

***Gender and the Political Opportunities of Democratization in South Korea***, by Nicola Anne Jones. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 320 pp., US\$ 105.00, ISBN: 978-1-4039-7249-1 (hardcover)

Nicola Anne Jones' *Gender and the Political Opportunities of Democratization in South Korea* is one of the representative works on gender politics in Korea. While there are a number of books that analyze democratization, civil society, and social movements in Korea, few have systematically studied the formation of women's movements and their achievements during and after the democratic transition in the late 1980s. *Gender and the Political Opportunities* in a sense spearheaded a stream of new theoretical and empirical studies on gender politics in Korea available in English. Since the book's publication in 2006, monographs that offer in-depth analyses of women's activism and its relations to sociopolitical context have followed, such as *Protest Politics and the Democratization of South Korea: Strategies and the Role of Women* by Youngtae Shin (Lexington Books 2014), *Practicing Feminism in Korea* by Kyungja Jung (Routledge 2013), and *The Korean Women's Movement and the State* by Seung-kyung Kim and Kyunghee Kim (Routledge 2013).

Therefore, *Gender and the Political Opportunities* is a volume that needs to be in the bookshelf of students who are in the field of Korean politics, women's studies, and social movements. In this book review, I will briefly introduce the major arguments and findings of the book and then discuss the theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of Korea's democratization, political institutions, civil society, and gender issues. In this discussion, I will also identify the limitations of the study, which will serve as suggestions for future studies on gender politics in Korea.

Jones begins by laying out a theoretical framework to analyze women's activism to enhance gender equality in democratizing Korea (Chapter 1). The analytical framework reflects a synthesis of the scholarship on historical legacies, social movements, political institutions, and international norms (13). Using this theoretical lens, she examines how gender equality was advanced in the context of democratizing Korea, with a special focus on policy changes, the establishment of women's political machineries, and the extent of women's formal political representation. Her empirical examination begins from the pre-

democratization era as discussed in Chapter 2. Korea's economic development model and ideological conservatism tied to anti-communist hysteria and Confucian traditions are identified as conditions that shaped women's status in post-Korean War Korean society. In Chapter 3, Jones traces the organization of earlier women's groups, such as the Korea Women's Association United (KWAU) and the Korean National Council of Women (KNCW), and identifies "organizing as umbrella groups" as a distinctive characteristic of Korean women's movement. The chapter also discusses the movement's discursive, networking, and collective-action-related strategies and demonstrates how women's activism was transformed from *minjung* (people-oriented) feminism in the 1980s to gender mainstreaming strategies in the 1990s.

Chapter 4 is devoted to an examination of gender coalitions on both the progressive and the conservative side. In democratizing Korea where pro-democracy movement actors continued to play a crucial role for political change and reform, women's groups chose to go "separately but together" with the vocal civil society sector by forming an alliance with *shimin undong* (citizens' movement). The conservative side, however, was rather fragmented with narrowly defined goals and was unable to stage an effective opposition to women's activism for the advancement of gender equity. The progressive gender coalition was able to engage with the legislature, the presidency, political parties, bureaucracy, and judiciary as these political institutions offered varying degrees of opportunities to enhance gender equality agenda. Chapter 6 delves into analyzing the processes through which various legislative/policy changes in the areas of equal employment rights and maternity protection, the civil and family rights, and the rights to bodily integrity were introduced. Jones continues to explicate the political dynamics through which new women's policy machineries such as the Presidential Commission on Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Gender Equality were formed (Chapter 7) and how women's groups were able to introduce a quota system in bureaucracy and party politics to gain an increasing level of representation at the national and local political institutions (Chapter 8).

One of the theoretical contributions of *Gender and the Political Opportunities* is its examination of both the changing political context that conditioned women's movements and the movement's strategies to actively engage with the institutional context. Informed by the social movement literature on political opportunity structures, Jones discusses the changes in

political institutions and the balance of power between the state and civil society actors that came with democratization in Korea. At the same time, she analyzes the choices made by women's movement groups in selecting alliance partners and discursive strategies. With this dual examination, Jones is able to present a more complicated picture of democratization where civil society actively interacts with formal institutions and issues of gender equality are dynamically contested and negotiated. This work obviously fills an important omission in the literature of democratization, which has overlooked the presence of women's activism and gender politics.

Another noble advancement that stands out in this study is the discussion of both the progressive coalition and the conservative opposition to women's rights. Jones provides a map of broad actor constellations involved in the contestation of gender politics. From this examination, we learn that it was not only the strength of the progressive alliance and its strategy to take advantage of new institutional openings but also the weakness of the conservative opposition that enabled the introduction of various changes in women's rights.

However, *Gender and the Political Opportunities* also suffers from several shortcomings, both theoretical and empirical. Although the theoretical framework emphasizes political opportunity structures, the empirical discussions on policy changes that follow in later chapters do not fully articulate the causal mechanisms of how different political institutions were more or less receptive to gender-related policy change. Simply put, we learn that political openings with democratic transition offered crucial opportunities for women's movements but we do not know exactly why and which institutions offered varying degrees of political opportunity to feminist agenda.

Another weakness I identify in this study is its insufficient discussion of structural conditions that undergird gender inequality in Korean society and the failure of women's movements to incorporate the structural picture into their activism. Due to the author's emphasis on political institutional opportunities, the analysis does not effectively expand to examine how Korea's economic structure has created conditions for gender disparity. *Chaebol* (large conglomerates)-oriented economic structure, the norm of male breadwinner model, the gendered segmentation in the labor market, and long working hours are just a few examples that form structural conditions behind sustained gender inequity. Yet, women's movements in democratizing Korea chose a strategy of "gender mainstreaming" and concentrated their resources on gaining

institutional and legal equity. Then, why did they neglect the structural aspect of women's inequality and what were the consequences of this inattention?

Related to this, there are two empirical aspects that are missing in Jones's discussion of gender coalitions in democratizing Korea. First, women's groups, by choosing an alliance with the citizens' movement sector, further failed to incorporate structural issues into women's agenda. Neither the KWAU nor the KNCW were successful in building systematic ties with labor groups or expanding to grassroots organizing. The specific coalition women's movements chose to form to engage with political institutions left out other coalition partners and class-related women's issues. This is the other side of Korean women's movement that needs to be incorporated in the examination.

Second, building coalitions with the pro-democracy movement groups was not conflict-free. As in many other examples of feminist movements, social movement actors often regarded gender equality as a secondary or subsidiary issue to broader political change agenda. Korea's feminist groups had to constantly reinvent itself in terms of organizing "separately but together" and negotiate with its coalition partners how to prioritize gender politics. Therefore, the discussion of building gender alliances has to fully explicate the tensions and dynamics within social movement actors.

Despite these limitations, *Gender and the Political Opportunities* offers important insights into the dynamics of gender politics in the context of changing political institutions with an in-depth empirical discussion of women's movements in Korea.

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