

# Gendering Democracy after Democratization in Korea Public Feminism and Politics of Identity

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## Abstract

This article examines the meaning of the “gender equality agenda” in Korea’s public sphere since democratization. In the space opened by the democratization movement, the women’s movement sought to promote the gender equality agenda through public policies, which resulted in the achievement of “gender equality reforms.” Paradoxically, however, the achievements of these legal and institutional reforms led to unintended consequences and have confined gender equality agendas within the limits of bureaucratic rationality rather than spreading them to various spheres of Korean society. Discourses on popular feminism have appeared in various forms in response to the unclear successes of these reforms. On the one hand, the anti-feminism discourse condemned women’s policies and the Ministry of Gender Equality (MOGE) for perpetrating “reverse discrimination” against men. On the other hand, the young generation of feminists have criticized Korea’s patriarchal culture that exists even in the country’s civil movements and the concealment of various kinds of violence against women. The candlelight protests conducted by young women since 2008 suggest the appearance of a new gender equality agenda that includes the safety of imported foods and everyday life politics. In light of these diverse gender equality agendas and controversies, this article focuses on two different but related political projects: public feminism and identity politics. Although public feminism tends to concentrate on practical reforms as shown in the legislative and institutional reforms initiated by women’s movement groups, it aims to expand civic virtues and practice of democratic citizens for a ‘good society’. The popular feminism discourse that spread after the 2000s turned the discrimination and oppression that women experienced in their individual and daily lives into a political consciousness and shows the flow of identity politics that demands the realization of gender justice. There have been efforts to legislate women’s policies for the past two decades, but as polarization and inequality grow more severe there are still no policy tools that can challenge the strong structure of vested interests causing women’s social exclusion, discrimination and segregation in the labor market. In order to form a new vision of democracy after democratization, it is necessary to consider gender a universal problem of democracy. Democracy without gender cannot be an alternative to the new democratic society.

## Keywords

Women’s movement, public feminism, identity politics, gender democracy, state feminism, gender policy

\* This article is an updated English version of the original work in Korean: Hwang, Jung-Mee (2017). “Jendeo gwanjeomeseo bon minjuhwa ihuui minjujuui [A Gendering Democracy after Democratization in Korea]”. *Gyeongjewa sahoe [Economy and Society]*, 114: 18-51.

## Introduction

The year 1987 has been regarded as a turning point for Korean society that symbolized the country's transition to democracy; this was also an important year in terms of the changes it brought to the lives of Korean women. The roots of Korea's feminist movement and ideas started long before 1987, and that year did not witness any event specific to women's movement, such as a major strike or demonstration. Why then is 1987 still recognized as an important year in the context of Korea's feminist movement and gender equality? The year 1987 is important because democratization shifted the paradigm in how Koreans understand gender and women's issues. (Hwang, Jung-Mee, 2005). In the 1980s, the feminist movement grew significantly and the empowerment of Korea's women's movement brought about a wide range of improvements in the country's policies and institutions concerning gender equality.

However, democratization was not a "magic carpet" that brought Korean women into the new world of gender equality. The democracy Korea enjoyed after democratization was characterized by women being treated as citizens newly "included" in society while, on the other hand, they were still "excluded" from Korean society's patriarchal and male-centered sphere of power. Many discussions that analyze Korean democracy after democratization note both the hope and discontent that existed among women during this period (Choi, Chang Jip, 2005; Hur, Song-Woo, 2007; Ahn, Sook-Young, 2016). While positive steps have been taken since democratization – including the establishment of a strong democracy solidified through peaceful regime change, economic inequality and social polarization have grown more serious, and this is undermining the confidence Koreans have toward their society. The "candlelight revolution" created widespread confidence that Korea had overcome its "democracy crisis." However, Korean democracy faces a great number of demands after the "revolution" across many spheres of Korean society, and these demands are continuing to create new areas of conflict. At this juncture, gender provides an important perspective to reflect on the dilemma that exists between the equality and differences that are embedded in the modern democracy regime.

This article started as an attempt to reflect on the relationship between gender and democracy in Korean society after 1987. However, it is very difficult to include the vast range of social changes and controversies over the past three decades in a sole piece of writing. Accordingly, this article focuses on the "gender equality agenda" to succinctly deal with such a long-running and complicated discussion. This article will examine how "gender equality" has been defined in Korean society since the country's democratization in 1987; what kind of actors and social forces have engaged in discussion about the meaning of gender equality in the public sphere; what kinds of policies and institutional reforms these actors and social forces have argued for as part of their efforts to expand gender equality; which of these efforts have been successful; and, finally, what kind of ripple effect these efforts have had on gender equality in Korean society.

It is well known that policy research has long focused on how specific and controversial social issues wind up on the decision-making table through the agenda-setting process. Agendas do not exist as simple concepts; instead, they reveal

the standpoints of important actors and are thrown into discussion within the public sphere where they are “socially constructed.” (Hwang, Jung-Mee, 2006: 13-14). In this article, the meaning of “agenda” is not limited to its use in the policy decision-making process but is extended to a broader context, referring to the “discourse that involves the discussion of the meaning of gender equality in the public sphere and the practical suggestions to solve gender-related issues.”

This article is divided into three sections. The second section briefly examines the significance of the women’s movement aimed at legal and institutional reform and the establishment of a gender policy organization within Korea’s central government. Starting with the Act on Equal Employment in 1987, a series of enactments were passed including the Framework Act on Women’s Development (1995), the Special Act on Sexual Violence (1994), the Special Act on Domestic Violence (1998), and the Act Prohibiting Gender Discrimination (1999); moreover, the Ministry of Gender Equality, a central state apparatus in charge of gender policy, was established in 2001. This series of developments can be referred to broadly as “gender equality reform” that was triggered by democratization. The third section points out the realities of Korean women who still suffer from social exclusion and gender discrimination in both workplace and in their private lives despite these institutional reforms. The fourth section examines how the gender equality agenda, which was strongly tied to the democracy movement of the 1980s, faced new issues at the end of the 1990s, particularly after Korea’s economic crisis. As Korea’s era of fast growth came to an end and neo-liberal polarization grew more severe, the “gender equality institutional reforms” faced new challenges and criticisms. What is even more interesting, however, is that the social field in which discourses on gender equality and gender related policies were circulated became multi-layered. In other words, expressions on gender equality issues expanded to diverse spheres of mass culture, internet communities, and even the street space of candlelight demonstration.

The methodology used by this article focuses on reframing and interpreting discourses based on a review of existing literature. The interpretive approach taken in this article is aimed at connecting the complex experiences of the successes and failures of gender equality institutional reform - and the appearance of alternative gender equality agendas in response to these successes and failures - within the broader scheme of new democracy. These efforts are not only focused on the analysis of gender policies, but also on an extended enquiry to envisage the potential of institutional reforms in solving exclusion and discrimination, which have been paradoxically increasing after the democratization of Korea.

## The “Gender Equality Reforms” Following Democratization and Controversy Surrounding the “Institutionalization” of the Women’s Movement

### *The Temporal and Spatial Significance of 1987: The Women’s Movement and Civil Society*

The Korean democratization process after 1987 was an historical opportunity that allowed gender equality and gender-related issues to become part of the broader public agenda. There were previous endeavors to struggle against gender inequality, such as the movement demanding the reform of the Family Law from the 1950s, and also women’s labor movement insisting for basic rights in the 1970s. Unlike these efforts which were severely suppressed under the authoritarian government, the women’s movement after 1987 could participate in a hegemonic space where gender equality and women’s empowerment were regarded as a central issue of democracy. During the 1980s, women’s movement organizations rapidly grew based on the previous foundation built by the Christian women’s movement and women’s labor movement activated since the 1970s. Extended alliance among women’s organizations composed a significant part of the overall democratization movement for social transformation in Korea.

Constitutional reform to implement a direct election system for the presidency after the June Uprising was a catalyst for the women’s movement to rapidly adopt a “civil movement” model. The women’s movement of the 1990s focused particularly on achieving its goals by establishing legal and institutional reforms and securing the enactment of gender equality-related policies. The background to these developments is multi-faceted. First, given the immaturity of organized forces that could represent the interests of women, there were no other practical tools available to activists other than to constantly demand that political parties, the National Assembly, the government and other actors within the institutional and political system, intervene to advocate for women’s issues. Second, the social movement of the 1980s gradually shifted from an ideological resistance to a reform-oriented civil movement, and this allowed the women’s movement to share typical strategies and know-how of their activities. This strategy of “issue-fighting” - first identifying controversies that would attract the attention of the public, then turning them into issues through the media to force a government response - was perfectly suited to the demands of women’s movement organizations. Third, not only socio-political circumstances but also the strategic choice of women’s movement clearly mattered in these circumstances. Korean society was dominated by the vested rights of men encapsulated within the traditional patriarchy system, and leaders of the women’s movement realized they needed a “fast-track” to bring about real change at the national level. Encouraged by strengthened democratic governance that was solidified through successive, peaceful transitions in power, their movement to reform the country’s laws and institutions grew even more prominent and focused all its energies on the so-called “state feminism” strategy (Kim, Kyung-hee, 2009; Suh, Doowon, 2012).

Throughout the 1990s, during the Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung administrations, the women's movement successfully promoted legislation to resolve Korean society's chronic oppression of women, such as gender discrimination, sexual and domestic violence, and prostitution. The state's responsibility to enact policies improving gender equality was proclaimed in the Framework Act on Women's Development (1995), and this was followed by the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality (MOGE) in 2001, along with the introduction of the gender quota system for National Assembly proportional representatives, which was aimed at increasing women's empowerment in politics.<sup>1</sup> The abolition of the Family Registration System in 2005, a symbol of Korea's patriarchal family system, was an historic event that compounded the success of the women's movement within the mindset of the Korean public.

With the new political frame granted by democratization, the women's movement took active advantage of their broader space to operate and played a leading role in preparing a series of policies to advance gender equality and women's human rights, also meant to establish a government agency concerned with gender-related issues. These successes were in line with the criteria set out by the United Nations (UN) on gender equality and the Beijing Platform for Action, and international community and international agencies have assessed these efforts in a positive light.<sup>2</sup> Activists and experts who have led the women's movement have participated in the execution of gender policies as "femocrats"; this is significant because it represents a "paradigm shift" from the previous authoritarian era. The institutional success of the women's movement is based on a new governance model among state and civil society organizations, and has historical significance as an extended partnership model to include gender equality and minority rights into the scope of national policies (Hwang, Jung-Mee, 2004b).

### *The Criticism against the "Institutionalization" of the Women's Movement*

In contrast to these positive assessments, however, the state feminism strategy of the Korean women's movement faced criticisms against its efforts to "institutionalize." The institutionalization of the women's movement is a strategy aimed at securing public space for formal cooperation, rather than engaging in confrontation with the state through "conflictive cooperation." Generally speaking, whether a social movement achieves its original goals through cooperation with the government or damages its autonomy by being co-opted by the dominant system it

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<sup>1</sup> Starting with the passage of the Act on Equal Employment in 1987, the full-fledged passage and implementation of laws concerning women in the 1990s occurred across a wide-range of spheres, including employment, the family, childcare, welfare, political participation, and the expansion of the policy delivery system. Please see Hwang, Jung-Mee (2004b, 2005) for more details.

<sup>2</sup> UN agencies, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1998, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 1999, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in 2001, and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) in 2004 have positively evaluated the Korean government's efforts to improve the status of women by improving the country's institutions and systems. (Suh, Doowon, 2012: 166-167)

was trying to reform is inevitably a source of controversy. (Suh, Doowon, 2012: 169; Oh, Jangmigyung, 2005: 28).

Those who criticized the “institutionalization” of the women’s movement pointed out that the radical claims the movement made to resolve discrimination and biases toward women reduced to the sphere of what is “practically possible,” and thus weakened the movement’s autonomy. For example, members of the women’s movement in the 1980s and 1990s conducted an active feminist movement by operating counseling centers that provided support for female victims of sexual and domestic violence, and criticized law enforcement agencies, the courts and the media which were saturated with patriarchal preconceptions of sex and women. By the enactment of new laws on sexual and domestic violence, however, some feminist activists faced a practical dilemma. Although the centers obtained financial stability for counseling services, they were required to adapt to bureaucratic guidelines rather than focusing on their feminist goals (Hwang, Jang-Mee, 2006; Suh, Doowon, 2012; Byun, Hye-jung, 2005; Kim, Hyun-jung, 2000).

After the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality (MOGE) and the gender quota system for National Assembly proportional representatives, the cases of activists from the women’s movement being promoted to high level offices of public organization and political parties increased, prompting more widespread criticism of “institutionalization” of the women’s movement. Critics argued that the entrance of these activists into the government or National Assembly weakened the capability of women’s movement to criticize and monitor government policy: this would weaken the organizational strength and level of activity of the women’s movement, thus corrupting its original intent (Cho, Soon-Kyoung, 2004). Some critics further argued that the original vision of women’s movement searching for women’s empowerment and participatory democracy was set aside,, and that the focus was on practical results like supporting elite women’s entrance into high-level positions and increasing influence in government decision-making activities. (Choi, Il-Sung, 2012).

The criticism that the women’s movement to improve laws and institutions on gender equality after the 1990s simply ended with a minority of elite women successfully entering high-level public positions is based on overexaggerated, simple logic that fails to properly consider the disadvantages the women’s movement faced. As Suh, Doowon (2012, 165) remarked, the women’s movement was ultimately faced with “unintended consequences” – in other words, the movement faced a paradox of successful institutionalization accompanied by serious dilemmas and crises it could not have predicted. The women’s movement had pursued a strategy to enact policies at the national level to resolve a myriad of problems, ranging from employment and gender discrimination, to sexual and domestic violence issues, and made efforts to persuade the National Assembly and government to create laws and institutions to alleviate these issues. These efforts, however, created new dilemmas. Paradoxically, the Korean women’s movement faced what can be called “failure through success”; in other words, it enjoyed external policy successes which have been regarded as highly successful, but it suffered from subjective criticism that the movement’s internal strategy failed (Suh, Doowon 2012, 186).

## *The Dilemma of State Feminism and Gender Democracy*

State feminism can be broadly defined as “top-down” feminism, or the promotion of a gender equality agenda and the expansion of women’s participation in administration and parliament through the institutionalization of feminism. State feminism can be initiated with a perspective which regard state not as a monolithic mechanism of oppressive patriarchy but as a field of intersecting struggles among multiple social forces. (Steson & Mazur, 1995: 10-11) The institutional reforms for gender equality in Korea can also be discussed within the specific context of democratization and the growth of the women’s movement, changes in political regime, and the structure of governance formed by progressive governments.

The focus of this article is not to assess the successes of the women’s movement per se, but to examine how the series of legal and institutional improvements led by the women’s movement transformed the agenda to achieve better gender equality in Korean society. Focusing on the gender equality agenda, there are several points to be highlighted.

First, to ensure gender equality becomes a policy agenda, the values of women’s movement should be realigned in line with bureaucratic procedures. This is a dilemma very much based on practical concerns, and depending on the circumstances, only some part of the gender equality agenda can be selectively institutionalized. The accumulation of these agenda choices may damage the uniformity and significance of overall gender equality policies. Let us examine a couple of examples. The Act on Equal Employment (1987) and the Act Prohibiting Gender Discrimination (1999) were introduced to resolve the unfair discrimination faced by Korean women. However, when examining the specifics of these laws - including the legal definition of discrimination, the punishments and rules against discriminatory actions, and the establishment of a committee to resolve disputes - the range of gender discrimination dealt with by these policies has been selectively diminished over time. Likewise, policy measures against employment discrimination - an issue that greatly impacts women’s economic independence - that punish employers or provide female victims with suitable compensation have failed to be put into place effectively (Hwang, Jung-Mee, 2004a). In contrast to the female employment issue being the center of the discrimination measures in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in US or positive action programs in Sweden, policy concerns to solve discrimination against women, especially in the workplace, have been gradually weakened in Korea. (Yoo, Jeong-Mi, 2012; Kim, Kyunghye & Shin, Hyunok, 2004).

Second, the state feminism strategy has been partially successful in forming a governance model or, in other words, the creation of a certain level of partnership between women’s organizations and the state. However, the governance relationship between women’s organizations and the state is very imbalanced in terms of both material resources and social influence. While the partnership between women’s organizations and the government was facilitated during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun presidencies (1998-2007), the subsequent conservative administrations (2008-2017) created ruptures in existing governance efforts and significantly weakened the platform for women’s groups to conduct their activities. Government agencies have monopolized the agendas of the women’s movement and,

consequently, this may have decreased the influence of actors within civil society. Taking policies for childcare as an example, the Korean Women's Association United (KWAU) continually made childcare issues an agenda for the women's movement in the 2000s and advocated for the "publicness" of childcare, or that the government should play a strong role. The MOGE was expanded to become the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) that included family policy and childcare as important part of women's policy, however the direction of these policies was aimed at supporting childcare and providing public services for so-called "healthy families" to resolve very low fertility rate of Korea. In this process, the gender equality agenda was gradually subsumed under the political framework of family policies, which emphasizes patriarchal norms of "healthy families" (Kim, Kyunghee, 2009).

Third, a more fundamental question is whether the state has strong enough tools and the ability to intervene in social structures of inequality and discrimination. A reformist political party that can promote redistributive welfare policies, active labor policies and other measures to solve poverty and gender discrimination issues faced by low-income women concentrated at the very bottom of the labor market is undoubtedly needed. However, the fundamental limitations of Korean democracy due to the division of the Korean peninsula and national security issues (Kim, Dong-choon, 2016) makes it difficult for these policies to be established.

The dilemma that "gender equality reform" faces is not limited to cases involving the women's movement. The degree of success achieved by state feminism in Europe benefitted from the political agenda of feminism that intersected with social democracy; social democracy political parties actively advocated gender equality agendas connected with labor unions and put them into practice (Walby, 2011:125; Hernes, 1987: 61-70). Ultimately, a successful state feminism strategy requires an interventionist, capable government and more democracy.

## **The Limits of Gender Equality Reform : Persistent Gender Gap in Workplace and Everyday Life**

During the first decade after 1987, the reform of presidential election system, along with other pillars of procedural democracy, were established. From 1997, however, Korean society was confronted with the new challenge of the Asian economic crisis, during which Korea's version of state feminism was forged (Kim, Kyunghee, 2009: 17-18). The economic crisis led to a large-scale restructuring of the economy and unemployment, which resulted in hardships for the middle-class, an increase of divorce rates; and family disruption. In the neo-liberal era, more Korean women faced risks of unemployment, unstable and precarious jobs, and poverty. The "gender equality reforms" failed to actively cope with the social exclusion that regulated Korean women's lives during the economic crisis, and policy intervention against discrimination in employment gradually diminished. This section examines the realities women faced as the gender gap persisted and was reproduced in both workplace and daily life in spite of gender equality reforms.

### *The Gender Segregation in the Labor Market*

Despite the dynamic changes that occurred in Korea after the late 1980s, the realities of women in the labor force did not improve significantly (Shin, Kyung-ah, 2016a: 322). Even the trends of female labor force participation rate was characterized by long-term stagnation: although there was a slight increase to 49.5% in 1997 from 44.9% in 1987, this rate fluctuated after the financial crisis. When comparing Korea to other OECD countries, the Korean female labor force participation rate continues to be positioned at the very bottom and there is still a major gap with men.

There have been, of course, some positive changes. There are now more women than men attending college and more women attain high scores in the civil service examination than men. However, gender continues to be the central criterion defining standard versus non-standard jobs, major conglomerates versus small to mid-sized companies, and the internal labor market and external labor market. After the foreign currency crisis (1987) and the financial crisis (2008) the proportion of women in temporary jobs clearly increased. Beyond the differences between permanent and temporary jobs, however, the divide between the internal and external labor markets overlaps significantly with the gender divide (Shin, Kyung-ah, 2016a: 226).

Stable high-income jobs provided in the internal labor market are usually filled with men who have families. Women who are unable to enter the internal labor market find themselves faced with the lack of job stability and low incomes along with extremely unclear career prospects. From the perspective of highly-educated women, there is little incentive for them to get a job or stay in their current jobs. Korean society is currently discussing the issue of women experiencing career interruption due to childbirth or for childcare. From a more fundamental perspective, it is not the career breaks themselves, but the segregated structure of the labor market in Korea that continuously reproduces deep-rooted gender discrimination (Shin, Kyung-ah, 2016a; Lee, Soon-Mi, 2015; Heo, Eun, 2013).

Youth unemployment is a very serious issue amidst the Korean economy's "growth without employment." The ability of conglomerates to hire more people has reached its limits, and there are few opportunities for young people to enter the internal labor market to become stable breadwinners for their families. According to the traditional "scenario" for upward mobility, educational investment and university degree were supposed to secure a stable job in a large enterprise or the public sector, followed by entrance into the stability of middle-class life. This, however, is no longer an option, and middle-class and lower-class families who are unable to climb up the "class ladder" either have to reduce their consumption or go into debt. The crisis of youth unemployment is more an issue of class polarization and generational conflict, and it is also related with the maintenance or decline of the so-called "male-breadwinner model" in Korean society (Kim, Young-mi, 2016).

Will the crisis of the male breadwinner model and the increase of dual-earner households in Korea contribute to the economic autonomy and the independent professional careers of women? Empirical analyses suggest that married men in Korea's working class usually fail to keep the job they had when they married for a long period of time, and the employment instability experienced by family

breadwinners lead to family crises. There are many cases in which married women obtain jobs for the subsistence of the household (Choi, Sun-Young & Chang, Kyung-Sup, 2012). These women suffer in instable, low-income and poor-quality jobs while also subject to the double burden of housework. Kim, Sujeong (2015), who analyzed the increase in dual-earner families after the 1990s found that there was a clear increase in the number of dual-earner families in their early 40s, and also discovered that the lower the income of husbands in dual-earner households the higher the proportion of wives who participated in economic activities. This shows that while dual-earner households increased, women were unable to acquire independent working experience and, ultimately, that Korea's transition to dual-earner households is failing halfway (Kim, Sujeong, 2015: 172). In other words, Korea's move to dual-earner households has been accompanied by increasing gender divisions in the labor market and the marginalization of women's labor.

### *The Gender Bias of the Work-Family Balance Policy*

The Work-Family Balance Policy is one of the important policy successes of the "gender equality reforms" examined in the previous section. However, this policy also supports the family lives of workers by reducing the long working hours in Korea. Does this policy help in reducing the gender gap in Korea's labor market and in revising the gender segregation problem in the labor market? Two things need to be taken into account here. The first is the question of the extent to which women benefit from the Work-Family Balance Policy, including child-rearing leave, since this depends on their position in the labor market. Korea's social insurance system is designed to benefit workers with stable sources of income who can pay high amounts of insurance premiums over a long period of time and is thus insufficient to enable effective redistribution. This is the same for the child-rearing leave system, which is operated with funds from the Employment Insurance. People who enter the higher rungs of the labor market are better positioned to enjoy the benefits of the Work-Family Balance Policy, while low-income workers with temporary jobs not only suffer from small incomes but also have limited access to such policy (Joo, Eun Sun, 2009; Tronto, 2014: 237-238).

Secondly, Korea's Work-Family Balance Policy assumes working women will take on the main role in raising their children, rather than restructuring the gender-based division of labor within paid labor and caregiving labor. While it is difficult for women to use vacation days for childbirth or child-rearing, women who take time off work find it hard to go back to their original jobs. According to results from recent research that analyzed employment and health insurance, more than three out of 10 (32.1%) working women who used child-rearing leave in 2015 left their jobs within a year of returning, and one out of four (24.5%) of working women left their original jobs within one week of returning.<sup>3</sup> While higher leave allowances helped increasing take-up rates from working women, percentages of women who cannot

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<sup>3</sup> Please see the Yonhap News article dated February 22, 2017 (<http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/dev/9601000000.html>) (found on: 2017. 5. 19.). The percentage of women who continued working for more than seven days after returning from child-rearing leave was 76.5%, while the percentage of women who continued working for more than one year was 67.9%.

return to work or who are soon quitting after returning to work remain high. In other words, given that married women typically transition to marginal jobs after childbirth, the Work-Family Balance Policy may end up becoming a route for women to leave the labor market.

### *Time Pressure and Gender in Private Life*

Several studies suggest that time pressures and time poverty differ according to gender. Research that has analyzed data concerning the use of time in daily life has found that despite the increase in the number of women obtaining paid jobs, male participation in household work has not changed very much. Working women are, in essence, faced with the double burden of having to conduct both household labor and paid labor (Kim, Sujeong & Kim, Eunji, 2007). Dual-earner couples who have a young child have to spend most of their time in the course of a 24-hour day focused on paid labor, and the proportion of time spent on leisure is very low. Even full-time, dual-earner households generally have the woman spending most of the time watching the child (Joo, Eun Sun, 2014). As this shows, working parents who have young children feel much more time pressure than other types of parents, and even within dual-earner households the women experience much more scarcity in terms of leisure and sleep time compared to the men. Running after time, cutting down on leisure activities or sleep time are typical features of mothers' busy lives, leading them to exhaustion (Kim, Jin Wook & Ko, Eunju, 2015).

Working women are always busy due to their responsibilities for caregiving and child-raising, and they constantly cope with multiple tasks in daily life. White-collar working women compress their time to complete all of the conflicting daily tasks within the demands of their professional and family lives, all the while saying that "Time appears the more it's divided up" (Cho, Joo Eun, 2012, 70-83).

The women's movement, which expanded during the democratization process in the 1980s, led to the passage of laws and the institutionalization of policies on employment equality and gender discrimination. However, institutional reforms were unable to bring about wholly satisfying results in confronting the realities women faced. A considerable gap exists between the benefits provided by the policies and the realities of labor and caregiving, and women lead daily lives where they are cornered by time pressures and the need to multi-task throughout the course of a day. The two opposing sides to their daily lives are shown by the increase in the number of late marriages and unmarried people and Korea's extremely low birth rate. Young-mi Kim and Bongoh Kye (2015: 12) have shown through comparative research that countries that have an advanced mindset toward gender equality, but low rates of female employment, i.e. countries that have failed to prioritize the preferences of women, tend to have low birthrates. After comparing Korea against this standard through international indicators, it was found that Korea has a very low rate of prioritizing women's preferences. Korea's economically active women's rate stagnates at half of what it should be, and the country faces an extremely low birth rate while failing to find an "escape route" from the deep "valley of transition" (Kim, Young-mi & Kye, Bongoh, 2015). The "gender equality

reform” following democratization has failed to find the way out of this “valley of transition.”

## The Popularization of Feminist Discourse and Identity Politics

The women’s movement has long pursued the state feminism strategy, institutionalizing policies for women and policies that strengthen public funding for caregiving. However, women have found it difficult to benefit from these policies in their daily lives. Paradoxically, the partial success of institutional reform has led to criticism of women’s policies and the MOGEF. Discontent and criticism of women’s policies and the MOGEF (MOFE) spread significantly after the 2000s in general public discourse, particularly within online communities and social networks. Up until the 1990s, discussions on gender equality, women’s policies, and feminism were limited to a small number of intellectuals, including women’s movement activists, women’s policy experts and female scholars. These actors problematized gender issues to the media, government bureaucrats and political parties. However, from the late 1990s, gender issue-related discussions grew more active on university campuses, including through clubs run by female students. After the 2000s, debates on the merits and demerits of feminism became a daily staple on Internet communities, portal bulletin boards and Internet blogs frequented by the general public.

### *The Backlash against Feminism and Misogyny*

Anti-feminist feelings in Korea are generally thought to have started with the 1999 ruling that the military reward system [the awarding of extra points to men who completed their military service on exams for government jobs] was unconstitutional. Young men who experience pressure due to the increased competition for jobs felt a sense of deprivation after the dismantling of the reward system, and expressed discontent that they were receiving reverse discrimination. The effort to make the reward system unconstitutional was led by the women’s movement and was considered an important success of “gender equality reform.” On online discourse concerning the ruling, feminists were viewed as pursuing power at the expense of men (Chung, In-Kyoung, 2016: 198).

The discontent and sense of deprivation felt by young Korean men were expressed by a series of satires that degraded women on the Internet from around 2005. The expression “daenjangnyeo” (a high maintenance woman) was a popular way to lampoon the vanity of women who loved luxury items, and from around 2010, the expression “kimchinyeo” (literally, “kimchi woman) became widespread to describe women who “did not pay for anything,” make no effort and only wanted the best things in life. There was the spread of pictures and videos of “mugaenyeomnyeo” (a stupid woman) in the subway, and this led to a craze among men to “track down” these women (Park, Kwon-il, 2014; Jeon, Hye-Won & Cheon, Gwan-Yul, 2015).

The Internet discourse that degraded women criticized the MOGEF and called for its dismantlement. The ministry's homepage was beset by critical comments when it announced songs that "harmed" youth and attempted to shut down internet gaming in 2011. The ministry failed to understand youth culture and the world of Internet gaming and became the target of male Internet users along with male teenagers and young men. Anti-feminist sentiment ended up being combined with criticism of the ministry and anger toward regulations which were aimed at restricting freedom of expression.

The misogyny that has permeated the Internet is an expression of the sense of failure and anger of the young male generation, but that is only one factor at play here. The insults and language of hatred unique to the online community are an expression of the culture of amusement, and othering women through misogyny is a part of how men form bonds and socialize with each other (the so-called homosocial society) (Ueno Chizuko, 2014). These misogynists have not presented a rational, critical discourse to oppose women's policies, but have refused to accept the gender equality agenda on the basis of male social homogeneity, and have spread feelings that criticize "preferences toward women." The feelings of hatred toward women and men's feelings of victimhood have spread online on the outskirts of public discourse and the democratic system, and has weakened popular sympathy for gender equality reform.

### *Young Feminists and "Learned Women"*

In universities during the 1990s there was an increase of clubs run by female students with an interest in feminism, and within student councils there was an (anti-) sexual violence movement led by college student feminists who raised the issue of university-based sexual violence (Kim, Bomyung, 2007). Moreover, young women active in social movement groups argued that patriarchal culture was prevalent within even the politically progressive-leaning camp and that sexual violence was occurring that turned women into objects and excluded them from organized culture. Based on radical feminism, these self-proclaimed "Young Feminists" led a movement against sexual violence. In 2000, sexual violence incidents that occurred within labor movement and progressive social group activism became a major issue, and women who were active in social movement groups formed a 100-member Committee to expose and criticize cases of sexual violence perpetrated by so-called progressive male activists. Some perpetrators of sexual violence apologized following these efforts and discussions were held on ways to prevent such incidents from happening again. However, there was also criticism of the Young Feminists for violating the human rights of the perpetrators because they released the perpetrators real names to the public; moreover, they were criticized because exposing cases of sexual violence supposedly damaged the "moral basis" of the movement (Eum, Hye-Jin, 2009).

The way that Young Feminists raised the sexual violence agenda in the 2000s contrasted in several ways with how the women's movement of the 1990s dealt with the sexual violence issue through legal and institutional reforms. Feminist, critical awareness formed the foundations of the women's movement and their efforts to

improve laws and institutions, but the movement's central features focused on legal definitions, systemizing procedures, operating agencies that provided services, and using human resources. However, the Young Feminists who made up the 100-member Committee went beyond procedures and creating systems: they released the real names of perpetrators online themselves and operated not a vertical but a horizontally-organized network. Moreover, the 100-member Committee raised concerns about gender discrimination and patriarchal culture within social movement groups, rather than focus on advocating for individual victims, and pursued a radical strategy to bring about change in the community. The sexual violence agenda advocated by the young feminists was not limited to just the legal process of helping individual victims and punishing perpetrators. It also involved a cultural strategy that involved politics and politicized individual issues. Unlike the sexual violence agenda supported by the post-democratization gender equality reform movement, these young feminists aimed to use the anti-sexual violence movement to promote "identity politics" and express their own critical standpoints and cultural identities.

Another example of women expressing their political opinions in a new way within a more popular and common space is the 2008 candlelight protests surrounding the mad cow disease. At the time, the government unilaterally decided to import American-made beef not yet verified safe from mad cow disease, and female students, teenagers and parents worried about the safety of their children voluntarily gathered in city centers to conduct a protest against the imported meat. Ordinary women who previously had little interest in politics, the women's movement and/or feminism became the mainstays of these candlelight protests. Women participated in the protests with babies in strollers, and female members of Internet-based clubs that shared information about food, shopping, cosmetics and cosmetic surgery shared their criticism and anger toward the government's decision and participated in the protests. Moreover, Korean women who lived abroad spread information about American beef and organized protests attended by overseas Koreans who protested the unreasonable importation of beef (Kim, Young Ok, 2009; Kim, Chul-Kyoo, et al. 2008).

At the center of these candlelight protests was the issue of everyday democracy protesting against the government's decision to ignore the safety of food ingredients eaten on a daily basis – a new agenda and a private one, yet also a public issue that had not been prominent within the space for democracy in the past. The agenda they raised, and the demand for the government to take responsibility for the safety of food and the country's citizens, brought about interest and participation from women in a way that contrasted with the existing gender equality agenda. This involved the politicization of daily life and small-scale things like health, public health and safety, and the "politicization of non-political things" (Hong, Seongtae, 2008). The protests were important in the context of consumer capitalism along with the appearance of agents who possessed a wide range of opinions and sentiments within the influence of consumer capitalism. They were not organizing a protest outside the system but viewed their daily choices as a problem of rights and self-respect. The issue of daily life and politics intertwined and the borders between culture and politics became less clear, while the candlelight protests showed that new spheres unseen in the past were quickly creating new social agendas and politicizing them (Jun, Hyo-gwan, 2008: 271-274).

The candlelight demonstration participants were not policy experts or feminists, but rather “learned women” who were members of the general public, with education and common sense. The equal solidarity and sympathy felt among members of Internet clubs who shared similar hobbies and interests became the energy that expanded the candlelight protests. This allowed the discovery of a new political direction that expressed identity politics, based on personal daily interests and common feelings.

### *The Feminist Discourse Outside the System and Identity Politics*

The gender equality agenda pursued by the women’s movement post-democratization aimed to secure a so-called “fast track” to transform gender relationships through national policies. The degree of success achieved by the women’s movement paradoxically led to a dilemma where the women’s movement’s agenda was selectively diminished to meet the rationale of the bureaucratic system. On the other hand, there were those who argued that the institutional “success” of women’s policies symbolized by the establishment of the MOGEF was both unjustified and exaggerated. These critics attacked women’s policies and feminism that discriminated against men and later increased expressions of hatred toward women online.

In contrast to this, young feminists aimed to highlight the failures of gender equality reform; in other words, the sexual violence agenda overlooked by legal and institutional responses. They radically criticized the patriarchal culture that continued to permeate society and the customs of daily life. Women who took part in the candlelight demonstrations showed the possibility of a new kind of democracy that turned the issues of everyday life into political issues. Ordinary women who showed the importance of democracy in daily life, which had long been argued for by the women’s movement, and the cultural strategy they implemented brought the problems of daily life into the public sphere, were different from the members of the women’s movement that pursued gender equality reform.

Identity politics is a very broad term used similarly to the politics of difference, the politics of acknowledgement and group-based politics. However, there are two factors concerning identity politics that must be highlighted. In a male-dominated society, being “woman-like” is emblematic of weakness and sentimentality and stands in contrast with physical power and rationality. Efforts aimed at re-interpreting the understanding and experience of women in response to existing stereotypes can be considered identity politics. Moreover, confirming identity is not limited to just cultural interpretations and must include a demand for justice to develop into a political plan (Young, 2000: 103-105).

The Young Feminist’s identity politics, criticism of patriarchy coming from young women’s movements and, on the opposite end of the spectrum, the misogyny displayed online and the spread anti-feminist discourse represent the background in which changes in the political and economic structure of Korean society took place. The sense of deprivation felt by the younger male generation, symbolized by the phrase “Hell Chosun,” and the fear that the foundations of their lives are collapsing due to pressures from the neo-liberal era, has, to some extent, led to attacks against

women (Lee, Na Young & Heo, Min Sook, 2014). Moreover, young women who received equal education post-democratization still feel a suffocating sense of discrimination in their daily lives; however, the laws and institutions pursued by the women's movement are not nearly sufficient to resolve these issues.<sup>4</sup> The murder of a young woman in Gangnam Station in 2016 galvanized popular discourse on feminism even more. What is the reason why popular discourse on feminism spread outside the institutional sphere, i.e. online and in daily life? As it pushed for legal and institutional reforms after the 1980s, the women's movement failed to make daily discrimination part of its agenda and thus the desire among women to express their own, individualized anger played a major role in the spread of this popular discourse on feminism.

## **Conclusion: Aiming for Communication between Public Feminism and Identity Politics**

The post-democratization women's movement presented a gender equality agenda that could be pursued through laws and institutions, and this agenda led to a practical result: gender equality reform. The success of institutional reform paradoxically and unintentionally resulted in the gender equality agenda becoming confined within the limits of bureaucratic rationality. After the 2000s, the popular feminist discourse expanded in various forms and discussed the daily lives of women and gender discrimination that had failed to be covered within the framework of institutional reform. The framework of "gender reform" failed to expand and interact with the economic crisis, the discontent of the young generation, the new desires of young women, and the popular feminist discourses that appeared as dynamic change took hold of Korean society. Is the "gender equality reform" that formed after democratization now devoid of any purpose, having run out of value?

The legal and institutional improvement movement pursued by the women's movement within the democratization movement has been called the "politics of participation," state feminism, and the institutionalization strategy; at a basic level, however, it is "public feminism." The women's movement has its basis on being "public" and to most regular women they consume feminism as "public goods" and the belief was strong that it should form the collective identity of feminism (Kim, Kyunghee & Yun, Jeongsuk, 2006).

If we define public feminism more generally, it would refer to feminism that emphasizes the activities of women who contribute to social reform. Public feminism is less aimed at radical transformation of the fundamental order between genders; rather, it focuses more on practical reforms and policy agendas that had a chance for success. However, another axis of public feminism is civic virtue, which includes women's participation and efforts to making a better society. Public feminism responds to social crises and democracy crises, and conducts public efforts within

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<sup>4</sup> Please see "Feminism, Dreaming of Reform in Daily Life." Lee Kyung-in. University Newspaper, September 25, 2016.

the system to resolve social issues. A representative example could be the gender equality movement in France (*parité*), as it advocated election system reform which allowed women, who make up half the country's population, to be universally represented in the national legislature (Scott, 2009). The *parité* movement - which created ruptures in the political system that had been closed off and dominated by the vested interests of men and also aimed to secure representation for women - was based on France's own unique republicanism and was also characterized by public feminism.

Identity politics turns the discrimination and oppression that one feels in one's own life and in one's daily experience into political critical awareness, and creates ruptures in the existing structure of public discourse. Social minorities are deprived of the language and tools to politically express the oppression and discomfort that regulate their lives, and they need a new language and discourse to express their identities politically. As the 100-member Committee example shows, young Korean women raised the sexual violence issue anew and expressed their own feminist identities politically. This was because sexual violence is an important act that can explain the discrimination and oppression women experience in a patriarchal society (Shin, Sang-Sook, 2007; Eum, Hye-Jin, 2009: 46). Defining the oppression, discrimination and unfair treatment that young women feel in their society as "misogyny" and criticizing it is related to all this.

Identity politics is a very broad concept and is characterized by promoting groups that have been excluded and pushed to the periphery in past social movements or in politics that aim to turn their own demands into political issues and demand either recognition of their social existence or acknowledgement of their rights as citizens. (Choi, Hyun, 2009: 309). It is a mistake to consider identity politics as "cultural politics" and to classify it dichotomously with the politics of interests. Identity politics is a movement that removes the excluded from disadvantages by politicizing difference issues, and demanding justice.

Public feminism and identity politics are based on different political plans. Public feminism is interested in attaining the good life as a member of a community and views gender as a universal issue of the entire community rather than just a specific, private issue. It places importance on solidarity with a broad array of social movement forces and reformist political parties. In contrast to this, identity politics creates radical agendas while expanding the efforts in daily life originating from the spheres of individual life and identity into the political sphere. By politicizing the various identities and cultures of minorities, identity politics creates ruptures in the mainstream culture, which is oppressive toward women and is patriarchal. While public feminism is a universal plan to make women citizens and masters of the community, identity politics politicizes the identities of minorities and exposes the oppression of the mainstream culture. Various expressions and interaction of the post-democratization gender equality agenda, and the different trends between public feminism and identity politics can be discerned here.

Then, can the radical demands of identity politics and the universal plan of public feminism exist together despite their different political directions and cultural sensitivities? Some clues can be found in the candlelight protests in Gwanghwamun

square in 2016.<sup>5</sup> Gwanghwamun represents a dynamic public space that allows citizens' demonstrations and puts on display a wide-range of identities. The women's movement groups that led gender equality reform after democratization were critical actors in the preparation of the candlelight protests, which were led by regular citizens. Young women held the banner of feminism and marched in Gwanghwamun, and distributed print-outs they had created with ordinary people who had gathered there. These so-called "Young, Young Feminists" raised issues about sexual violence and sexual harassment that occurred in the square, and broadcasted messages encouraging demonstrators not to commit actions or say things that may make participants sexually uncomfortable. Moreover, many women held hands with young children and pushed strollers as they participated in the protests. A wide-range of feminist political plans and various kinds of female identities coexisted at the square.

The public feminism of the women's movement that led the gender equality reforms must move beyond the "fast-track strategy" that uses the state as a tool. It must advocate a universal political plan that creates a more democratic community. Moreover, the identity politics that were expressed outside of the institutional reform space demands the actualization of more equal lives and gender justice in daily lives and in culture, and exposes the exclusion and gender blindness inherent in democracy. There is a need to seriously consider gender as a universal issue of democracy to break through the limits faced by democracy post-democratization. Democracy without gender cannot become an alternative for new democracy.

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<sup>5</sup> This was a nation-wide protest against former President Park Geun-Hye and corruption in politics.

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