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CHAPTER 7 SOCIOLOGY IN KOREA AND GENDER ISSUES

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As in other non-western countries, sociology, which is a science formed in western society had been imported in the process of modernization in Korea. It was in the end of 19th century when Korea was trying to modernize itself in the midst of invasions of other countries, the major ones being China and Japan. At that time sociology was introduced with the names of Kun-Hak through China and sociology through Japan. Korea became a colony of Japan, and western sociology was introduced through Japan for a while. (Chung 1985)

Although there were serious conflicts between modernization and colonization during the colonial period, and modernization and state control during the post-colonial period, there have been significant improvements in women's status during Korea's modernization process. The expansion of women's education, the increase in female labor participation, the formation of women's movement organizations, and other changes demonstrate this. The institutionalization of sociology, however, has severely excluded women.

I will examine the situation of exclusion of women during the process of institutionalizing sociology by examining the female faculty numbers, female students, the gender of the presidents of the Korean Sociological Association and the number of gender-related subjects at the universities.

Gender in the Institutionalization of Sociology

The trend of women's participation in the development of sociology did not change, following the overall process of institutionalization of sociology. (1) I will divide the process of development related to gender issues in Korean sociology into the following four periods: 1) The period of time extending from the beginning of sociology until 1957 when female participation was practically non-existent; 2) The period starting from 1958 until the early 1970s when sociology departments were built at several women's universities and some female scholars began to work; 3) The period of time starting from the latter part of the 1970s until the end of the 1980s when many sociology and women's studies departments were established; 4) And the 1990s when feminism in Korean society has some influence on the gender situation of Korean sociology.

Beginning Stage:--->1957

In the 16th century sociological thinking sprang from Confucianism in traditional Korea, and also in the 19th century sociology was introduced by China and Japan. These were accomplished by male scholars. In the colonial period the opportunities for education had expanded to women, but mostly on an elementary school level.(2) And so called 'New Women' who received higher education appeared, but their majors were mostly in literature, theology and arts; it was rare for women to study social sciences at that time.

After the Liberation the department of sociology was established at Seoul National University in 1946, but no female students entered until 1950, and of course there were no female professors then. During the chaotic period of the Korean War, very few female students entered, but no one after the war again. (Department of Sociology, Seoul National University, 1996)

First Women's Participation: 1958--->Middle of the 1970s

A great moment for development of women's participation in sociology was the establishment of a sociology department at Ewha Women's University, the largest women's university in Korea, in 1958. In 1961 a department was also established at Seoul Women's University (it was abolished in 1967), and in 1962 graduate programs were introduced at Ewha Women's University's sociology department. At these institutions female sociologists were trained, and a some female faculty became employed. These female sociologists began to participate in activities at the Korean Sociological Association which had been monopolized by men since its establishment in 1957 (Korean Sociological Association, 1990 pp.10-17, pp. 108-124). The impact of this momentous take-off was, however, not very big; while the number of female students increased, the number of female faculty members had not increased, and the participation of women at the Korean Sociological Association had also ceased.

Increase of Women's Participation: Middle of the 1970s--->End of the 1980s

During the period of time from the latter part of 1970s until the early part of the 1980s the institutionalization of sociology in Korea developed rapidly. Sociology departments were established at 23 universities, including 3 women's universities, which received many female students. (Korean Sociological Association 1990, pp.108-124) However, it was still very difficult for women to enter the sociology department in competitive universities like Seoul National University, and female scholars encountered great obstacles when trying to obtain jobs. (Department of Sociology, Seoul National University 1996, pp.19)

An important development during this period was the offering of women's studies' courses, as a subject of liberal arts and sciences at Ewha Women's University, and the establishment of a women's studies graduate school at this University in 1982. Following this, many universities began to offer women's studies' courses, and in 1989 63 universities offered this course, and several universities came to have a department of women's studies at the graduate level.(Chung 1996, pp.112-114) It was not within the institutional frame of sociology, but was developed more as an interdisciplinary science, and more independently from conventional sciences. However, in most universities, including Ewha Women's University, the establishment of this program or department was led by the people of social sciences, especially of sociology, and the subjects were organized and related with those of social sciences such as family, class, labor, women's history, etc.

Women's studies is, however, also an imported science from western society, mostly America. As in the case of other social sciences, women's studies, also faced serious challenges in properly treating our own problems.

Qualitative Changes: the 1990s

During the period extending from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s there was a momentous transformation in Korean society. With the Declaration of Democratization on June 29th in 1987, formal democratization began to be developed, and the various social demands that had been suppressed before were all expressed at once. Social movements which had been expressed as a single form, 'class' movements and labor movements, began to be specialized into movements about, for example, environment, civil rights, the handicapped, etc., absorbing various strata or parts of 'citizens'. In the midst of these changes expansion of feminism was notable. From the latter part of the 1980s various organizations of the women's movement began to be formed which reflected the changing consciousness of women, and the social interests in gender issues continued to prevail.

In the field of sociology the need to digest these changes also began to be felt. In 1994 Korean Sociological Association organized a seminar on the reformation of subjects in sociology departments, which included the subject of gender issues. The paper on gender issues argued that all sociology subjects, including class, family, social change, etc., should explain gender aspects, and separate subjects, such as the sociology of gender should be offered. (Korean Sociological Association, 1994) Some departments, including that of Seoul National University first offered the subject of the sociology of gender in 1996. A large number of students took this subject, which presented questions about gender issues.

From the beginning of the 1990s the number of female students in the sociology department rapidly increased, especially at the graduate level, and

female faculty also increased at a slow rate. The sociology department of Seoul National University first employed a female professor in 1996, which was 50 years after its establishment. During the same year the subject of the sociology of gender began to be offered every other semester, and now a cooperative program of women's studies at the graduate level is being prepared, led by the sociology department.

On the other hand, there are also developments outside universities. Many graduates of sociology have contributed to the women's movement and to social education for women outside universities. Many leaders of major women's organizations and the lecturers as well as presidents of the institutes of social education for women which were built mostly in the 1990s are graduates of sociology departments. Several research associations on gender issues also appeared, and are mostly led by the graduates or graduate students of sociology. These efforts would contribute to the development of gender issues within institutional sociology, and also to the analysis of Korean society in institutionalized women's studies.

Reasons for Low Participation of Women in the Development of Sociology and Prospects for the Future

Up to the present, the situation of female exclusion from the process of institutionalizing sociology in Korea has been severe. It improved gradually, but women are still subject to discrimination. The number of female students began to increase recently, but there are still very few women at the universities. The entrance examination is very competitive. Sex discrimination continues to be very severe in faculty employment. Sociology departments of most universities, except women's universities, have one or no female professors.(3) Among some 40 presidents of Korean Sociological Association from 1957 until now only 3 have been female, and only a few departments are offering the subject of sociology of gender.

The most basic reason behind the exclusion of women in Korean sociology seems to be the sex-blinded characteristics of sociology as a modern science, as discussed by many feminist sociologists, including Oakley (Oakley, 1982). However, the patriarchal situation of Korean society has added difficulties. University enrollment rates of women are much lower than those of men,(4) especially since social sciences have been considered to be male sciences.(5)

In the 1990s feminism became prevalent in Korean society, which had some positive influence on the gender situation in sociology. We also could hope that the fact that gender issues are continuously examined and attacked outside universities, would have a positive effect on institutionalized sociology.

However, in one part of society neo-conservative responses against the growing women's voice are also appearing, and this is also reflected in sociology. Many consider the increase of the number of female students as a

sign of lowering the standards of the department, compared with other departments in social sciences such as law, political science, economics, etc., and the strong preference for male students by the professors is easily seen. Some efforts to try to suppress the number of female faculty members have also been discovered. It is not uncommon for seminars, including international ones, to be organized by solely male scholars.(6)

When we see more severe discrimination in the fields of political science, law, economics and other fields which are more competitive, the prospect of gender equality in sociology does not appear bright.

Notes

(1) Myung-Kyu Park divides the institutionalization process of Korean sociology into 6 periods: before 1945, 1945-1956, 1957-1969, 1970-1979, 1980-1990, and 1990--(Park1996)

(2) In 1944 4.97% of the total female population were graduates of elementary school or finished in the middle of it. In the same year 19.29% of 15-19 year old girls were at the same status, 1.37% of them were graduates of high school, and 0.03% were those of college. (Colonial Government of Korea, *Report of National Survey on Population in Korea 1944*, pp.142-143)

(3) The percentage of female professors among all sociology professors is some 25%. (Korean Sociological Association 1994)

(4) In 1990 the number of new male freshmen at colleges was about twice of that of female freshmen. (Korea Women's Development Institute 1991, pp.20)

(5) Women are more suited to art, literature, nursing, and home economics, but less adapted to social sciences, engineering, law and natural sciences. In 1986 among female college students 17.2% were majoring in social sciences, 5% in engineering and 11.3% in arts, while among male students 31.7% were majoring in social sciences, 30.2% in engineering and 2.6% in arts. (Korea Women's Development Institute 1991, pp.20)

(6) For example, at the East Asian Regional Colloquium, "The Future of Sociology in East Asia" organized by the Korean Sociological Association and the International Sociological Association held in Seoul in 1996 all the Korean participants, including paper presenters and discussants, were men.

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PART III THE ASIAN CULTURE, ITS MODERN EXPERIENCES, AND SOCIOLOGY