

Being Mother: Comparative Study of the Contested Motherhood between South Korea and Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explain the discourse of motherhood in both South Korea and Indonesia. It is based on the interesting dynamic of being mother that is much influenced by the interrelated actions played by number of dominant actors around woman itself. By using a comparative study, it is found that the map or the trace of political economy in terms of developmental agenda, in fact drives the difference flows in shaping the notion of motherhood. In Indonesia, for being mother, women exist in the intersection of state intention, industrialization and culture pressure. Indonesian motherhood is interestingly in line with another analysis, such in their relation with housemaids. Meanwhile, in South Korea, the description of motherhood occurs in the middle of nationalism spirit, competition, ambience and family routine. Hence, this study concludes that being mother is highly contested and closely associated with the endless structural and cultural issues.

Keywords: *Contested Motherhood; Comparative Study; Being Mother; South Korea; Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

The term “mother” had been studied for centuries. The recent definition of mother is often embedded with woman, found in heterosexual family, and given to those who already have children. This conception then grows along with the new invention of nuclear family. While feminists argue that term mother inside nuclear family is likely created by patriarchal society, in previous civilization, people may have other ways to define a “mother”. They usually use historical traces to ensure that primitive matriarchy ever been exist to recognize mother as head of family and community (Allen, 2005). Lerner (1982) for instance emphasizes that in most primitive societies, of the past and in all hunting/gathering societies still existent today, women provided the average of 60 percent or more of the food. To do so, they often wandered far from home, carrying their babies and children with them. In addition, Engels used the term “Mutterrecht”, referred to as “Mother Right”, derived from Bachofen to describe matrilineal kinship relations, in which the property of men did not pass to their children but to their sister children (Lerner 1982:23).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the more real description, the novel of “Lake of Motherland” could be deployed as a reference to see that mother in particular time and place was the leader in both of family and community (Namu and Mathieu, 2007). This novel also shows that property ownership mostly goes to women, while man, as husband or father would just visit woman’s house when they want to meet their wife and/or children. The most important thing to underline is that the definition of mother, based on historical contexts, is much contextual. Moose (1993) even put a fundamental question whether being mother is a natural

process since “mother” could be part of a social term. She then gives an example that in Matabeleland, South Africa, the term “mother” does not always related to biological relationship, while in India mother-in-law and the grandmother often take care all nurturing role, except breastfeeding. In this sense, Moose aims to explain that if women are merely embedded with domestic chores as a requirement to be called “mother”, other works that are performed by women may be not recognized. Subsequently, in the industrial society where people, whatever gender, are able to actively participate in workplace, the dichotomy of housewife and working-mother then emerges as additional identity that should be applied. The term “housewife”, as also written by Moose (1993), was first accounted when industrial process enabled men to imitate aristocratic group who owned unemployed housewife but these wives could represent their husbands’ status and property. While in the past household symbolized the unit of production, the meaning of industry shifted to be the Centrum of consumption at the present. Accordingly, public and private become the important finding to divide the space in which it raises the segregation based on gender. Further, by utilizing gender role construction, the state does exercise the power as well as the intention to gain some political agenda. In order to limit population growth, for instance, being mother means having a docile body that would not mind to be engineered by a series of contraception method. State, capitalism and technology may come as colony to re-construct motherhood through the body (Mies, 1993). In this sense, being mother is increasingly contested. For being mother, women should consider not only the biological matter, but also negotiate their social status, gender role, capital and space.

This paper mainly focuses to analyze the flow of contested motherhood within the intersection of state intention, industrial society and culture discourse. South Korea and Indonesia then become the compared setting for several reasons. First, Indonesia and South Korea simply have similar social critic over the patriarchal social structures in some way. While South Korea is strongly influenced by Confucianism, Indonesia has some values coming from culture and religion in dealing with the issue of gender and inequality. Second, gender problem caused by industry expansion such as, feminization of labor, is happening in both South Korea and Indonesia. It means that the space segregation influencing the shift paradigm of being mother may be internalized by societies on those countries. However, third, South Korea and Indonesia have different approach in dealing with industrialization even though the economic progress among those countries and the intention to have dictator leadership were relative similar in post World War II. Considering the huge number of population and limitation economic capital, Indonesia tended to use its authoritarianism to strengthen the bureaucracy system as development foundation. On the other hand, South Korea preferred to raise much more on entrepreneurship to fostering the national economic cycle, and it was remarked by the birth of chaebol group. Those development approaches then interestingly become highly decisive matters in determining those who would be the power holder and it also influences the forms of relationship among society in micro level. Furthermore, this situation may stimulate the distinguished problem dynamic and even the different negotiation ways, in terms of womanhood or motherhood.

METHODOLOGY

This study is simply a comparative research using South Korea and Indonesia as the main settings. As a data collection, it would utilize some secondary data regarding to previous research in South Korea and Indonesia concerning the issue of motherhood or womanhood, there are many researches have been conducted. However, some of them usually just put one context as a framework. The research of state ibusim (motherhood) in Indonesia, for instance, tries to reveal gender trouble in terms of motherhood but the researcher more focused on the power relation between state and women (Suryakusuma, 1996). Also, in other exploration of woman and labor, some scholars tended to elaborate the problem of feminization of labor as the trigger to criticize motherhood conception (Caraway 2007, Jones 2004).

However, in South Korea, there is an interesting research about managing mother and kirosi family. (Finch and Kim 2012) trying to problematize the intersection of industry demand and motherhood discourse. It then inspires some researchers to raise similar possibility of study in Indonesia. It could be more complex because there are several intentions such as state, market and culture that are likely mixed up to compete each other and it has been determining the ideal notion of motherhood. Further, those fragmented secondary data whether coming from Indonesia and South Korea would be compiled and connected and serve as basic information in this comparative study.

The following part discusses the investigation result of interrelated situations of politic, industrialization, culture and motherhood in both South Korea and Indonesia. Those data would be the bridge to deliver the comparative discussion in the next passage. The last part of this study will conclude that by revealing the problem of motherhood in both countries, we can recognize those who are involved in constructing motherhood and how its construction works around women's life. In a more critical point, this study could contribute to raise further action in terms of woman liberalization.

In this research, however, I should admit that the knowledge about South Korea is not as much as over Indonesia. Thus, it may have some limitations due to the imbalanced data coming from both countries, even though the few experiences in learning South Korean woman studies give much insight, inspiration and encouragement to develop this paper.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Motherhood and the Unavoidable Competition in South Korea

The study of contemporary South Korean family has sought to reconfirm the functionalist thesis of industrialization and the nuclear family. A research on family change, following industrialization has either examined the development from a traditional family structure to the nuclear family (Kyung 2005). Nuclear family here is assumed as a breakthrough to create more democratic relationship between husband and wife as feminists wish to gain gender equality inside the private relationship. However, this fantasy is in fact hindered by another demand coming from the society and the market. As mentioned that nuclear family is still far away from the realization of being conjugal family. It is since first even a love marriage takes place, parental support is most important in situations where woman and man to be married are not economically independent.

Second, it is interesting that the difficulty to get conjugal family is caused by the inclination focus on the children. The excessive competition surrounding university entrance examinations and the very high educational hopes that parents invest in their children molds the everyday life of parents to become more child-focused (Kyung 2005). The current trend to feel much worry or consider children education is increasingly happening when after school market massively grows in South Korea. In April 2000, the constitutional court decided that state regulation had technically prohibited private educational institutes since 1980. Along with the adoption of English as part of the elementary school curriculum in 1997, this court decision has had an important effect on the private after-school market, especially for elementary school. This court decision should be understood in relation to the context of neoliberal educational reform, which dramatically changed the rhetoric of educational values from uniformity and equality to one of creativity, excellence and diversification (Park 2005: 102-103). Shortly, being mother also means having special ability to carry a more complex responsibility in preserving class status in family through children education.

Child-focused and placing families as materialistic unit are also shown in the phenomena of *kirogi* family. As class reproduction is a very important matter, family would send their children to study abroad. In the context of motherhood, *kirogi* family regards women as mothers, while men stay behind as father and breadwinners in high status occupation (Finch and Kim 2012). Concerning to this, mother role becomes very essential. The term of manager mother then becomes a special diction applied to a number of housewives. They should make sure that all children study well, pass every examination and are accepted in a prestigious school. Children achievement means that the family has been successful in maintaining their class and social status in society and this responsibility fully goes to the mothers.

As one instance, a housewife was sending her two kids to 23 after-school programs, while keeping two different diaries—a weekly planner and a journal—in order to keep track of her children’s schedule. Thus, it is very common for middle class married women to be full time housewives and do not really consider to having social life with their peers (Park 2005; 108). This situation seems to not be able to be ignored because most children also have been educated to be ambitious and competitive. Hence, women would devote their life to family, while children have ambition as being chosen student (or citizen) as rhetorical education values constructed by the state.

Motherhood in Indonesia: The Power of State, Industry and Culture

The dynamic of motherhood discourse in Indonesia is little bit different, even though women also get similar hidden oppression, in terms of gender inequality. The social construction of motherhood also much relates to the domestic chores and other family maintenance, including the responsibility of children education. However, the difference of state logic in dealing with development agenda provides a distinct dynamic.

The journey of the contested motherhood in Indonesia could be started from Suryakusuma (1996) on the idea of state of *ibusim*. State of *Ibuisim* itself is one of the faces of bio-power provided by the state in defining women as appendages and companions to their husband, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children. This concept of womanhood is maintained in national level by *Dharma Wanita*, while in the villages, *PKK* (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*, Family Welfare

Guidance) is the primary channel between the state and village women through which the official ideology is filtered (Suryakusuma 1996).

The conception of placing woman in the notion of state of *ibusim* is in line with government idea to exercise power in any level. In this sense, the government actually attempts to create the imagination of “being ideal” over civil servant, family and even women. A perfect civil servant should come from a harmonious and moralist family. They should not get divorced, had supportive wives and delivered a promising generation (read: children). Women then are organized in particular groups in both national and local level to be internalized the lesson of being full time husband’s companion and ideal mother.

Meanwhile, the time of the emergence of state programs promoting full time domesticity for women citizens is parallel to the period of rapid industrialization of the Indonesian economy and a massive movement of migrant rural women in factory labor (Jones 2004). Also, civil servant is interestingly regarded as part of a middle class society or in local term they are called as *priyayi* (aristocrat). Shortly, the intersection of state of *ibusim*, *priyayi* and rapid growth of industrialization enables the rendezvous between full-time housewives and their maid. The existences of maids then were very beneficial for wives, especially to help their physical domestic tasks, while they would focus more on emotional fulfillment of husband and children. In Jones’s (2004) research, it is even found that family and particularly wives would maintain their strong connection with the maids. Maids were sometimes regarded as if they were member of family; therefore they would keep being faithful to accompany the wives in accomplishing the number of responsibilities.

Comparative Discussion

Based on those existing problems in both South Korea and Indonesia, we can see that even though those countries have similar concern of women oppression, they do have different expressions in dealing with the problems.

As it was previously described, Indonesia and South Korea have a distinct way in applying their political approach regarding to the economic development and industrialization post World War II, there was any theory mentioning about the strong relation between industrialization process and the growth of powerful state (Budiman, 1999). For some developed states, they do not really need to be involved in fostering the productivity because the society consisting of rich developers would easily share the capital. However, for developing countries, they need much effort to gain capital substitution from outsider. The state involvement then becomes a very important matter. In this case, the idea of building the bureaucratic authoritarian state was applied in some countries, including Indonesia and South Korea.

The Bureaucratic Authoritarian State is different to fascist or communism state. In this style, people are strongly suggested to stay away from political issues and just requested to work for supporting development goals. The State, here emerges as bureaucratic machine having specific agenda to increase economic productivity; thus, its basic ideology is actually anti-participation. In order to deal with this intention, the state needs to be more powerful because economic development requires the politic stability. In some cases, this kind of state often works along with the economic technocracy and military (Budiman 1999, 15). However, the problem is South Korea and Indonesia practice different processes. As known that South Korea, at a glance is relatively successful in making an economic breakthrough. On the other hand, Indonesia is in fact trapped in a more complex situation like corruption

and bigger class segregation. Since authoritarianism practiced by South Korea is equal with the advent of superior bourgeois coming from outside, in which further they would stimulate the economic competition inside. As noted that it is widely recognized that the institutional framework of economic development in South Korea was the “state-banks-chaebol nexus” far into the mid 1990s. In this framework, often known as “South Korea Inc”, the three key actors, which are the state, banks and chaebol, closely collaborated and were institutionally interlinked with one another for the purpose of the country’s economic growth and industrial transformation (Jang 2005: 47).

Nonetheless, the bourgeoisies in Indonesia, in fact much come from inside country, while the elites in bureaucracy and state power holder work together to make such nepotism. The strong relation between state and business community even triggers a metaphor that if in many Western nations money begets power, in Indonesia power begets money (Suryakusuma, 1999) since the government really holds the power to take over all development projects. Therefore, in the context of social politic, the class segregation was increasingly wider. For poor women, layers of oppressions dominate their daily life. In spite of feminization of labor, they still should face other uncertainties and the absent of government attention in giving the social safety guarantee.

Meanwhile, as written above, the policy to discipline civil servant becomes very important in Indonesia. During the New Order political participation, for instance, was limited to voting at the election held every five years from 1971 onwards. The election was more regarded as duty than a right because the state power always set the election into one conclusion: Golkar (New Order Party) always won by a comfortable margin due to the government manipulation (Blackburn 2004: 103). Women participation was not counted because they likely did not have any intention in political sphere. If they should participate in election, they of course followed their husbands’ choice, which it aimed to support the ruling state. It also related to the internalized values from Dharma Wanita that women were to be the main supporters for their husbands, educators of children, supplementary income-earners, housekeepers, and members of Indonesian society (Ilhami 1995 in Blackburn 2004).

Comparative Study of Motherhood in South Korea and Indonesia

INDUSTRY, MODERNIZATION, CAPITALISM		
	KOREA	INDONESIA
Development Agenda	Entrepreneurship encouragement; <i>cheabol</i> power	Technocratic encouragement; Civil servant base
Society Relationship	Nationalism; Competition	Docile citizen; Class segregation
Motherhood	In the middle of family and market demand	In the middle of state, family and market pressure
Negotiation	Full time housewives	Maintain good relationship with housemaids
CONFUSIONISM, RELIGION, CULTURE		

Table 1. Comparative Study of Motherhood in South Korea and Indonesia

Based on the table above, it is clearly shown that the contest of being mother either in South Korea and Indonesia is much influenced by the state traces in dealing with developing agenda. While the result of Indonesia development agenda is docile citizen and class segregation, mostly, the Korean society is likely to internalize the spirit to mutual competition and the values of nationalism at once. As one of the examples of nationalism construction, it could be found through how Korean society often put the symbols of Songhwa story in some important events purposely to unite people in same feeling of state ownership. Thus, for children, it is very narrow to decide their study intention whether as truly ambition to be a good student or to be regarded as chosen citizen by state or both.

Therefore, in order to maintain the competition, mothers in South Korea, as expressed by manager mothers prefer to transform to be full time housewives as a way to deal with the notion of motherhood. They need much time allocation to maintain everything relating to family needs fulfillment and class reproduction scheme. In this case, their performance degree of being manager mother would significantly determine the social recognition of being mother itself. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, strong state pressure comes along with the opportunity to be part of middle class, in which it enables wives to have good relationship with housemaids. Hence, Indonesian mothers always maintain a good relationship

with their housemaids as a way to fulfill all domestic responsibilities without losing the “harmony” bonding with their husband and state.

CONCLUSION

Being mother is not a simple thing and cannot be reduced in one or two particular explanations. This study shows that motherhood is highly contested not only in the framework of gender equality, but also in the wider structural and cultural matter. In addition, this study has revealed the map of actors who are involved in the construction project of “being mother” and how it works and is internalized by women, particularly in Indonesia and South Korea. Furthermore, women, even though they tend to be more vulnerable to be objected, commoditized or oppressed, in fact increasingly grow to create series of strategy to deal with.

In another point, motherhood or manager mother in Korea is likely preserved because they have an important role to continuously maintain the financialization in South Korea itself. Likewise in Indonesia, motherhood or womanhood is closely associated with the term of state ibuism and it becomes one of the key actors in supporting state intention, while it strongly relates to the agenda to reproduce the docility. Lastly, this study, even though it is short, it is interesting enough to be continued by other research; therefore there would be much more related facts that could be found as well as the way to build alternative narration, in terms of women liberalization

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