citizens begun to pay more attention to women's participation in politics in South Korea. The Fourth UN World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995)[4] proposed discussing the issue of gender quotas. The conference emphasized the importance of increasing women's representation in political life and spread the idea that gender quotas are the fastest way to achieve this goal throughout the world.

Before 1980, only 10 countries had gender quotas, but in the 1980s, the number increased to 12. In the 1990s, more than 50 countries introduced quotas, and in the 2000s, more than 40 countries did so. There are currently 130 countries [5], with quota systems, and more than 75 countries have introduced quota systems since the 1995 World Conference on Women [6].

An amendment to the Public Office Elections Act in March 2010 introduced for the first time a mandatory quota for women candidates in local council constituencies, requiring political parties to nominate more than one woman candidate per general constituency [6].

Women in South Korea have been viewed as largely apolitical, largely due to socialization into gender roles at home, school, and the media [7].

With the adoption of the Constitution of South Korea on July 17, 1948, women's rights to

employment and education were emphasized in an attempt to prohibit discrimination. Article 9, paragraph 1 of the 1987 Constitution states that all citizens of the Republic of Korea "shall be equal before the law, and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic, social or cultural life on the basis of sex, religious belief, and social status." The country's constitution also stipulates that all citizens over the age of 19 have the right to run for election. In the 2019 elections, the voting age was lowered from 19 to 18 [8].

The process of women's empowerment can be traced back to the administration of President Kim Dae-jung.

Kim Dae-jung's election as chief executive in 1997 was a milestone in women's empowerment in South Korea. In the midst of the financial crisis, Kim Dae-jung's campaign promised to be a "prepared president," a "people's president," and a "women-friendly president"[9]. Although women were granted the right to vote as early as 1948, they remained marginalized in the political life of the male-dominated Confucian society. Women were given little attention during elections, as it was assumed that women's decisions would conform to their husband's idea. In the late 1990s, political parties began to demonstrate a greater commitment to reducing gender inequality in order to create a modern image and attract female voters.

In 1997, democratic consolidation in South Korea was further strengthened when women's participation in elections became evident, as women constituted half of the voters. It was an unprecedented election that showed a change in women's consciousness, as women's active participation in political life provided a significant opportunity to assert their social significance in society[9].

Kim Dae Jung's gender policy included issues of labor, social security, family, and women's human

rights in South Korea. According to the Kim Dae Jung government's gender policy [9]: 1) Women were to make up 30% of the party's candidates in all elections; 2) 30% of the positions on government ministry committees would be allocated to women; 3) Women's representation in party organizations would increase by more than 30%; 4) at least four women would be appointed to cabinet positions, and 20 to 30% of important leadership positions would be filled by women; 5) female students would not be discriminated against in the entrance examinations for special-purpose colleges (e.g., Junior Railway College, Accountancy College, and Junior Cooperative Agricultural College); and 6) to increase the percentage of women recruited into the Army, Navy, and Air Force Academies [10].

Thus, the Kim Dae-jung regime has made notable changes to the role of women in the government's push for participatory democracy, but meaningful inclusion of women in the political sphere that goes beyond the numbers game is a key component to achieving real progress. As Dr. Seo Bong-sook argues: women must help the nation achieve rapid democratization. If the Republic of Korea's ongoing democratic experiments fail to achieve the results achieved so far, the momentum and unity could easily be undermined [11].

Changes in attitudes toward women among voters and political parties have also played a role in the increase in the number of women in politics. In the run-up to the 2004 elections, women were seen as a possible alternative to the existing male-dominated politics tainted by corruption and power struggles. Incumbent female legislators had better performance records than their male counterparts, helping to overcome some of the prejudices about women's ability to succeed in politics. Women with parliamentary experience fared better than their male counterparts in elections: while two-thirds of the representatives

in the 17th National Assembly were newcomers, seven out of ten women who won had parliamentary experience.

By 2004, political parties had become more concerned with creating a modern image that included women in their ranks. This change resulted not only in more women in high positions on proportional lists, but also in the selection of a woman as party spokesperson and thus the public face of the party. A few weeks before the April 2004 parliamentary elections, all three major parties appointed a female speaker, marking the first time that South Korean parties did not wait for legislation to advance women, but did so voluntarily. That same year, the conservative Hannara (Great Country Party) also elected a woman, Park Geun-hye, as party chairperson.

The election of Park Geun-hye as South Korea's first female president on December 19, 2012, marked a turning point for women in South Korean politics. South Korea had not elected a woman president since its founding in 1948 [12]. She competed against Moon Jae-in, who will become the country's president in snap elections from 2017 to 2022. According to South Korean experts, Park Geun-hye's campaign team faced conflicting demands to either emphasize traditional female stereotypes or create a more masculine image to offset the negative effects of gender stereotypes [13]. Analysis of media coverage shows that Park Geun-hye was portrayed in a more masculine light compared to her rival [14].

Women's organizations try to influence government policy not only through well-trained and educated activists, but also through efforts to mobilize the public for their goals using various strategies such as lobbying, signature collection, demonstrations, and issue-based advocacy. Although women's organizations are relatively well organized, groups that can represent opposition are less coordinated. Conservative

groups such as Confucian organizations have only a small number of active supporters who are unable to mount significant opposition. Political parties are also unable to resist legislative changes in favor of women.

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