PUFY1013 Nayon Kim

Int. Sem 2: Fashion Theme: Politics of body

Lauren, Krauze

**Homo Sapiens Sapiens**

“It's a sad house where the hen crows loudest.” Or, “A spaniel, a woman, and a walnut tree, the more they're beaten, the better they'll be.” These are the famous proverb in Korea. “Kimchi bitches” and “Doenjang Girl” are the current popular Korean slang phrases about women that depreciate their values. In South Korea, women are treated as a minority and have been discriminated against by the dominant male society. The discrimination is continuously ongoing, and society is not respecting women the same way it does men. Gender equality is related to human rights and it is a fundamental key to democracy. Democracy is threatened by the gender role stereotypes which had been established by patriarchal Confucian culture and still forces women to conform to particular behavior. Discrimination against women creates a severe barrier between men and women. Destruction of traditional convention and proper education on gender equality would help to discontinue the stereotypical gender roles women are forced to participate in.

The most dichotomous thing which matters to society is gender. Most humans are biologically born male or female, and there are particular roles which force those sexes to perform according to society’s defined norms for that sex. It is what we call the “gender role.” Gender is different from the word “sex.” According to the APA, “Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It is socially constructed, and when it proceeds to be compulsive, it provides us a stereotypical pattern of behavior. The idea that girls should play with dolls and boys should play with trains is a basic example of gender stereotypes. From a young age, gender roles are constructed by a primary group, likely the family environment, and locked into the certain criterion of their genetic sex. We are slaves to the social environment. We need to think about how society perceives genders and how that society has shaped in Korea to understand why stereotypical gender roles are still a matter that hinders women’s rights especially.

In order to understand the existence of severe stereotypical gender roles in South Korea, the presence of Confucianism in modern society is the basic premise to acknowledge. Confucianism in Korean culture is originally from China. Surprisingly, in the major Confucian scriptures, Confucianism is compatible with gender equality. Eunkang Koh, the author of *Gender Issues and Confucian Scriptures* mentioned that the philosophy of Confucian classics does not really illustrate women’s subordination to men.[[2]](#footnote-2) The coalition between Confucianism and patriarchy occurred during a time when Chinese society was organized as a patriarchal order, and Confucianism provided the political philosophy for leaders who were redefining Confucianism in East Asia. In other words, the idea of women's subordination to men was not embodied in Confucian philosophy, but was historically combined with Confucianism by those who established their patriarchal social order.

Throughout the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910), Korea adopted Confucianism as a national religion, Part of an ideology of Confucianism called the three fundamental principles and the five moral disciplines in human relations mentions that males and females should be separated and carry different roles to maintain the family. The statement is often used to imply that Confucianism allows woman’s subordination to man, which is patriarchal. The hierarchy is alive in society and patriarchal properties of Confucianism illustrates that the man is in a higher position than woman. Women cannot eat or be educated in the same way as men are. The *Hoju* system, a law that states a man is the head of the household is still used today. Furthermore, the present republic in Korea is male-dominated in other areas as well.

Confucianism is complicatedly inherent to the modern democracy in Korea. The problem is that it is much more focused on historical elements than on the future, which means it does not correspond to the more radical modern society, where equality and equity are merited. In the current democratic society, it is within a person’s authority to demand due rights that uphold freedom and individuality. The boundary of man and woman are seemingly blurred and being paralleled. Yet, the stereotypical demands on genders are still ongoing. Junpyo Hong, one of the predominant candidates for the presidency in Korea, mentioned that women should do all the housework and triggered many protesters.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is problematic that most elderly people in Korea are extremely indoctrinated into gender stereotypes like him. They don’t think they are wrong but they were naturally educated in a way that established the fixed ideas already present in their culture.

Many Korean educators are acknowledging the importance of circumstance, which can help educate people go be free from gender stereotypes, and are consistently thinking about how to deviate from obsolete customs to reform gender equality and develop society. The appropriate and open education about gender identity and giving children a free choice about gender play is crucial. Meehwa Cho, an instructor of Yonsei-kindergarten in Korea, mentioned that it is a parent’s duty to develop children to grow with flexible notions about gender.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Healthy Children Organization also stresses the parental state of mind, educating children with a wide range of toys, and allowing children to make decisions regarding what sports and other activities they want to be involved in.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Throughout the century, Confucianism formed the entire attitude of the Korean character. We can confirm the fact that the ethics of Confucianism are deeply and unconsciously rooted in Korean culture, and authoritarianism and hierarchy in Confucianism are being extended to gender differentiation. This frustrates the logic of modern society, and forces Korean to gender stereotypes which disturb the women’s rights and social advancement. The division of the sexes creates an intense sociopolitical conflict between men and women. As a democratic nation, every human should be treated equally, choose what to become, and how to act on their own terms, not be forced by external pressure. It will take a long time to get away from the vices of gender roles, but they need to be changed for a better world.

**Endnotes**

1. *Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity in APA Documents*. PDF. <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexuality-definitions.pdf>.

2. Koh, Eunkang. "Gender issues and Confucian scriptures: Is Confucianism incompatible with gender equality in South Korea?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71.02 (2008): 345-362

3. Herald. "[Election 2017] Gender biased language backfires on campaign trail." The Korea Herald. April 27, 2017. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20170427000791>.

4. Cho, Meehwa. Interview by Nayon Kim. Personal Interview. New York City, May 1, 2017.

5. "Gender Identity Development in Children." HealthyChildren.org. https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx.

**Annotated Bibliography**

*Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity in APA Documents*. PDF. <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexuality-definitions.pdf>.

This document from APA is defining the sexual orientation and gender diversity. It provides the different guideline of sexual vocabulary forms according to people. It is useful to understand the difference between the ‘sex’ and gender which is crucial. Also, it illustrates about what word to use in the different context.

"Gender Identity Development in Children." HealthyChildren.org. Accessed May 08, 2017. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx>.

This article is about the appropriate education on children which helps parents to build a proper environment for children, and it also shows the correlation between gender stereotypes and the breakthrough. These factors apply to both Western and Korea’s cases and useful to demonstrate the value of development in young age.

Herald. "[Election 2017] Gender biased language backfires on campaign trail." The Korea Herald. April 27, 2017. Accessed May 08, 2017. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20170427000791>.

This is a news article posted in Korean Herald describing the incident that Korea’s presidential candidate Jun Pyo Hong mentioned gender stereotyped words about women. The article shows the current circumstance of elder people’s notion of gender and also how people respond to those issues.

Koh, Eunkang. "Gender issues and Confucian scriptures: Is Confucianism incompatible with gender equality in South Korea?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71.02 (2008): 345-362

The paper details the relationship between Confucianism culture and Korea’s historical perspective on gender. The author clearly explains the history of Confucianism and the compatible factors with gender issues.

Meehwa, Cho. Interview by Nayon Kim. Personal Interview. New York City, May 1, 2017.

Meehwa Cho is a children educator in Korea, and we had a conversation about the parent’s role in the process of forming children’s gender characteristic. Meehwa Cho provided me her experience of the conference with parents, and it was helpful for me to confirm the relationship between first group environment and children’s gender identity.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)