The Importance of Globalization in Developing Queer Culture in South Korea

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Introduction and History

For the longest time in Korean history, LGBT issues have been hidden under the surface of society. Before heavily implementing globalization, decades of military dictatorship posed a hostile environment to gay culture in Korea. Government was opposed of liberal political agendas and democratic ideals while national solidarity and political stability were promoted (Bong 88). Therefore, at the time, any public appearance of queer culture was considered a rebellion against the government. At the same time, the Chosŏn dynasty's neo-Confucianism was enforced by the military regimes to carry out military and industrial mobilization of the citizens. Neo-Confucianism opposed sexual minorities because they regard same-sex relationships were a disruption to "gender hierarchy, duty, and family over personal priorities and preference" (Bong 88). Therefore, the end of military regimes in 1987 provided an opportunity for the expansion of LGBT culture.

Beginning in the 1960s, Korea adopted and began to pursue an outward-looking, open economic policy. However, it was not until 1997 that Korea started heavily implementing Segyhewa (global Korea) after the 1997 financial crisis which created economic regression in Asia which later led to multiculturalism in Korea (Thomsen 413). Since the government seeks economic and political independence in an international context, both the government and Koreans want to emulate those who have achieved such power as role models, which in the case of South Korea is the West. Western countries have higher acceptance of queer culture, which then affected Koreans' mindset and increased tolerance and acceptance of queer culture

The Role of Globalization in Developing Queer Culture

Globalization allows Koreans to connect with foreigners. Authorities Adjusted immigration laws to attract foreign labors. Korea saw a 60% increase in short-term economic migrants from 1997 to 2007 (Watson 237). Globalization also makes oversea transportation easier, which encourage people to go on international trips. According to the following graph, the number of Korean tourists going on international trips soared after 1987, from less than 1million departures before 1987 to over 12 million departures in 2006 (Alaeddinoglu and Can 522). The increased contact with LGBT culture improved citizens' tolerance of LGBT content, and it also encouraged the appearance of queer culture in the Korean public.
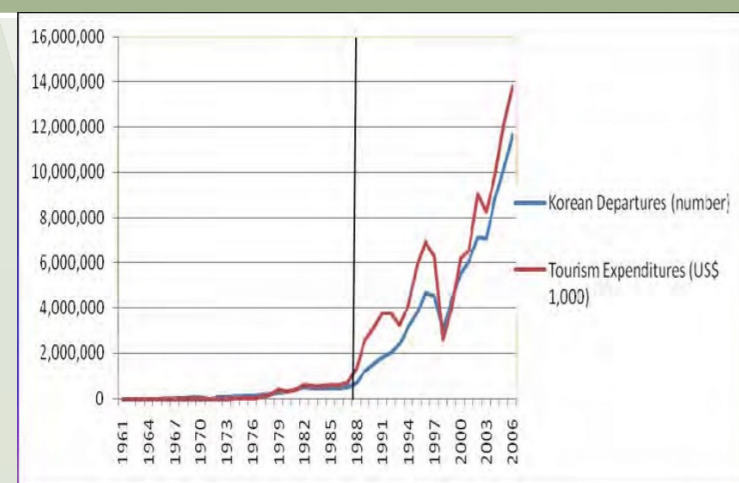
Moreover, globalization provided ways such as media, for society to access information and news on queer content. Media such as newspapers, television shows, and films with queer content were appearing in the public's sight. Globalization allows people to share their sexual standards through pictures, ways of dressing, music, and sexual identities. The West has a relatively high tolerance for sexual minorities, and hence, through communication between locals and foreigners, Koreans' perspective of homosexuality changes.

Development of Queer Culture in Korea

In Korea, the media played a key role in the globalization of queer culture. Media, especially the Internet, can transfer information fast and without the limitation of the border, thus, allowing the accepting attitude for queer culture to enter the country. Koreans are able to watch a variety of foreign LGBT films that are less censored and have higher sexual diversity. Increasing exposure to the culture encourages more people to recognize that the LGBT community is a part of their society. For example, the annual Korea Queer Culture Festival, including the Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade was established in 1999 (Cho and Kim 217). Gay culture continued to be promoted in the nation with examples such as the success of the gay film, the King and the Clown, in 2005, which sold over 12 million tickets.

In addition to the rising queer content in society, there are also an increasing number of LGBT organizations. Take the first lesbian group in Korea, *Sappho*, as an example, it was established by an African-American lesbian in 1992. *Sappho*'s influence sparked the emergence of more LGBT groups, including the first gay and lesbian organizations, *Chingusai, Kirikiri*, established in 1994 (Cho and Kim 211). After the appearance of gay and lesbian groups, the public paid more attention to LGBT rights, leading to queer activism. For instance, the first public gathering of gays and lesbians happened in 1997.

Apart from increasing visibility, globalization also helps with the LGBT community's self-identification. With the increasing queer issues in society, citizens can access more information through different platforms. A website called Gaymunhak, published a 2001 e-journal, describing the hardships of being queer (Pettid 178). Information about different types of sexual minorities can also be shared to help people gain knowledge of their sexuality. For instance, "Fancos," a drag show featured female performers imitating male boybands in the 1900s (Shin 295). This performance demonstrated different kinds of queers and helps to remove the stereotypes of the LGBT community.

Obstacles

As queer culture spreads, homophobia also grows, which results in the LGBT community being scared of interacting with the public. Since Koreans are deeply influenced by neo-Confucianism, not every Korean can react positively to the open mindset for queer culture from the West. One of the fundamental reasons for them to stay in the closet is because Korean culture values filial duty making it hard for some Koreans with traditional values to understand same-sex relationships (Shin 311). For that reason, getting out of the closet would mean that they would have to go against their responsibility to produce offspring according to traditional beliefs, making it difficult to come out as queer as they needed support from families.

Moreover, economic security also affects queer's decisions to reveal their sexuality. LGBT community often faces discrimination in the areas of taxes and mortgages and have less opportunity to be employed in companies that promote heterosexual nuclear families, while at the same time, there was also a low employment rate, especially for women, after the IMF Crisis of 1997 (Shin 311). Therefore, hiding their sexuality became a survival technique.

Korea is accused of not providing anti-discrimination protections for LGBT people, nor does it prohibit hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The government has implemented policies that hinder the development of queer culture and shows that they do not support such culture. For example, the Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) launched the blockage of all LGBT sites from teenagers in 2001, and The Youth Protection Act supported this rule by defining homosexuality as a "harmful influence" (Cho and Kim 216).

There is almost no law established to protect the rights of the LGBT community. For example, the Supreme Court once stated that "sexual assault inflicted on a transsexual does not constitute rape" in a case involving a female transsexual rape victim (Pettid 180). This shows to the public that, the government's ignorance of LGBT rights. Although there were attempts to protect queer human rights with the Korean Human Rights Bill in 2001, The Ministry of Justice announced in 2007 that it would delete 7 items, including sexual orientation, from the bill (Cho and Kim 218). This government decision implies that "it was OK to discriminate against queers" (218).

Changes in Society on Queer Culture

Compared to Koreans' opinion on queers before globalization, recent studies show that Koreans' attitudes towards same-sex relationships are improving. A research was conducted from 1994 to 2014, asking the same 9 questions regarding respondents' opinions on homosexuality (Rich 609). The results shown in the chart on the left, show an improvement in Koreans' attitudes toward homosexuality. Comparatively, respondents in 1994 were more inclined to strongly agree that homosexuality is a mental illness and that gay rights would be a violation of morals and ethics, as compared to 2014, when more people tend to disagree with these statements.
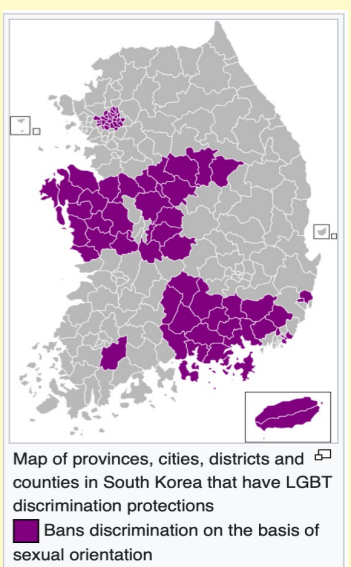
Measure	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014
Year of Data Collection					
Q1. Male homosexuality is a mental disorder.					
Male	2.49(1.19)	2.45(1.52)*	2.63(1.42)*	2.60(1.32)*	3.06(1.43)*
Female	2.55(1.13)	2.86(1.55)	2.93(1.43)	3.25(1.44)	3.39(1.42)
Total	2.52(1.16)	2.68(1.55)	2.79(1.43)	2.95(1.42)	3.23(1.43)
Q2. Female homosexuality is a mental disorder.					
Male	2.52(1.15)	2.51(1.48)*	2.73(1.42)	2.68(1.29)*	3.11(1.40)*
Female	2.59(1.13)	2.89(1.53)	2.95(1.43)	3.25(1.40)	3.37(1.42)
Total	2.55(1.14)	2.73(1.52)	2.85(1.43)	2.99(1.38)	3.25(1.42)
Q9. Equal rights for homosexual individuals in our society would be a violation of morals and ethics. (Reverse coded)					
Male	2.39(1.14)	2.78(1.62)	2.97(1.44)	3.25(1.39)*	3.41(1.45)
Female	2.50(1.16)	3.08(1.62)	3.19(1.45)	3.52(1.35)	3.55(1.40)
Total	2.45(1.15)	2.95(1.62)	3.09(1.45)	3.39(1.37)	3.48(1.43)

Views of Homosexuality Mostly Unchanged

% Homosexuality should be accepted	2007 %	2013 %	Change
S. Korea	18	39	+21
U.S.	49	60	+11
Canada	70	80	+10
Italy	65	74	+9
Spain	82	88	+6
Germany	81	87	+6
Britain	71	76	+5

Although Korea is still lacking behind in LGBT development, citizens' attitude is shifting positively at a relatively fast pace. According to the right table above , among the 39 countries surveyed worldwide, Korea showed the greatest shift towards greater acceptance of same-sex relationships between 2007 and 2013. There is an increasing number of Koreans joining and supporting gay rights movements, such as the Seoul Queer Cultural Festival, with only 50 people joining in 2000, to 150,000 people participating in 2020, suggesting that queer topics are continuing to gain public attention (Cho and Kim 217).

There have been an increasing areas in Korea started to enact anti-discrimination policies and provisions to protect the queer community. According to a report from The Korean Society of Law and Policy on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGILAW), Korea currently has 15 local governments that have anti-discrimination provisions that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation (SOGILAW 111).

Map of provinces, cities, districts and counties in South Korea that have LGBT discrimination protections
Bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation

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