

**SOUTH KOREA EFFORTS TO ADRESS GENDER EQUALITY
NORMS WITHIN CONFUCIAN DISCOURSE AND
DOMESTIC POLITICAL RESISTANCE**

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

In 2022, Yoon Suk-yeol was elected President of South Korea after a campaign marked by anti-feminist rhetoric, gaining strong support from young men and conservative groups. His election revived traditional Confucian-based misogynistic discourse and provoked backlash from feminist movements. Paradoxically, despite the administration's resistance to gender-related policies, South Korea's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index rose from 107th in 2022 to 94th in 2024. This study applies Antje Wiener's norm contestation theory to examine how gender equality norms are engaged with at the state level under Yoon's leadership. It analyses contestation through formal validation via international treaties, social validation through public discourse and activism, and cultural validation rooted in Confucian traditions. Using a qualitative approach, it draws on government policies, international reports, and scholarly analyses to assess norm engagement across constituting, referring, and implementing stages. The findings reveal that progress reflects selective adaptation, where international obligations are symbolically upheld, societal demands are managed, and cultural traditions are leveraged to limit transformative change. The study concludes that under Yoon, advancements in gender equality stem less from normative commitment than from strategic accommodation to external scrutiny and domestic political constraints.

Keywords: *South Korea, Gender Equality, Women Rights, Norm Contestations*

