

Crimes against Women in Korea: Feminism Movement and its Obstacles

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Thesis

- Study the key characteristics of feminist movements concerning sexual crimes against women in Korea from the 1990s to the present
- Argue that such movements have highlighted two major issues in Korea – pro-natalist approach of the government and intensifying gender war.
- Despite that women's situation has improved because of the different movements held, there are still certain obstacles stopping women from receiving fairer treatment from the society.

Situation of women in the 1990s

- A part of Korea's culture emphasized the idea that woman's sexual fidelity belonged to her husband. Many sexual assault survivors tended to think they had brought shame to herself and her family when she underwent such incident (Jung 16).
- In workplace, the society treated sexual harassment to women as trivial and acceptable, something they had to endure if they chose to work instead of taking care of their family (Jung 71; Hasunuma and Shin 99).

Korean women's movements in the 1990s

Approaches

- Raising the awareness of public towards the presence of gendered issues in the society
- Pushing forward legal reform to protect the victims
- Publicizing cases related to sexual violence and campaigned for legal reform

Impacts

- Establishment of several laws to uphold women's rights
- Set up of significant government departments and women's organizations
- Abolition of the family-head system of family law, hoju system, in 2005

Limitations of success

- Only 29% of respondents said they had received education on sexual harassment in 2007 (Jung 72).
- Korean women's organizations failed to tackle with the root cause of sexual crimes, which was to prevent women from being discriminated from the deeply patriarchal society.

Reason for limited success

- Only a large number of serious cases could grab the public's attention and sympathy and prompt women's organizations to work on women's rights (Jung 18).
- Women's organizations in the 1990s could not prevent sexual crimes from happening (Jung 113).

Foreseeable Obstacles of Korean Women's Movements in the Future

Pro-natalist Approach of the State

- Since the start of 2000s, Korean government saw its declining economic growth and linked it with the low birth rate as the government believed that low birth rate weakened the competitiveness of the nation (Lee qtd in Bae 91).

In December 2016, the government proposed an online "National Birth-Maps" which is a distribution map that visualized the number of women of reproductive age living in each municipality via the use of pink dots (Lee and Jeong 637).



Conclusion

- From the 1990s to the 2010s, Gender issues have achieved different goals including raising the awareness of the public to the deeply-rooted gender inequality in the society, pushing forward legal reforms regarding sexual violence against women and increasing the number of women identifying themselves as feminists.
- However, South Korea still ranks as one of the lowest countries in terms of gender equality as the 108th out of 153 countries in 2019 according to the World Economic Forum (Bae 787).
- Korean woman's movements still have a long way to go in order to achieve gender equality in the society.

Situation of Women in the 2000s

- Women face a more serious wage, employment and workplace role discrimination (H, Kim 256).
- Female workers' wages are about 40% less than that of male workers on average
- in a survey conducted by KOSIS in 2019 (Lee and Jeong 640).

Online Korean Women's Movement in the 2010s Characteristics and Impacts

The involvement of online platform

Its anonymity, easy mobilization makes it easier for individual to speak up their own personal stories (Citron qtd. in Kim, J.S., 2017 "Iamfeminist" 806; H, Kim 244; Hasunuma and Shin 100).



In the #Iamfeminist movement on Twitter in 2015, there were approximately 3,600 tweets which shared personal stories on gender inequality, with around 26,500 times of retweet.

Able to bypass traditional mass media gatekeepers

The public can develop counternarratives on online platforms (Bae 771). Online platforms can connect separate events and issues together. (Eagle qtd. in Kim, J.S., 2017 "Iamfeminist" 807).

The sticky notes movement in response to the 2016 Gangnam station murder case



A user on Twitter suggested to leave tributes to the victims. It accumulated more than a thousand sticky notes at the Gangnam Station Exit 10. A series of offline protest and gatherings, were organized as follow-up events (Kim, J.S. 2021b, "The Resurgence" 76).

An organization or a representative is not necessary

The leaders of the Korean women's movements have changed from progressive students and activists to ordinary citizens (Kim, J.S. 2021b, "The Resurgence" 78).



In 2018, Seo Ji-hyeon, a prosecutor, sparked the #MeToo movement in the Korean peninsula by revealing her sexual harassment experience by her seniors (H, Kim 244).

Intensified Gender War

- The balance between gender equality and discrimination towards either of the genders is difficult to maintain when some of the anti-sexual violence movements go extreme
- When the movement goes extreme, gender war will achieve nothing but only provoke greater anger between the two genders. It can easily evolve into disseminating vitriol or focused attacks on victims (Jeong and Lee 706).



In #MeToo movement, men began to advocate for completely avoiding unnecessary interaction with women colleagues after the sparking of the #MeToo movement in the society (Bae 770).

Selected Works Cited

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