

HISTORY OF THE KOREAS

For hundreds of years, the Korean peninsula was a single, united country. Before the split, they were ruled by generations of dynasties. After the Russo-Japanese war, Japan occupied Korea and annexed it. For thirty five years, Korea was under the Japanese occupation until the end of WWII when one Korea became two.

After WWII, the two super powers, USA and USSR, without the involvement of the Koreans, decided to divide the country into two occupation zones. The dividing line was known as the DMZ or the 38th parallel. Between 1945 and 1948, The Soviet army set up a communist regime north of the parallel while the United States supported the military government that was formed in the south.

In 1948, an attempt was made to reunify the two countries but the north refused to participate in the process. So, the south formed its own government as did the north. Since then, the two nations have taken a drastically different paths. The south developed into a fully democratic nation with a robust economy whereas the north is ruled by three generations of a single family of dictators with no real economic development. (Sarah Pruitt, History)

The religion of North Korea is the worship of its leaders and their communist party. They persecute all religions including Buddhist, but the harshest punishment is reserved for the Christian faith. The hatred of the Christians by the communist goes so far as even to hunt them out from their neighboring countries to bring them back to North Korea to persecute, imprison, and to execute. (Rebecca Pankratz, HRNK)

When there was only one Korea, during the Joseon Dynasty, women were expected to give birth to and rear male heirs to assure the continuation of the family line. Women had few opportunities to participate in the social, economic, or political life of society. Although women were never equal to men, they had more, comparatively speaking, rights and freedom before the Yi Dynasty and Neo-Confucianism was introduced. Furthermore, during the Koryo period, remarriage of women as well as equal property inheritance between men and women was completely acceptable.

During the Yi Dynasty, however, Confucianism was strongly adhered to by society and immensely affected the roles of men and women. At a young age, boys and girls were literally separated and were taught to fulfill their gender roles. Girls were taught to obey men throughout the rest of her life: In youth, she was to obey her father; when married, she was to obey her husband; if her husband died, she was subject to her son.

Traditionally, few women received any formal education in Korean society. In the late 19th century, however, when the country began to open to foreign contacts, Christian missionaries began to establish girl's schools allowing young Korean females to obtain modern education. When the Japanese occupied Korea between 1910 and 1945, women experienced some social changes much like women did in the Western world. Urbanization and modernization in the early 20th century opened up opportunities for women in the workforce.

Other more fortunate women received education at secondary schools in urban areas while some even had the chance to study abroad at more prestigious institutions in Japan. There were even movements to eradicate illiteracy. These movements towards education across the socio-economic spectrum would later influence and encourage North Korean communist activities. It aided in the spread of communist ideals and made it easier to educate and rally the people around communism.

After WWII, the social status and the roles of women were radically changed. Before the Korean War, the communist regime in North Korea began reordering traditional Korean society to reflect the ideal communist society. The communist regime in North Korea granted women positions of importance and agency in their communities in its efforts to promote equality.

North Korean women were also given the opportunity to be involved in the political culture. The regime encouraged them to join various groups-women's organizations were powerful and ambitious. They were responsible for making demands and social changes such as paid maternity leave, wage equality, education, parental services, etc.

Many women contributed to the economy during the North Korean Revolution as well. Women took on the roles of journalists, teachers, clerks, and more. These women were forward thinking in their reasons for being in the workforce, some

expressing a desire to be trailblazers for future businesswomen. They still saw economic involvement as an uphill battle, though, because of the regime's emphasis on women's duties in the home. They were required to fulfill their traditional gender role, particularly strong communist values in their children. Thus, for most women, agency was situated in the home, not in the workplace or political sphere.

In 1972, the North Korean constitution asserted that "women hold equal social status and rights with men." In the 1990 constitution, the state stipulated that the state create various conditions for the advancement of women in society. In principle, North Korea strongly supports gender equality, and established different policies regarding women's emancipation, however, in reality, North Korea remains a patriarchal society.

This trend is seen clearly throughout the history of Korea, and it had deep roots in Confucian ideals. Women do hold one-third of the representative positions in the lower echelons of power, but with not much sway over major decisions. Since women barely have any role in the higher positions of power, they are not well represented and do not have a stake in governance.

The most progressive change in the traditional position of women was the Law on Sex Equality, announced on July 30th, 1946. This law emphasized equal rights in all spheres, free marriage and divorce, and equal rights to inherit property and to share property in case of divorce. It ended arranged marriages, polygamy, concubinage, the buying and selling of women, prostitution, and the professional entertainer system.

The North Korean Labor Law, Article 14-17 stipulated the rights of mothers and pregnant women, including seventy-seven days of maternity leave with full pay, paid baby-feeding breaks during work, a prohibition against overtime or night work for pregnant or nursing women, and transfer of pregnant women to easier work with equal pay.

Unlike in South Korea where women struggled to abolish the family feudal system, the Democratic Women's Union of North Korea replaced family registry system based on male lineage (family feudal system) with a new citizen registry system. Therefore, giving more power to the women in purchasing and owning land.

In early 2015, the North Korean government decided to make military service mandatory for all women, whereas prior to 2015, women only served on a voluntary basis. They are required to serve for seven years or until the age of 23.

Women's role in the family sphere and in the public sphere has changed several times from the end of WWII to this day. After the war, women were enrolled in the socialist economy in large numbers, and played a major role in the rebuilding of the country. As the economy improved in later decades, women were less needed in the work force, and a move towards more traditional roles emerged.

During the North Korean famine of the 1990s, these rations, known as the Public Distribution Systems, dried up and families had to look elsewhere for financial support. Men, even though they were not receiving payment, are still required to attend their government jobs. The cash-strapped government relies heavily on the free labor they get from men and it is unlikely to discontinue this practice anytime soon.

Illegal markets began springing up all over the country out of desperation to keep people alive. These markets became the target of a number of crackdowns and restrictions but were later relaxed. These markets have become the main source of money for the vast majority of families in North Korea, with almost half of households claiming private trading as their only source of money. Although these numbers are difficult to come by in the iron-clad North Korea, researchers believe women are the breadwinners in 80-90 % of homes. Women across the country, empowered by their new money-making abilities, have become less obedient to their husbands and have started controlling a lot of the household decisions.

But, with this change, women in this country are facing increasing domestic violence. Scholars who survey North Korean defectors claim they have yet to interview a woman that hasn't experienced some sort of violence in the home. Men are frustrated with their new-found lack of power.

Albeit with heavy obstacles, women are still leading the charge for civil disobedience, and unusual occurrence in North Korea. When new restrictions are imposed on the markets, women are very vocal and prominent in the protest. These changes have resulted in women preferring to wait longer to get married and men being forced to accept their subordinate roles as husbands. This power

change in life has resulted in men that are forced to beg when their spouse dies, instead of the other way around.

Despite such examples, however, it appears that women are not fully emancipated. Sons are still preferred over daughters. Women do most if not all of the housework, including preparing the morning and evening meals, in addition to working outside the home. The majority of women work in light industry, where they are paid less than their male counterparts in heavy industry. In office situations, they are likely to be engaged in secretarial and other low-echelon jobs.

North Korean women have played an important role in society, politics, and economics, especially during the 20th and 21st centuries. Their significant involvement in social and political organizations helped to shape North Korean communism and spread the regime's socialist ideals. Women's organization like the Korean Women's Socialist League provided an outlet for women to express their daily concerns and to be active towards the communist cause.

Today, North Korean women exercise new forms of power, yet are simultaneously excluded from positions of real power. For example, the women are the leaders of the underground markets. Many women are entrepreneurs, using creativity and resourcefulness to provide for their families during times of economic hardship. It is often the women who are earning money and bringing food for their families when traditional communist means of employment cannot suffice. At the same time, women are grossly underrepresented in the upper echelons of politics even though the Gender Equality Law of 1946 in Article 2 stipulates that the women have the same rights as men to vote and hold political office.

Over time, women in North Korea have made significant strides towards equality. They have experienced success with gender equality legislation, women's organizations, economic entrepreneurship, and more. However, their progress has been severely stunted by the economic failing of their country and the persistence of chauvinist ideals. Despite these challenges, women are still significant, if not essential, contributors to the development of the North Korean state. Wikipedia.

Women of South Korea, on the other hand, are not so fortunate. They have taken their struggle against misogyny and are fighting to be heard.

Under the post-war dictatorship, South Korea's growth model relied on a clear division of labor: men did military service and went out to work, women raised the children and did the housework. What paid work women did tended to be subordinate to men's serving, for instance, to pay for their brothers' education. Adverts often stated that applicants must have completed military service, effectively excluding women. Such rules abolished as part of the democratization of the late 1980s. And Korean women are now far too well-educated to submit meekly to second-class status. But they still face barriers in the labor market, and are expected to do the bulk of housework and child care. Many are extremely unhappy about this as rising number are opting out of marriage and motherhood entirely.

The expectations placed on a South Korean wife are burdensome, she faces intense pressure to look after her husband's extended family, deferring to her mother-in-law and preparing endless snacks. And it is still taboo to have a child unless married. Only 2% of Koreans babies are born out of wedlock, compared with 40% on average across the OECD. "Even though people's lives have changed a lot, the traditional idea of what marriage will be like has not," says Lee Do-Hoon of Yonsei University. "That is stopping them from getting married in the first place." Growing up in a conservative part of the country, Ms. Jung remembers being appalled as a teenager by how poorly her mother, a housewife, was treated by other relatives. "I always knew I didn't want to end up like that," she says.

But the battle against misogyny starts much earlier. "The problem is that nobody takes you seriously," says Kim Na-Yoon, a 17 year old who says she was sexually abused by a group of boys at school and treated dismissively when she reported the incident. "Everyone says it was my fault because I seduced them with my mature body and sexy clothes," she says. "The male police officer they sent to take my statement asked why I didn't just play it cool."

A big part of the problem is a lack of education about sex and equality. "Sex among teenagers is considered taboo, and not being able to talk freely about it gives people unrealistic expectations." Government guidelines on sex education in high schools still suggest pupils be taught that women should focus on their appearance and men on making money to attract partners, and that a man who spends money on a date may "naturally" expect sexual favors in return. Gay sex

or transgender right are not even mentioned. Ms. Kim's middle school sex education consisted of anti-abortion videos.

The average woman still makes two-thirds of the salary of the average man and is given fewer opportunities to advance. Informal arrangements to limit the number of female employees persist in some companies; several banks were recently fined for illegally changing the test scores of job candidates to ensure more men were hired.

On the glass-ceiling index, of the 29 OECD countries, almost 40% of the Southern Korean women have taken the GMAT exams. However, the South Korean women also experience the highest gender wage gap of the 29 OECD countries. Furthermore, only about 5% of the South Korean women sit on company boards.

Many bosses believe that men's jobs are more important than women's because, they assume, men are the primary breadwinners. Julian Han, who manages the homewares division at Lotte Mart, the country's biggest retailer, says a previous employer explained a decision not to promote her by saying that she could always quit and live with her husband whereas her male competitor had to support a family. Coming back to the same or a similar job after maternity leave is hard. As a result, there are still too many well-educated women whose potential is being wasted. (The Economist, April 8th, 2020)

Domestic violence in South Korea is the mental, physical, verbal, or sexual abuses or crimes of violence committed towards a victim in a domestic setting of marital relations and cohabitation. Marital violence has been the most prevalent form of family violence in South Korea. One out of six couples in South Korea had more than one episode of physical violence from their spouse. As part of the culture of South Korea, marital violence is regarded as a private family issue, rather than a crime or social issues. Accordingly, 50% of Korean adults reported that they did not wish to call the police for an incidence of marital violence because "it is a family matter."

One of the predominant cause of domestic violence in the Republic of Korea is the presence of patriarchy in many domestic settings and patriarchal hegemony. The patrilineal house-head system, which grants the succession rules to the paternal side of the family, was dominant in South Korea until the government abolished it in 2005. Gender roles enforced by patriarchal system grants male the superiority

and the control over the family, which often leads them to use physical violence when conflicts occur at home. In 2008, laws regarding the family kinship register were legislated and the patrilineal succession ended. From that point, the Minister of Gender Equality and family guides for family education according to the Basic Plan of Health, which promotes equality and happiness.

Violence against women was present mainly under President Park Chung-hee's military dictatorship that enforced patriarchal hegemony, and women suffered from sexual abuse, prostitution, and physical abuse in the workplace. The victims of these crimes were unable to complain or request assistance because they were not given equal rights to men. State violence became mostly evident after the Puchon Police Sex Torture Case in 1986 where labor activist student from Seoul National University was arrested by authorities, without a warrant, for using false resident identification to be able to work for the manufacturing industry. During her 10 day interrogation, she was sexually abused and tortured by police officers. The case raised concerns and awareness about state gender violence among the Korean society and triggered a related protest organized by the Korean Women's Association United and local NGOs.

In the Family and Changing Gender Roles Survey by the International Social Survey Program in 2002, on a scale of 1 to 5, South Korea scored a high 3.2 due to the respondents' support in the statement, "it is a man's job to earn money, and a woman's job is to look after home and family..." According to the United Nations Development Program's Gender Empowerment Measure, South Korea ranked 68th out of 100 nations in women's participation in important political and economic policy-making decisions, emphasizing men dominance in all fields of the country, the tradition of patriarchy is often deepened in the South Korean culture with popular old Korean sayings such as "Dried fish and women are better after they are beaten," with common view on women as a commodity of a household or a kitchen.

From a 2015 survey conducted by the Korean Institute of Criminology on national random sample (4,000 people) in South Korea about incidents of intimate partner violence, 71.7% of females respondents felt the incidents of "being controlled" by a male partner, 36.6% felt psychological or emotional violence, 22.4% felt physical

violence, 37.9% felt sexual harassment or misdemeanor, 17.5% felt sexual violence, and 8.7% felt physical injury.

The Korean Women's Association United stated in January 2018 that the Korean government does not fully protect the victims of domestic violence. KWAU identified the reasons to the lack of governmental protection:

- 1) Violence at home is culturally a matter of privacy.
- 2) Legal and institutional safeguards for the victims are poor.
- 3) The awareness is low in the police.
- 4) The aggressor is often allowed to stay at home while the victim is driven away under the existing legal system.
- 5) Public services focus on counseling for the victims rather than punishment of the perpetrators, resulting in only 14.9% of prosecution among the arrested for domestic violence in 2003.

Established in 1983, The Korean Women's Hotline is the first women's human rights movement in the Republic of Korea, and an organization committed to promote gender equality and eliminate violence. KWHL defines domestic violence as violence against women, and emphasized the commercialization of sex and the impersonal treatment of gender in the Korean society. Practices such as enforcing termination of pregnancy, illegal trade of labor, forcing women to stop working after marriage, sex tourism, and beauty pageant are perceived as practices of gender violence in the KWHL vision. The KWHL views domestic violence as an international issue rather than a domestic concern and addresses it to the Korean government, and the rest of the world. In 1993, KWHL pressured the government to address sexual violence, domestic violence, and sex trade as crimes, and with that pressure the Prevention law was established in 1997. In 1994, the movement organized the first Korean weekly event aimed at doing away with domestic violence. KWHL has 25 branches across South Korea that provide victims of domestic violence with medical and legal assistance, telephone counseling, and rescue shelters to regain independence. In the initial hotline services in 1983, the movement conducted 1,930 counseling sessions, in which 45% of the cases involved physical violence against housewives. The KWHL has created a slogan to raise awareness to the social issues derived from the domestic violence existent

in the society by saying, “Peace in the Family is Peace in Society.” (Wikipedia, Domestic Violence in South Korea)

South Korean women and girls, primarily, have been sex trafficked within South Korea and to other countries in Asia and different continents. Foreign victims are sex trafficked into the country. Children and persons in poverty are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking. Victims are deceived, threatened and forced into prostitution and their passports and other documents are often taken. Many are enslaved in debt bondage. They suffer physical and psychological abuse and are typically locked up or guarded in poor conditions. Some are murdered. A number contract sexually transmitted diseases from rapes with no condoms. Cybersex trafficking and forced performances in live pornographic videos, as seen in the Nth Room case and other incidents, is a growing issue. (“Nth Room” case is a criminal case involving blackmail, cybersex trafficking, and the spread of sexually exploitative videos...)

The extent of sex trafficking in South Korea is difficult to know because of the lack of data, clandestine nature of sex trafficking crimes, and other factors. The number of child victims trafficked worldwide for sexual exploration or cheap labor on an annual basis is 1.2 million. In March 2020, Korean news organizations revealed details about a series of cases of sex trafficking through chat rooms, encrypted messaging apps such as Telegram and Discord. In these cases, “at least 74 women and 16 minors performing forced sex acts for thousands of viewers who paid cryptocurrency to view it.” The victims were tortured and referred to as “slaves.” (Wikipedia, Sex trafficking in South Korea)

During and following the Korean War, the United States military used regulated prostitution services in South Korean military camp-towns. Despite prostitution being illegal since 1948, women in South Korea were the fundamental source of sexual services for the US military and a component of Korean-American relations. The women in South Korea who served as prostitutes are known as “Korean Military Comfort Women,” and were visited by the US military, Korean soldiers, and Korean civilians. (Wikipedia, United States military and prostitution in South Korea).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in South Korea face legal challenges and discrimination not experienced by non-LGBT individuals. While

male and female same-sex sexual activity is legal in South Korea, marriage or other forms of legal partnership are not available to same-sex partners.

Covering all sources, homosexuality has never been illegal in South Korea. Although there is very little mention of homosexuality in Korean literature or traditional historical account, several members of the nobility and Buddhist monks have been known to either profess their attraction to members of the same sex or else be actively involved with them. During several Dynasties, Silla, Goryeo, and Joseon Era, kings, noblemen, and noblewomen, and other prominent people of status were known to have engaged in homosexual activity and express their love for a person of the same sex.

The spread of Neo-Confucianism in South Korea shaped the moral system, the way of life, and social relations of Korean society. Neo-Confucianism emphasizes strict obedience to the social order and the family unit, which referred to a husband and wife. Homosexuality and same-sex relationships were viewed as disturbing this system and thus were perceived as “deviant or immoral.” Since 1910s, Neo-Confucianism has lost a lot of influence, though still today Confucian ideas and practices significantly define South Korean culture and society.

The Constitution of South Korea prohibits discrimination on the bases of sex, religion, and social status. According to the Ministry of Justice, the term “social status” includes LGBT people. However, there are no remedies for LGBT victims of discrimination nor are these “protections” enforced.

Oppositions to LGBT rights comes mostly from Christian sectors of the country, especially Protestants. In recent years, in part due to growing support for homosexuality and same-sex relationships from South Korean society at large, conservative groups have organized public events and marches against LGBT rights as well counter-protests to pride parades, usually with signs urging LGBT people to “repent from their sins.” These marches have been attended by thousands and by various politicians.

South Koreans have become significantly more accepting of homosexuality and LGBT rights in 2010 and the onward decade, even if conservative attitudes remain dominant. A 2013 Gallup poll found that 39% of people believed homosexuality should be accepted by society, compared to only 18% who held this view in 2007. South Korea recorded the most significant shift towards greater acceptance of

homosexuality among the 39 countries surveyed worldwide. Significantly, there was a very large age gap on this issue: In 2013, 71% of South Koreans aged between 18 and 29 believed that homosexuality should be accepted, compared to only 16% of South Koreans aged 50 and over.

A 2020 Pew Research Center poll showed that 44% of South Koreans believed society should accept homosexuality. South Korea recorded the largest generational gap of the 34 countries surveyed, with 79% of 18-29 year olds agreeing but only 23% of those aged 50 and over. Women (51%), the more educated (51%), those on the left of the political spectrum (67%), and the religiously unaffiliated (60%) were also more likely to agree.

Political support for LGBT rights is limited in South Korea due to the significant lobbying power exerted by conservative Christian groups. Support for LGBT rights is limited even from the otherwise progressive Democratic Party of Korea and its leader, former human rights lawyer and South Korean President, Moon Jae-in. During the 2017 presidential election, in which he emerged victorious, Moon stated that he opposed homosexuality, and that gay soldiers could undermine the Korean military. Moon faced criticism from gay rights advocates for his inconsistent position on minority rights, given that he was prepared to backtrack on previous support for civil unions and sacrifice LGBT rights in order to win votes from conservative Christian voters. Moon later said that he opposed same-sex marriage while also opposing discrimination against homosexual people. Only one of the 14 presidential candidates in 2017, the Justice Party's Sim Sang-jung, expressed clear support for LGBT rights and introducing discrimination protections for LGBT people. (Wikipedia, LGBT rights in South Korea)