

# Rethinking Women's Status and Liberation in Korea

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## 1. Introduction

With rapid economic development and the advent of the women's movement, the changing status of women received much attention around the world. The concept of 'development' has been synonymous with a notion of 'modernization' (Diarsi, 1996). I, accordingly, use 'development' in a same context of 'modernization' - that is, economic progress from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' society. The status of women has been defined as women's access to public resources that are open to everyone (ward, 1984). The status of women, in this sense, reflects the level of social justice which plays a critical role in distributing these resources to each gender in a society. Justice is equality for equals. Women's inferior status means injustice. Injustice, here, is the unequal treatment of the members of the two genders.

Although Korea has achieved remarkable economic development within a relatively short span of time, gender disparity seems to be problematic. Compared to the West, the newly-developing countries of East Asia show a high negative percentage difference between the overall HDI (Human Development Index) and gender-disparity-adjusted HDI. For example, Hong Kong indicates the highest negative figure in this (-28.3), followed by Singapore (-23.8) and Korea (-22.2) (Chang, 1996).

Is gender disparity inevitable for the national economic growth in the East Asian countries, including Korea? What kind mechanism plays a critical role to maintain women's lower status?

Recently scholars have paid attention to the effects of the "economic miracle" on gender relations in the basic social unit of Korean culture (Chang, 1996; Cho, 1996; Kim, 1995). They argue that Korean families on the basis of the Confucianism create different social relations and ideologies, including gender relations and family ideologies. That is, the traditional familism in Korea reacts to the exigencies of the nation's intense industrialization in different ways from western familism. This exclusive familism provides survival strategy that enables the families to protect its members from the relative weakness of the national policy.

This paper is to provide global explanation about following inquiry: To what extent has development led to women's liberation compared to the general development of society for the last two or three decades in Korea? In the following section, I will examine some theoretical linkage between development and its impact on women's status. In the section 3, the effect of development on women's employment, family and gender role, violence against women, and women's political empowerment will be

reviewed. On the basis of previous review, section 4 presents summaries and discussions.

## **2. Development and Its Impact on Women's Status: Some theoretical Linkages.**

Women's status in developing countries in relation to the national economic growth can be explained by at least three different perspectives (Kong, 1990). Evolutionary theorists emphasize that modernization may enhance women's status in terms of altering their quality of life. By contrast, dependency and world-system theorists argue that an international division of labor during an modernization process has an adverse impact on women's status by widening gender inequality. Thirdly, socialist feminists insist that historically capitalist patriarchy perpetuates women's subordinated position. Accordingly, women's status does not change significantly as long as capitalist patriarchy persists. Let me examine these three perspectives more precisely.

Evolutionary theorists assume social development as a linear and cumulative process. For them, the impact of development on women is viewed as positive. Industrialization reduces the biological constraints on women by introducing birth control and bottle feeding. Modern values, in addition, encourage women to increase their mobility and to seek freedom of activity. Thus, women's development is perceived as part of a modernization process.

Goode (1963) identifies industrialization as the main explanation for a trend towards egalitarian relations within and outside the family. The industrialized economy and its need for a flexible labor force, he argues, are best served by a small and independent family. He postulates a "fit" between the conjugal family and the modern industrial system which stresses the individual's right to move about and the universalistic evaluation of skills. The industrial society's increasing demand for a skilled and mobile labor force tends to decrease the barriers of gender, and force into the conjugal family and equality between husband and wife.

In discussing increased modernization in Asian countries, Ward (1963) argues that modernization directly influences women's entrance into politics. She points out several factors that affect women's political participation: modern medical measures, new communication networks, urbanization, mass education, and experiences in political emancipation movements. A women's consciousness of their lives and status emerges from women's experiences in these areas. Women who experience nontraditional roles are expected to develop consciousness and organize efforts to support social justice and equality.

A number of scholars criticize the evolutionary perspective as economic determinism. They argue that the ideology of egalitarianism related to economic development does not fit actual reality (Boserup, 1970; Safilios-Rothschild, 1982; Tinker, 1976; Ward, 1984). They, so called dependency and the world-system theorists, conclude the the

industrialization process in developing countries has an adverse impact on women's status.

Ward (1984) argues that women's status was reduced by an international division of labor between the core and the periphery countries. Factors that especially diminished women's economic contributions are the introduction of agricultural technology, cash crops, the expansion of local trade, and the creation of foreign investment industries. In addition, when dependency trade emerges in developing countries, the extent of commodity concentration and of the foreign trade structure have a negative impact on women's employment. If countries concentrate on limited commodities such as agricultural or raw materials, and if countries export raw materials and import processed goods from developed countries, women's access to employment will be limited by this economic structure. Women in these countries are less likely to be employed than men because of fewer specified sectors in their economy.

Also during dependent development, investment in manufacturing distorts women's share of the labor force. When labor-intensive cottage industries were replaced by capital-intensive industries, women lost their jobs because of the scarcity of jobs and the overall preference for male labor. Some of these women became cheap workers in the multinational corporation factories that were oriented to production for export without long-term job security.

Further, women's participation in the service or informal sectors is also related to the underdevelopment process caused by foreign investment and trade dependency. Women's employment in the service sectors that includes domestic service, food production, trading, small scale production, and retail sales is based on women's domestic production within the home. In general, such service sector employment is poorly paid without job security and provides little opportunity for gaining specialized training. As a result, women's economic status in developing countries has declined. On the other hand, socialist feminists criticize the common notion that women's labor force participation is closely associated with their status (Barrett, 1980; Eisentein, 1979; Hartmann, 1979). They argue that women's subordination is due to the sexual division of labor and social assessment. Patriarchy not only depends on capitalism, but also facilitates the economic system in society by meeting capitalistic needs.

With the advent of capitalism, the creation of a wage-labor system and large scale production affected women's lives more seriously than men's. When large scale production was introduced by capitalism, women became isolated from labor force participation and remained at home. Although women entered the wage labor force, they tended to occupy lower-paid jobs than men because the social definition of women's labor is based on domestic work.

Female wage-labor is characterized by both low pay and insecurity because of women's domestic and childcare responsibilities. This generalization represents job

segregation in the labor market. The phenomenon of job segregation is exacerbated by the gender division of labor in which most women work in low-paid industries such as textiles and footwear. Furthermore, the entire female labor force is concentrated in a few occupations - shop assistants and managers, typists, secretaries, maids, nurses, teachers, and sewing and textile workers. These jobs are mainly described as service work, caring professions, and socialized forms of domestic service that are strikingly similar to the division of labor in the family. Although women's occupations in the current labor market seem to be extended into additional categories, the present distribution of female labor is basically same.

In addition to the categories of work primarily undertaken by women along the line of an ideology of gender, it is important to discuss the ideology of domestic responsibility in explaining the factors that might determine women's status as insecure wage workers. Women's participation in part-time labor is directly due to their responsibility for childcare and domestic work. Moreover, the family structure in which the husband is a breadwinner discourages equal pay and equal rights to work for women.

### **3. Gender Disparity in Korea**

In this section, I analyze actual women's reality in Korea related to four different fields - employment, family, violence, and political empowerment.

#### **3.1 Segregation of Female labor**

Along with an export-oriented growth strategy, Korea created the rapid incorporation of female labor which dominated in export industries such as textiles, wearing apparel, electronics, and footwear. These four industries were assessed to provide over half of all export earnings in the early 1970s (Seguino, 1995)

Like other developing countries, Korea preferred young unmarried female supply for labor-intensive export industries. <Table 1> indicates the labor force participation rates for women and men for selected years for the period 1970 to 1994. According to the Table, women's labor force participation has steadily risen since 1970, while men's labor force participation has slightly declined until 1985 and risen again.

Table 1: Labor Force Participation Rates by Gender (1970 to 1994) ( %)

Year	Female	Male
1970	39.377.9	
1975	40.477.4	
1980	42.876.4	
1985	43.172.3	
1990	47.074.0	
1995	48.376.5	

Source: Korea Research Institute of Labor (KRIL), 1994, 1996

On the other hand, women's labor participation rate forms a typical M-shaped curve. It shows high participation in women's early 20s, drops in their late 20s and early 30s, and rises again from the late 30s (Cho, 1996). Compared to other Asian countries such as Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan, Korean women's labor force participation rate is relatively low in the age group of 25-34 (<Table 2>). This means that Korean women's economic participation is heavily affected by their life-cycle stages and that marriage, child bearing, and child rearing are important factors to reduce women's participation in the labor market.

Table 2: Age-specific Female Labor Participation in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore (% of female workers)

Age	Korea	Japan	Taiwan	Singapore
15-19	17.4	17.6	21.3	28.6
20-24	65.3	75.6	62.6	80.2
25-29	44.3	64.0	61.8	77.8
30-34	47.8	52.7	55.2	64.7
35-39	57.8	62.4	57.8	56.9
40-44	60.4	70.5	55.4	54.5
45-49	60.9	72.0	48.9	47.6
50-54	60.8	67.6	40.2	36.6
55-59	54.1	55.7	30.9	22.7
60-64	44.9	40.7	20.3	12.6
65 above	19.6	16.7	4.1	4.5
total	47.3	50.7	44.8	51.3

Source: Korea Research Institute of Labor, 1994

Moreover, Korean women tended to be marginalized in the process of development and industrialization. The majority of women who participate in the labor force are still working in the informal and subcontracting sectors (firms employing less than five). More specifically, 56.6% of whole working women are paid employees, while 18.8% are self-employed and the rest (24.6%) are unpaid family workers in 1990. Out of the employed women, according to the <Table 3>, 59.1% are in the informal and subcontracting sectors (Cho, 1996).

Table 3: Informal Workers Rates by Gender (1980-1990) (%)

Year	Females	Males
1980	42.5	53.7
1985	50.2	42.8
1990	59.1	45.4

Source: Cho, 1996; note: Informal workers rates are for those 15 years and older who participate in informal sectors.

More than 60% of working women were evaluated as self-employed or unpaid family workers until 1980. In 1980, 39.2% were paid employees and the rest were either

self-employed (23.2%) or unpaid family worker (37.4%). The number of paid female employees, however, has consistently increased up to 15% more in the late 1980s, while the proportion of paid male workers has decreased more than 10% over that span of time. This trend is due to the increasing rate of married women's labor force participation in paid employment in Korean society (Kim, 1987).

Despite increasing women's participation in labor force, the marginalization of their labor has accelerated in disguised forms of paid employment. First of all, the majority of the paid female workers concentrated in the manufacturing sectors; 83.6% in 1975, 71.3% in 1985 and 72.8% in 1988. In manufacturing, 85.7% of female employees work for the production line. They are characterized as the lowest paid workers. The number of these female workers has been decreased in the late 1980s (KWID, 1984). This was due to the transition of young female workers from manufacturing to service sector. Because of better working condition, young female workers tend to prefer service jobs although wage levels are similar. Female workers in manufacturing sector became slowly replaced by married women during that period.

Gender segregation by occupation and sector indicates another aspect of women's lack of power in the labor market. According to <Table 4>, only small portions of female workers occupy the prestigious sectors such as professional and managerial/administrative positions. The proportion of women in professional position is relatively high, 21.8% in the firms employing more than 10, however, decreased drastically to 4.5% in the thirty largest firms. The case of managerial/administrative position shows more severe gender disparity. The proportion of females in these sectors is 0.7% in public enterprises, 0.5% in the largest firms, and 1.4% in firms employing more than ten. Even in sales and production positions, the proportion of female workers in public enterprises is also small, 3.6% and 6.8%.

Table 4: The proportion of Female Workers by Occupation and Sector (%)

Occupation/Sector	Public Enterprises	30 largest Enterprises	Enterprises with more than 10 Employees
Professional	13.0	4.5	21.8
Managerial/Administrative	0.7	0.5	1.4
Clerical	31.8	26.2	23.6
Sales	3.6	3.0	5.1
Service	32.6	39.7	37.8
Production	6.8	28.2	34.3
Total	20.1	24.3	32.6

Source: Cho, 1996.

In general, the proportion of female workers in clerical and professional/technical positions has increased over the late thirty years. In 1960, women held 3.8% of clerical and 17.8% of professional/technical positions and it has been enhanced up to

40.1% and 36.0% in 1990. However, women's economic status does not seem to have improved because of the feminization of cheap labor. Let me turn to the wage disparity between genders.

In spite of the relatively strong demand for female labor, women's relative wages have not improved substantially since the late 1970s. <Table 5> indicates the ratio of female to male earnings in selected industries in the manufacturing sector for the period 1975 to 1990. Overall, the female/male earning ratio in manufacturing sector has risen from 47.0% in 1975 to 50.5 in 1990. This trend was more prominent in the female-dominated export industries - textiles, wearing apparel, and electronics. On the contrary, the wage gap has widened in the transport and machinery industries (both male-dominated with women's share of jobs 12% and 16%, respectively, 1990).

Table 5: Ratio of Female to Male Earnings in Selected Industries in the Manufacturing sector, 1975-1990 (%)

Year	Sector	Textiles	Apparel	Electronics	Transport	Machinery
1975	47.0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1977	45.0	45.1	48.6	53.6	54.6	57.5
1980	45.0	46.3	48.9	44.7	50.9	49.5
1985	47.0	48.6	56.8	48.0	48.0	53.1
1990	50.5	52.0	58.4	57.6	50.4	54.4

Source: Seguino, 1995 (NA = not available)

The slight increase in the ratio of average female to male wages in manufacturing sectors is partly due to labor union activity (Seguino, 1995). During pro-democracy movement of the 1980s, women began to organize labor union in response to dangerous work conditions, discriminatory work rules, and low pay. Widespread strikes in 1987 and 1988 resulted in substantial wage increases for workers, particularly in female-dominated industries.

Nevertheless, Seguino(1995) argues, gender-based wage differentials remain wide during three decades of rapid economic growth in Korea. Based on the assumption that growth of earnings is driven by productivity growth, she explains the wage gap between genders resulted from women's concentration in industries with slow productivity growth.

### 3.2 Unchanging Family and Gender Role

Since kinship solidarity has been the single most important structure of Korean society, the family is considered as the basic social unit. Confucianism exercised great influence on family and overall society in Korea. Especially the rules guiding the relationship between husband and wife was based on severe prejudice toward women, resulting in lower status of women. According to Confucian virtues, a woman was required to obey to her father, husband, and son. In addition, a woman in the patriarchal family was regarded symbolically as an outsider from her biological

family once married and also an outsider from her husband's family until producing a son. Because a woman's place was supposed to be at home, a 'virtuous' woman should not deal with outside world and should not get ahead of her husband.

With a rapid increase of women's education and labor participation outside home, feminism also has influenced to change the family over the past two decades. The traditional extended family was transformed into the nuclear family and women had more control over the decision-making process within the family, although it does not mean that each individual woman obtained the actual power over her partner in the home. In addition, women in Korea became enlightened with the concept of equal rights between genders, role, educational opportunity, social participation and family values.

As a result, Korean women, on the other hand, are trying to develop new social roles with progressive and active attitudes, improved education and social participation. On the other hand, they still maintain the traditional gender roles in the family because of widespread and deep-rooted acceptance of gender inequality based on a powerful legacy of Confucianism (Kim and Han, 1996). Accordingly, distorted thinking about gender roles leads Korean women to place in lower position consistently: being treated as less important than men, excluded from prestigious occupations, alienated from politics.

Marriage and family is a system that holds traditional patriarchal gender roles. Married women with jobs are facing the deep conflict between their intentions and reality, because they have to pursue their career and take care of their family at the same time. The majority of Korean women do not have positive self-concepts and opportunities to exercise their potentials (Kim and Han, 1996).

According to Kim and Han's study (1996), however, Korean women have gradually tried to escape the patriarchal system, involving social participation. In their survey, 84.3% disagree the notion "women need not try to succeed in careers as men do", and 82.7% oppose that "women should undertake household chores and child-rearing even when they have jobs". But still those in 50s and older and those with lower education (below middle school) seem to have traditional gender role attitude.

In spite of drastic social change, enlightened notion of equality between genders, transformed family structure and weakened parental authority over their children, both traditional and new concepts of family coexist in Korean society. For example, the majority of Korean parents want their son to be successful in a public domain and their daughters to have good spouses while expecting high education for both sons and daughters. This conflict between new values and the established ethical system becomes more clear when the tendency of son preference and gender ratio of newly born babies are reviewed.

In their recent study, Kim and Han (1996) presented the statement "A son is necessary to carry on the family line". Among respondents, 44.5% disagree (including mild opposition and strong opposition) and 30.5% agree (including mild agreement and strong agreement). The agreement rates were higher among married and under-educated women.

As presented <Table 6>, ratio of newly born boys in 1994 is almost 116 per 100 girls, and this indicates 9% increase rates compared to 1980. Especially this imbalance gender ratio becomes severe in the case of the third (206) and the fourth (238) born babies. In Kim and Han's study (1996), as many as 13.2% of women said that they would feel guilty if they did not bear a son. This feeling is more common among married women, those in their 40s and older, and the under-educated. According to informal statistics, recently over 60,000 girls died in terms of abortion because of preference for sons. What does this tell us ultimately?

Table 6: Ratio of Boys to Girls (100 persons) by Birth Order (%)

Year	Total	First-born	Second-born	Third-born	Fourth-born
1980	105.6	106.0	106.5	106.9	110.2
1985	109.4	106.0	107.8	129.2	146.8
1990	116.6	108.6	117.2	190.8	214.1
1994	115.5	106.1	114.3	205.9	237.9

Source: Statistics Institution, 1996

In her study "Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian Patriarchy in South Korea", Cho (1996) discussed the two sides of Confucian patriarchy; extreme suppression of women on the one hand and extreme idealization of motherhood and encouragement of mother's accomplishments on the other. She argues that patriarchy legitimizes mother power to be a way of accommodating women under a male-dominated social system. That is, instead of excluding women from the public and political domains, patriarchy institutionalized mother power. It is because mother power may be the most unthreatening source of power to the patriarchal system.

Mother power is based on their son or son's well-being. As a result, mother power basically places at the personal and familial level at best. Institutionalized mother power enables women to be independent from their husbands. This independence, in fact, is limited within the symbiotic nature of mother-son relationships. Without the mother-son relationship, women hardly establish their identity as autonomous individuals. Thus, Cho (1996) contends, "The heavy emphasis on the identity of women as mothers is, in fact, the major stumbling block in the women's rights movement in Korea today. It is not motherly to feel oppressed" (p. 97).

Furthermore, after experiencing the long-lasting socio-political instability such as Japanese occupation, the Korean War, exclusive familism became the core value to

protect the family itself (Cho, 1996; Kong, 1992). The tendency of exclusive familism seems to have been strengthened through the rapid industrialization. Contemporary capitalism has developed the division of public and private domains, the family assumes a nuclear forms based on a particular sexual division of labor: a breadwinner husband and a full-time wife (Kim, 1995).

The separation of public and private legitimizes the separation of the official economic sphere from the domestic sphere. Women who are alienated at home become lost their identity and try to compensate their loss by pursuing the well-beings of their family. It has been indicated that Korean women pay little attention to community welfare programs, compared to the middle-class housewives in the Western society. They tend to focus their time and energy on immediate family interests (Cho, 1996).

In short, mother power, "overdependene" between mother and son, and exclusive familism play a critical role to maintain an extremely conservative social system in Korean society. As Cho (1996) suggested, the fundamental social change and women's empowerment can not be possibly obtained without deconstructing or reconstructing mother power, exclusive familism, and the distinction between the dual public/private domains.

### **3.3 Wife Battering as a form of Controlling Women**

Recently wife battering as a major type of domestic violence became a familiar issue in Korean society. Feminists argue that wife battering is no longer a personal problem but a social problem and should be regarded as a crime. However, historical traditions of the patriarchal family system in Korea make escape difficult for women who are systematically beaten.

As Johnson (1996) discussed in his recent article, couple violence in families are distinguished into two major categories: patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence. Patriarchal terrorism, a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control 'their' women" is defined as "a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics" (Johnson, 1995: 284). On the other hand, common couple violence refers to minor form of violence that occasionally gets "out of hand" in the less-gendered casual processes. In this case, both a husband and a wife can be a batterer and a battered at the same time.

Of two forms of couple violence, common couple violence may occur more often in Korean families. Patriarchal terrorism, however, is almost exclusively initiated by the husband, most wives never attempt to fight back. Thus patriarchal terrorism in which men systematically terrorize their wives with various tactics includes more severe problems over time.

According to the research of the Korean Health Department (1992), out of 7500 married women, 61% were suffering from their husbands' battering. And out of 544 women, 10.1% were seriously beaten by their husbands. Nevertheless, there are only 11 women's shelters in Korea. The first women's shelter which started from "Korean Women's Hotline" opened in 1987. Six of the whole women's shelters belong to private facilities with poor financial resources, they don't provide either enough economic or emotional service for battered women.

Accordingly, battered women not only fail to get social and legal protection from the shelter, but also tend to return to their violent home without alternatives. Thus, the rate of returning home among Korean battered women who visited the shelter facilities (from 61% to 90%) is much higher than the case of American battered women (from 25% to 46%) (Lee, 1995).

Moreover, most of the battered women are likely to be alienated. A feminist argues that femininity itself is alienation. Women are alienated as mothers and wives at the private domain. Exclusion from the realm of the public always involves a deprivation of the access to public resources and the public decisions that could lead the possibility of independence.

Battered women in Korea are in a dilemma. With family-centered ideology (for example, the notion "Rather staying at the own violent home is much better than staying at public facilities" or "Being with a violent husband is better than without"), they are alienated and continually abused in the home without help. In doing so, they become internalized patriarchal terrorism as an inevitable product in order to maintain their own family relations.

Integrated recent several studies, Byun (1994) examined the seriousness of wife battering in the four categories: initial occurrences, frequency, patterns, and its effect. Data of these studies are collected by either interviews or survey method. Research institutes, subjects, and period were as follows: 143 women who visited the shelters managed by the Korea Women's Hot Line from 1989 to 1991, 1200 spouses studied by the Korea Institute of Criminology (KIC) in 1992, 156 women who came to family law advice centers across the the nation in 1992 studied by Huh (for an individual study), and 52 battered wives who used counseling centers or shelters in 1993 studied by Korea Women's Development Institute (KWDI). The findings are summarized into following four points.

First, wife battering begins early in the marriage and continues for an extended period without ceasing. According to the studies by Women's Hot Line, Huh, and KWDI, most women (from 73.4% to 90.4%) were battered within the first year after marriage. Even 25.7% of the women in Huh's study reported that they had experienced assault before marriage. On the other hand, 37.5% of the women in KIC's study had experienced battering during the first year after marriage. It is because KIC collected data from general adult samples.

Second, 80.8% of research women in KWDI's study, 76.3% of women in Huh's study, and 42% women in The Korea Women's Hot Line's data had been physically abused more than once a month.

Third, the patterns of wife-battering tend to be more varied and serious over time. Half of the women in these studies reported that their spouses had begun the first assaults by slapping the face and the violence gradually progressed to strangling and using a weapon such as a knife. Further, wife battering is often connected to forced sexual relations. Around 25% of women in these studies reported that they had experienced forced sexual relations following battering.

Fourth, wife battering caused serious injuries, psychological trauma as well as long term mental strain. Women in these studies indicated severe headaches, bruises, bone fractures, loss of eye-sight, nervous paralysis, insomnia, and indigestion. Also they were suffering from anxiety, a sense of powerlessness, and a loss of self-respect and self-confidence which caused suicide and impulsive-killing.

### **3.4 Lack of Women's Political Empowerment and Organizations**

In general, political activities are correlated with education, work experience, and group membership. Women in developing countries have fewer opportunities in these areas. Because of the lack in education and work experience, the ability to organize political actions is also limited. Although women's educational and work opportunities have increased in Korea, these are not critically effective in enhancing women's political status at more powerful levels of government (Kong, 1990).

Women's political status has been categorized two indicators: women's political participation and equal rights legislation (Ward, 1984). Recently, most women in developing countries including Korea gained political rights through suffrage. However, there are several constraints on women's political participation: (1) women's perception of their public role; (2) cultural norms and social prejudices; and (3) lack of active women's political organizations.

First, women's political issues are closely related to their domestic maternal role. Even women tend to view their public roles as extensions of their traditional tasks of mothering and nurturing. Since women in political power have mostly involved "soft" issues (such as health, welfare, or education), their impact on government and whole society is little visible. Second, cultural norms and social prejudices are more important factors than women's socio-economic determinants in defining women's political roles and status. Thus, increasing women's economic independence has not yet transferred to increasing their political power. Finally, obstacles in the socio-cultural superstructure is so strong that women cannot develop their political organizations. Women's political strength can grow in terms of women's organizations, women can hardly mobilize themselves to integrate into political institutions.

Besides socio-cultural constraints on women's political activities, underdevelopment or dependent development in developing countries limits access to legislation for women's equal rights. According to Ward (1984), women's legal status may be weakened by 'modern laws' such as property rights and protective legislation. Land ownership, for instance, is usually applied to men within the patriarchal system.

Further, protective legislation is rarely implemented in developing countries because of pressures from multinational corporations. Although legislation may be enforced, selective enforcement of protective legislation discourages women to engage in the labor force. The denial of proper training for new industrial technology is another barrier for women's access to equal rights in employment. Although their educational and employment opportunities are increasing, women are continually excluded from "elite tracts" (Kong, 1990).

Fundamental changes in political and gender relations in daily life are possible by the organizations of women. Women's organizations, however, have been strongly discouraged by national politics within the world-system. With intrusion of the world-system, women's organizations in developing countries became marginalized by insufficient credit for members. Moreover, since multinational industries from developed countries are looking for a cheap and docile labor force, women's unionization has been deliberately disrupted by national governments (Kong, 1990).

Techniques of hierarchical organization and control seem to be closely related to the gender division of labor. Hartmann (1979) notes, "A patriarchal system was established in which men controlled the labor of women and children in the family, and that in so doing men learned the techniques of hierarchical and control." (p.207).

Men had enough opportunities to develop organizational structure, since men have had a head position both in the household and in the workplace, while women's subordinated position at home and work did not provide women with the ability to organize into groups as wage workers. Hartmann claims (1979: 216), "Men's organizational knowledge, then, grew out of their position in the family and the division of labor". Further, during the process of industrialization, male unions played a role in excluding women from gaining skills. Because the main policy of male unions was to keep women less efficient, women received lower wages and remained in segregated jobs.

Let me turn to the point of women's political participation in Korea regarding to women's three roles: as voters, decision-makers, and political activists (Chun, 1996; Kim and Chun, 1996). First, voting is the most common method of political participation for women. Although voting is relatively simple compared to other political activities, women are able to access political power and clarify eligibility for leadership through voting. In the 1989 National Assembly election, 74.7% of the

female electorate participated in voting. And 70.9% of females voted in 1992. This partly indicates women's active political participation.

Women's political participation became more active with reinstatement of local autonomy in Korea in 1991. Many changes have been made in repeated elections up to the local elections of 1995. The recognition that local politics is the politics for daily life enabled several women to win in the local elections. Despite the fact that women became more active about election activity, discussions about politics, and membership in political parties, women are not likely to participate the democratic process in a direct way.

Second, Korean political situation does not allow women to be representatives at the elite level. Political elites include legislators governmental officials, political party officials and other opinion leaders from diverse public and private sectors who influence the policy-making system. Nineteen women candidates ran in the Constituent National Assembly in 1948, fourteen in 1988, nineteen in 1992 and nine in 1996. Although local autonomy was expected to provide women more opportunities, the result was disappointing. In the 1991 local election, only forty won out of 124 women (0.9% of the total). This result implies that Korean women failed to achieve a breaking-through into the male domain of political power.

The highest rank of government positions that women have reached is the minister level. There have been 9 women cabinet ministers since 1948. The proportion of female ministers and vice-ministers is below 5% in 1997. The higher decision-making positions, the lower the percentage of women. At the end of 1991, 24.6% of public officials were women, with only 1.7% of women above the 5th class of national government employees. In spite of the increasing number of women in the government, the majority of them belong to the lower ranks.

Third, women's participation in high level positions in the political parties is disappointing, although women's active participation in party activity is growing. There are few women members (less than 10% respectively) in the decision-making posts (such as party adviser, party affairs committee, the central standing committee, party chairs) in the existing political parties in Korea. This reflects the patriarchal idea that women are merely assistants. Because of the bureaucracy of political parties, women hardly get the position of candidacy. On the other hand, it is also true that women have been too passive in claiming their rights to share the high level decision making positions.

There were approximately seventy five women's organizations with 827 branches and total membership of 9,800,000 in Korea, 1992. These organizations worked for enhancing women's legal, political, economic, and social status in various ways. They played a critical role in passing the revised family law, the Equal Employment Law (1989), the Mother/Child Welfare Law (1990), and the Special Law Against Sexual

Violence (1997). Especially women's movement has been specialized since the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995. Still most women are still more likely to be interested in culture, education, and sports activities than the consumer movement, community activities, and political activities (Kim and Chun, 1996). Through various educational and training programs, however, these organizations contribute to enhancing women's consciousness of political empowerment. In addition, several research centers for women in universities are making effort to extend the body of knowledge in terms of connecting theoretical women's problems with practical solutions.

In general, Korean women have been excluded and alienated from politics. There are several obstacles in empowering women (Chun, 1996): First of all, cultural ideology effectively prevents women from participating in the public domain; Women lack self-consciousness of gender equality; The national policies are not balanced for women; The distribution of power is determined by the rule of the dominant ideology, that is, male power holders.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to review the effect of economic development on women's employment, the family and gender role, violence against women and their political empowerment in Korea.

Economic growth has been the primary concern for power elites in Korea for three decades. Although Korea achieves a certain level of economic growth, those who have suffered from the developmental process are the powerless people, including women. As we have seen, despite increasing women's participation in labor force, they tended to be marginalized in the process of development and industrialization. Gender segregation by occupation and sector indicates another aspect of women's lack of power in the labor market.

Marriage and family in Korea is a mechanism that maintains traditional patriarchal gender roles. Married women with jobs are facing the deep conflict between their intentions and reality, because they have to pursue their career and take care of their family at the same time. Thus, the majority of them do not have positive self-concepts and opportunities to exercise their potentials.

Previous studies indicate that 42.0% to 61.0% of the married women surveyed have experienced assault by their husbands, and 10.1% of them were seriously beaten by their husbands. Moreover, most battered women are likely to be alienated. Women who are alienated at home become lost their identity and try to compensate their loss by over-caring their children. Battered women in Korea are in dilemma. With family-centered ideology, they are alienated and continually abused in the home without help. In doing so, they become internalized patriarchal terrorism as an inevitable product in order to maintain their own family relations.

Political activities are correlated with education, work experience, and group membership. Women in Korea have less opportunities in these areas than men. Because of the lack in education and work experience, the ability to organize political actions is also limited. Although women's educational and work opportunities have increased recently, these are not critically effective in enhancing women's political status at more powerful levels of government.

Higher education is essential to improve women's status, because education changes women's attitudes deeply rooted in belief and tradition and thus helps them to socialize their children to share equal partnership in marriage and in society. Although class difference is also critical understanding women's problems and to support policy changes, I think, opportunity for higher education basically narrow income distribution and the gap of employment.

More ideally, women need to recognize themselves as subjects as well as objects of history. In order to construct a new society, women need to have some systematic knowledge about the world. In addition, an understanding of women's oppressive condition or women's present status needs a call for change and participation in altering power relations. Knowledge based on concrete personal experiences in particular settings will provide us new paradigms and theories of gender. In order to transcend personal experience, the internalization of women's issues is important and this will help us to explore truth and to develop national resources for women. Improvement in women's status and roles depends on women themselves. The point is to change, not to reinterpret women's status in general.

In this context, we can take the first step to make our voices heard through sharing the knowledge of women's status and roles in two countries - Korea and Germany - that are suffering from similar historical tragedy. In addition, different women with different cultural and social experiences construct positively inexhaustible human relations. Such openness to difference in women's current social relations can build an unoppressive society. This unoppressive society is women's political ideal.

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