CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Misogyny is defined as a particular kind of justified hatred or contempt towards woman in a world where men have more power than women.[1] In South Korea, misogyny has been a major problem since the Joseon Dynasty through the practice of Confucianism until the contemporary era, regardless of how the country is now categorized as a developed nation.[2] As in 2022, it is a pivotal year marked by Yoon Seuk-Yeol's anti-feminist campaign, which gained significant support and led to his election as South Korea's 13th President.[3] A year later, the existing violence against women report published, as evidenced by a survey conducted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2022, revealing that one out of three women in South Korea experienced violence and 46% of survivors reported being assaulted by close friends, work colleague and family members. It was reported that the number also goes higher than the previous year.[4] These phenomena highlighted the ongoing discourse of misogyny in South Korea and raised questions about how the country balances its rising internal gender inequality and interactions with organizations such as UN Women, The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other social movement that emerged outside the

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[1] Matthew Jenkins and Hannah Kim, "The Role of Misogyny in the 2022 Korean Presidential Election: Understanding the Backlash against Feminism in Industrialized Democracies," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 24 (October 31, 2024): 1–28, https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2024.11.

[2] D.O Kasdan and H. Lee, "Examining Gender Differences in Korea of Preferences for Behaviorally Informed Policies," *International Review of Public Administration* 25, no. 3 (206 192AD): 2020.

[3] Lee, Souhyun Christine. "Anti-Gender Politics, Economic Insecurity, and Right-Wing Populism: The Rise of Modern Sexism among Young Men in South Korea," 2024. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxae016.

[4] Priyanka Jain, "Womenifesto for Women's Human Rights" (Thailand: The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, 2023).

country.[5] This is further compounded by signed treaties like The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which aim to represent South Korea as a country that upholds the core value of Sustainable Development Goals, particularly gender equality, and to ensure a positive representation in the international arena.[6]

On the other hand, South Korea's gender equality ranking has seen a notable improvement, moving up from rank 107 to 94 according to the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum in 2024.[7] In the context of gender equality research, it is imperative to consider not only the opportunities available to individuals but also the rights of women to receive their due entitlements without any form of discrimination that encompasses both the provision of equal opportunities and the assurance of women's rights being upheld and respected in all spheres of life.[8] This suggests that South Korea's efforts to address gender equality through specific measures and policies, as well as its commitment to the CEDAW, as a playing a role.[9] Additionally, the pressures and expectations from the international community, including the establishment of the UN Women Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality in Seoul in late 2022 in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, have contributed to these positive

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[5] Hawon Jung, *Flowers of Fire: The Inside Story of South Korea's Feminist Movement and What It Means for Woman's Rights Worldwide* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2023).
[6] Byung-Deuk Woo, "The Heterogeneous Impacts of the Ratification of CEDAW on the Adoption of Violence Against Women Laws," *The Korean Journal of International Studies* 19, no. 3 (December 2021): 339–75, https://doi.org/10.14731/kjis.2021.12.19.3.339.
[7] "Global Gender Gap 2024." Statistic. Switzerland: World Economic Forum, 2024. https://www.weforum.org/publications/ gender-gap-report-2024/.
[8] Choi Sunyong et al., "Women's Employment and Fertility in Korea," Working Paper (South Korea, 2024), https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/ac53879e-en.
[9] Kardina and Anisa Marlinda Yurisa, "Review of Analisis Gender Based Violence Dalam Konvensi Cedaw Pada Isu Kekerasan Seksual Di Korea Selatan," *LINO* 1, no. 2 (2021): 14.

changes.[10] These factors indicate that while significant challenges remain, there are concerted efforts and international collaborations driving gradual improvements in gender equality in South Korea.

Understanding the correlation between the current issue and the international system requires examining the international system itself. It is not solely constructed by interactions between states but also shaped by norms, identities, and complex social dynamics.[11] Social and political influences play a crucial role in shaping the global landscape through the establishment and dissemination of norms by international actors. This perspective highlights that the dynamics of the international arena extend beyond state behavior, encompassing networks of norms and identity-driven influences.[12]

In this context, the process of adapting international norms, such as gender equality, into a country's domestic values reflects the dynamics of global power.[13] It demonstrates how actors beyond the state can shape national policies, embedding international norms within domestic frameworks.[14] Power is not only exercised through coercion but also through the normalization of certain practices and beliefs, making the adoption of international norms a profound reflection of global influence.[15]

[10] UN Women Asia and The Pacific, "Overview: UN Women Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality," 2024 (South Korea: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and The Empowerment of Women (UN Women), n.d.).

[11] Rosert, E. "Effects of International Norms: A Typology." *Journal of International Political Theory* 20, no. 1, 2024: 22-40. https://doi.org/10.1177/17550882231184275.

[12] Siddique, Ali Md. "International Relations Theories and the Global Order: A Review of Selective Classic and Contemporary Texts." *Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 1-2, 2022: https://doi.org/10.56312/dujir15e1n2e12.

[13] Mcourt, David M. *The New Constructivism in International Relations Theory*. ISBN 978-1-5292-1782-7. United Kingdom: Bristol University Press, 2022.

[14] Visoka, Gezim, and Lemay-Hébert, Nicolas. *Normalization in World Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022.

[15] Hussein, Akhter, and Priyanka Saloi. "Review of Foucault's 'Power/Knowledge' and Its Contemporary Relevance." *Library Progress International* 44, no. 1, 2024: 5.

South Korea exemplifies this dynamic as an active member of the United Nations and a signatory to treaties like CEDAW. The country's engagement with international norms involves navigating a complex interplay between global pressures and deeply rooted Confucian traditions.[16] Confucianism emphasizes social hierarchy and rigid gender roles, where men are traditionally seen as heads of households and primary authority figures[17] In contrast, international norms on gender equality, championed by organizations like the United Nations, advocate for equal rights and opportunities for all genders.[18]

This contradiction between patriarchal Confucian values and the pursuit of gender equality makes South Korea a compelling case study.[19] Investigating this process offers insight into how nations navigate global norms while grappling with entrenched cultural traditions. Gender equality is not just a matter of social justice but also a driver of broader social and economic development, making this research both timely and significant.[20]

Although there is extensive research on gender equality in South Korea, there is a lack of in-depth analysis focusing on the recent period and its interaction between implementation of international norms specifically gender equality norm and Confucian discourse. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how South

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https://doi.org/10.48165/bapas.2024.44.2.1.

[16] Antje Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[17] Manek, Bernadine Grace Alvania. "Confucian Historical Narratives and Misogynic Culture in South Korea." *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 5, no. 1, 2023: 49-62. https://doi.org/10.15575/jassr.v5i1.73

[18] Kardina, and Anisa Marlinda Yurisa. "Review of *Analisis Gender Based Violence Dalam Konvensi Cedaw Pada Isu Kekerasan Seksual Di Korea Selatan*." *LINO* 1, no. 2, 2021: 14.

[19] Górska–Szymczak, Joanna, and Adam Machowski. "Confucianism in the Current Society of South Korea." *International Journal of Public Administration, Management and Economic Development* 7, no. 1, 2022: 85-91.

[20] Esther Barbé and Diego Badell, "Chasing Gender Equality Norms: The Robustness of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights," *International Relations* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 2023): 274–97, https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178221136994.

Korea navigates and interprets international gender equality norms in the process of how a norm is contested, examining how these norms are adapted and translated into domestic policy frameworks to shape the country's identity and global representation.

To measure the interactions and tensions between international gender equality norms and traditional Confucian values, this research will be conducted using constructivists approach specifically Wiener theory called Norms Contestation Theory. This involves examining official policy documents, reports, articles, and academic publications to identify how gender equality is framed and discussed in South Korea. The study will also look at how the South Korean government responded to international pressures and incorporates these norms into its policies.

1.2 Problem Statement

The challenge of balancing international gender equality norms with traditional Confucian values in South Korea represents a significant issue within the realm of International Relations. This research aims to explore how South Korea contest and navigate these norms from 2022 to 2024, considering the deeply rooted Confucian traditions that influence its social structure and gender roles. Misogyny within the ongoing traditional discourse of Confucianism still exists and often clashes with the principles of gender equality as promoted by international norms. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for comprehending the broader implications of international norm adoption in culturally unique contexts.

1.3 Research Question

How does South Korea contest global gender equality norms under the

Yoon administration regardless of the ongoing Confucian discourse, international pressures and their domestic political resistances under the Yoon administrations?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims to contribute to the academic understanding of gender equality in South Korea amidst the influence of traditional Confucian discourse. The research will enhance the theoretical framework by providing new insights into the interaction between international gender equality norms and domestic cultural values. The societal impact of this research is also to raise awareness about ongoing gender inequality and misogyny, encouraging informed public discourse, specifically Confucian philosophy that exists within the society.

1.5 Research Benefit

1. Academic Benefits: This research aims to provide new insights in the field of International Relations, particularly in studying how international norms on gender equality are integrated into domestic policies within a country that has traditional Confucian values. This study is expected to serve as a reference for future research investigating the adaptation of gender equality norms in governmental practices, specifically within the context of South Korea.

2. Practical Benefits: The practical benefits of this research include fostering further discussions on gender equality through social movements and policy-making. This research can inform the development of new policies aimed at promoting gender equality in countries with deep-rooted traditional values. Additionally, it aims to enhance public understanding of the issue of gender equality and how government actions can align with evolving

international norms.

1.6 Literature Review

The initial literature review draws from the journal article titled "Confucian Historical Narratives and Misogynic Culture in South Korea" by Manek, published in 2023. This article examines the impact of colonialism on the misogynistic culture in South Korea within the broader East Asian context. While South Korea aggressively promotes K-Pop as part of its effort to project a positive global image, the social reality diverges significantly, with many South Korean men adhering to misogynistic and patriarchal views. These adverse perceptions of women are deeply rooted in Confucian teachings that have long been embedded in Korean culture. Manek asserts that Confucian teachings, which position women as inferior and subordinate to men, have become an integral part of South Korea's social structure and cultural values. Despite the nation's numerous social and political transformations, including modernization and globalization, patriarchal values derived from Confucianism persist in South Korean society.

The researchers found that Confucianism has been ingrained in the daily lives of South Koreans since the Joseon Dynasty, continuing even during Japanese colonial rule. In this context, Confucianism has served not only as a moral and ethical guide but also as a significant influence on South Korea's social, political, and cultural systems. Although modern values and democracy have strengthened over time, Confucianism's impact on gender views and the status of women remains strong across various aspects of life, including family, work, and broader society[21]

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[21] Manek, Bernadine Grace Alvania. "Confucian Historical Narratives and Misogynic Culture in South Korea." *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 5, no. 1, 2023: 49-62. https://doi.org/10.15575/jassr.v5i1.73

Previous studies, such as Manek's, have explored the relationship between Confucianism and misogynistic culture in South Korea. However, these studies often do not delve deeply into how Confucian teachings were initially introduced and embraced by Korean society during the Joseon Dynasty. Instead, they focus on the evolution of Confucian values and their role in shaping social structures and gender perceptions in South Korea. Moreover, a significant gap in the literature is the lack of discussion on South Korea's position within the international arena and how the country represents itself concerning gender equality. Although South Korea is a signatory to international treaties like CEDAW and faces pressure from international organizations and internal movements, there is insufficient analysis of how these international commitments are translated into domestic policies and practices.

This research aims to address these gaps by investigating how Confucianism first took root in Korean society during the Joseon Dynasty, how these teachings were translated into social practices at the time, and how their influence has persisted, shaping negative perceptions of feminism that contributed to the success of the anti-feminist campaign in the 2022 election. Furthermore, the study will critically examine South Korea's efforts to navigate international gender equality norms and its representation on the global stage. By doing so, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how gender views constructed through Confucianism contribute to the formation of social narratives supporting misogynistic culture in South Korea and how this influences modern political dynamics, particularly the anti-feminist campaign led by.

The second literature reviewed is titled "Examining Gender Differences in

Korea's Preferences for Behaviorally Informed Policies" by Kasdan published in 2020. This article discusses South Korea's progression and its attempts to implement nudge policies. It was demonstrated that there are gender preferences within these policies. The author found that women in South Korea favored nudge policies more than men. Additionally, the study shows that nudge policies are not particularly favored by either left-wing or conservative individuals. Men tended to prefer more forceful wording rather than the subtler approach of nudge policies. One reason for the application of nudge policies in domestic contexts is the increasing presence of women in South Korean politics.[22]

As Korea's social development catches up to its economic development, policy issues need to address the gender equity shortcomings imparted by traditional culture. Korean women are increasingly occupying positions of power and dismantling institutional biases that have hindered progressive agendas. To achieve this, the government must introduce policies and approaches that can alleviate imbalances and promote greater inclusivity of women and minorities across Korean society. Kasdan's research aimed to identify inherent gender biases in nudge policy approval rates through a survey of Koreans.[23]

However, the literature presents a gap as it does not clearly articulate the specific roles women play in politics. While the study acknowledges the influence of women in political spheres and their preference for nudge policies, it falls short of providing a detailed analysis of how these roles contribute to the development and implementation of such policies. Further research is needed to explore the

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[22] Kasdan, D. O., and Lee, H. "Examining Gender Differences in Korea of Preferences for Behaviorally Informed Policies." *International Review of Public Administration* 25, no. 3, 2020: 192–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/12294659.2020.1800199.
[23] Kashdan.

specific political actions and positions held by women that facilitate the integration of nudge policies. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between gender, policy preferences, and political influence in South Korea.

To fully grasp the existence and evolution of norms in global international relations, a third body of literature has emerged. The one that aligns closely with the discourse presented in "Silvia Steininger's review of Antje Wiener's Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations" in 2020. Steininger highlights the originality of Wiener's contribution to norm theory, emphasizing that the understanding of norms does not stem from a singular, unified framework. Rather, it emerges from the "cracks in everything," a metaphor borrowed from Leonard Cohen's famous line, "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." This poetic phrase captures the essence of Wiener's approach: she seeks insight in the fractures, contestations, and ambiguities inherent in international relations. Norms, according to Wiener, are not static; they are dynamic and often born out of conflict, negotiation, and reinterpretation.

Wiener's empirical approach is distinguished by its exploratory nature, relying on a "sensitizing reading" method that allows for the emergence of multiple interpretations. This method enables her to explore the ways in which norms are constituted, contested, and transformed over time. Rather than limiting her analysis to codified treaties and formal agreements, Wiener delves into the interactions and practices of stakeholders involved in international governance. These include legal advocacy groups, government representatives, and other actors who actively shape the normative framework by contesting existing norms and proposing new ones.

Her research highlights that norms are not only top-down constructs imposed by international institutions but also bottom-up processes influenced by the voices and actions of affected communities.

One of the significant contributions of Wiener's work lies in her case-based approach to norm contestation. For instance, she critically examines how the prohibition against torture has been challenged and defended by various actors, including in high-profile instances such as the policies endorsed by former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. This case exemplifies how norms can be both violated and reaffirmed through political practice. Moreover, Wiener emphasizes the proactive role of stakeholders who not only respond to norm violations but also seek to reshape the normative landscape. This is evident in her analysis of how norms concerning sexual violence have evolved, particularly through United Nations resolutions that address women, peace, and security. In these instances, government representatives and civil society actors collaboratively advocate for the recognition of sexual violence as a matter of international security.

Wiener's conceptual framework goes beyond traditional categorizations of norms. She identifies three types of norms starting with fundamental norms, organizing principles, and regulations as each of the layer plays a distinct role in the normative order. However, what sets her theory apart is the focus on how these norms are contested. She distinguishes between reactive contestation, where stakeholders resist or respond to a norm after it has been established, and proactive contestation, where actors seek to influence norm formation from the outset. According to Wiener, proactive contestation tends to yield more legitimate and just

normative outcomes, as it ensures broader participation and inclusivity in the norm-setting process.

Ultimately, Wiener's approach reimagines norm contestation as a multilogue rather than a dialogue, it is a process involving multiple voices, perspectives, and arenas of interaction. This reconceptualization opens up the normative space to a wider range of stakeholders, making norm contestation more accessible and democratic. Her work underscores the importance of considering not just the content of norms, but also the processes through which they are formed, challenged, and sustained. In doing so, Wiener provides a robust theoretical and methodological toolkit for understanding the dynamic, contested, and often conflict-ridden nature of international norms in a globalized world.

Gender equality has evolved from an abstract idea into a widely recognized international norm. To assess gender equality as a norm, it is crucial to examine the broader framework of norm categorization, specifically how norms are distinguished as either principled ideas or emerging norms. Additionally, understanding the distinction between strong and weak norms is essential in evaluating the degree of institutionalization and adherence within the international community. This analytical approach is informed by the work of Hirsch and Dixon published in 2021, in their study called "Conceptualizing and Assessing Norm Strength in International Relations" which introduces a conceptual framework for defining and assessing the strength of norms.[24]

This framework categorizes norms based on their degree of influence,

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[24] Ben-Josef Hirsch, M., and Dixon, J. M. "Conceptualizing and Assessing Norm Strength in International Relations." *European Journal of International Relations* 27, no. 2, 2021: 521-547. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120949628.

distinguishing between strong and weak norms. To illustrate this conceptualization, the study identifies two key transitional justice norms: the norm of legal accountability and the norm of truth-seeking. Legal accountability, which emerged as a norm in the 1990s, has since solidified into a strong norm with widespread adherence. Conversely, truth-seeking, which developed later, remains a weak norm due to its lower degree of institutionalization and acceptance. The study evaluates norm strength based on two key characteristics: concordance and institutionalization.

Concordance refers to the extent to which international actors acknowledge and accept a norm as a legitimate and appropriate principle. This characteristic is assessed through three primary indicators. First, concordance is measured by analyzing the frequency and nature of references to a norm within official reports and resolutions issued by international organizations. Second, it is evaluated based on the level of advocacy and support for the norm by international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Finally, the third indicator examines how international actors respond to and engage with the norm in practice.

Beyond concordance, the second characteristic used to assess norm strength is institutionalization, which refers to the extent to which a norm is embedded within international legal and policy frameworks. This is determined by two factors: the formalization of the norm through conventions and treaties, and the extent of ratification by states. Based on this framework, gender equality is categorized as a weak-to-moderate norm within a high-priority issue area. While gender equality has been widely promoted in international discourse, its level of institutionalization varies significantly across different states and regions, affecting its overall strength

as a global norm.[25]

Further analysis of gender equality as an evolving norm is supported by the work of Anggaraini published in 2023, with the tittle called The Role of The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Improving Gender Equality in South Korea. This study provides empirical evidence on how South Korea has navigated gender equality over the years, highlighting the role of the OECD in influencing domestic policy reforms. The OECD has contributed to South Korea's gender equality efforts through multiple initiatives, including recommending policy changes to the South Korean government, as documented in its 2021 report.[26] These recommendations offer policy options aimed at fostering greater gender equity in the country's legal and institutional frameworks.

Beyond policy recommendations, the OECD has played an active role in facilitating gender equality initiatives by collecting and analyzing gender-related data, providing empirical insights into existing disparities. Additionally, the organization has established forums where member states can discuss gender equality challenges and share best practices. South Korea's engagement with the OECD, particularly as a member for 27 years, has provided an avenue for international collaboration on gender-related issues. However, while this literature acknowledges South Korea's willingness to address gender equality, it does not provide an in-depth examination of the challenges the country faces in implementing policy recommendations or the difficulties associated with institutional reform.

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[25] Ben. 19.

[26] Yulianti Anggarini, "The Role of The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Improving Gender Equality in South Korea," *Globalization and Foreign Affairs Journal* 1, no. 2 (2024).

The references used in this analysis can be categorized into three distinct bodies of literature, each contributing to a nuanced understanding of gender equality in South Korea. The first body of literature examines gender equality within the context of Confucian discourse in South Korea, highlighting the cultural and historical factors that shape societal attitudes toward gender roles. The second focuses on the norm life cycle, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding how gender equality has emerged and evolved as an international norm. The third body of literature presents evidence of South Korea's efforts to advance gender equality, illustrating the role of international organizations such as the OECD in shaping domestic policies.

Despite these contributions, the existing literature does not comprehensively address how South Korea has adapted the norm of gender equality within its domestic policies. While studies acknowledge the country's engagement with international organizations and its willingness to pursue gender equality, they fall short of analyzing the extent to which South Korea has internalized gender equality norms and incorporated them into its legal and institutional frameworks. Future research should focus on bridging this gap by examining the implementation process of gender equality policies, the challenges associated with domestic adaptation, and the role of political, social, and economic factors in shaping South Korea's approach to gender equality.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

In the constructivist framework, the international system is not solely defined by the interactions between state actors. Rather, it is shaped through social

constructions formed by ideas, norms, identities, and engagements with non-state actors.[27] This perspective emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality and the epistemological foundations of knowledge, demonstrating that international relations are governed not merely by material forces but also by shared beliefs and collective understandings.

Central to constructivist thought is the role of social norms, broadly defined as standards of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity. Norms thus serve as guiding principles that influence state behavior and shape the global governance system. The study of norms within international relations has been advanced by Finnemore and Sikkink, who introduced the foundational concept of the "Norm Life Cycle." This concept comprises three distinct stages: norm emergence, norm cascade, and norm internalization.[28] However, this theory does not adequately address the contestation of norms. One constructivist theorist who shifted the focus toward contestation is Antje Wiener, with her concept of "Norm Contestation," which views norm diffusion as a site of conflict and negotiation, interpreted and applied within domestic contexts. This approach by Wiener draws the line between the constructivist spectrum of how it takes part, leaning to the idea of post positivist approach. [29]

Contrasting with both rationalist and institutionalist approaches to the idea of norms, Wiener emphasizes their inherently contested and dynamic nature. Norms

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[27] Jeffrey S Lantis and Carmen Wunderlich, "Reevaluating Constructivist Norm Theory: A Three-Dimensional Norms Research Program," *International Studies Review* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): viab059, https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viab059.

[28] Matthew J. Hoffmann, "Norms and Social Constructivism in International Relations" (Oxford University Press, December 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.60.

[29] Garrett Brown and Sagar Deva, "Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations," *International Affairs* 95 (September 1, 2019): 1159–60, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz165.

are not universally accepted or internalized simply through treaties. Instead, they gain legitimacy and influence through repeated, interactive engagement across diverse socio-cultural contexts. For Wiener, the power of norms does not lie in their legal status but in the extent to which their meaning is shared and recognized as appropriate by the people and institutions involved.[30]

Wiener's theory of contestation identifies three distinct stages at which the meaning of norms can be challenged and reinterpreted, In this research, the contestation cycle by comprising the constituting, referring, and implementing stages will serve as a framework to trace how the norm of gender equality is introduced, interpreted, and engaged with in South Korea. These stages correspond to three layers of norm validation: formal (legal and institutional), social (collective recognition and discourse), and cultural (individual and community-level practice). Together, they reveal how norms travel from international agreements to national discourse and finally into everyday life as they often facing resistance, adaptation, or reinterpretation along the way.[31]

These stages allow us to understand not only how norms are formed and disseminated but also how they are received, negotiated, and sometimes resisted across different contexts. Rather than assuming norms are static or universally accepted, Wiener's approach highlights how norms are always subject to interpretation and re-negotiation, especially as they travel across cultural, institutional, and individual settings. Wiener also promotes an understanding of norms through the exploration of normative roots within each approach. Norms are

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[30] Antje Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316718599.
[31] Brown and Deva, "Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations."
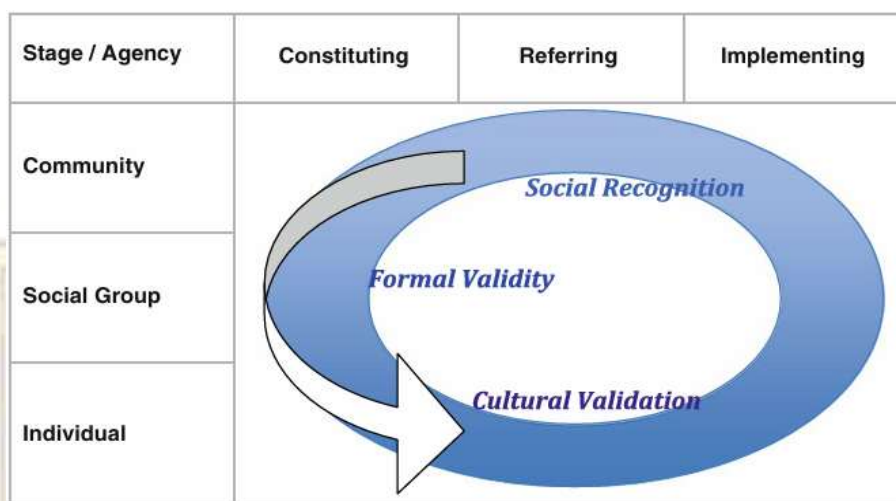
seen as standards of behavior, leading to conventional constructivism; as tools of principles and rules involved in global governance; as elements in the creation of reality through constitutive norms and normative glue; and finally, as structures of meaning-in-use.[32]

Before addressing the structure and dynamics of norm contestation, Wiener's theory introduces norm transfer or diffusion as a one-way process. This overlooks the marginalized process of local agency involvement with both domestic and international actors to ensure that the context of norms reflects local identities. The subsequent plea for access to contestation arises from a cultural platform that conceptualizes cultural diversity as a constitutive element. Norm contestation acknowledges the role of diverse agents, further elaborated through the concept of diversity within the theory of contestation[33]. This leads to the understanding that norm engagement is not merely a dialogue but a multilogue among actors, which unfolds through three levels of discourse.

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[32] Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations*, 2018.
[33] Phil Orchard and Atnje Wiener, *Norms and Norm Contestation*, Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods, n.d.

Figure 1.1 The Norm Contestation Cycle

Stage / Agency	Constituting	Referring	Implementing
Community			
Social Group			
Individual			

Social Recognition

Formal Validity

Cultural Validation

The constituting stage refers to the point at which norms are formally created and validated. The norms are seen through the involvement of actors that include states, international organizations, and elites institutions, such as treaty or policymakers who sit on the position to decide whether the norms could be institutionalized. Contestation here concerns the legitimacy and authority of certain norms over others. Not all proposed norms are adopted; some are excluded due to competing political interests, ideological differences, or strategic calculations. These dynamics are visible in treaty negotiations, international declarations, and legal codifications, where the normative agenda is shaped by actors with the greatest influence over global governance structures. From a conceptual perspective, this stage invites us to consider which voices are included in the creation of a norm and which are marginalized, and how this impacts the perceived legitimacy of the norm from the outset.[34]

The second stage, the referring stage, focuses on how norms are taken up

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[34] Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations*, 2018.

and recognized within particular communities that referred to government institutions, political parties, legal systems, and media, who deeply influence how norms are framed and understood by public. This stage deals with social recognition. In which to the extent of norm is seen as appropriate or legitimate in a specific sociocultural context. Within communities that share similar values, histories, or institutional structures, norms are often referred to without friction.[35] However, when norms are introduced into contexts lacking a shared normative background, they may face resistance or reinterpretation. Contestation at this stage does not necessarily arise from outright rejection but from differing understandings of the norm's meaning. This stage highlights the influence of culture, identity, and local history in shaping norm interpretation. Conceptually, it allows for a more nuanced analysis of norm diffusion—one that accounts for variation in reception depending on actors' positionality and shared understandings.[36]

Finally, the implementing stage centers on cultural validation. This stage engages individuals, civil society organizations, local communities, and grassroots activists who either adopt, resist, or reinterpret the norm within their daily lives. This is arguably the most grounded and complex stage, involving individual and collective engagement with norms in everyday life and local practice. Even when a norm is formally recognized and socially referenced, its actual implementation may still face contestation at cultural or personal levels. Individuals and groups bring their own beliefs, experiences, and values to bear on how they interpret or respond to norms. A norm may be accepted on paper but ignored, adapted, or resisted in

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[35] Antje Wiener, "Constitutionalism Unbound: A Practice Approach to Normativity," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, October 22, 2011, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2103049.
[36] P. Orchard and A. Wiener, "Norms and Norm Contestation," 2022, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003139850-6.

practice if it clashes with deeply rooted cultural frameworks or lived realities. This stage underscores that norms are not merely applied top-down but are filtered through local meaning-making processes.[37]

In the context of this research, this stage is especially relevant when analyzing domestic responses to globally promoted gender equality norms, particularly how they are negotiated within culturally conservative or traditionally Confucian societies These three stages form a cycle, revolving around social recognition, formal validity, and cultural validation. Norms are not engaged solely by state representatives but also involve communities, social groups, and individual actors.[38] Overall, Wiener's theory of contestation is useful not only for analyzing whether norms are adopted but also for understanding how they are interpreted and engaged with across different stages and levels.

Figure 1.2 The Segment of Norms

Segments	Reference	Form
Formal validity	Official document	Law, law-like
Social recognition	Social group	Unwritten, law-like
Cultural validation	Individual experience	Socio-cultural, informal

The segments of norms presented in Table 1.1 are used to understand how norms are validated across different layers of society, reflecting the complexity of norm engagement beyond formal adoption. Each stage of norm contestation which is constituting, referring, and implementing. These corresponded to a specific type of validation. Formal validation takes place during the constituting stage, where norms are legalized and institutionalized through international treaties, national

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[37] Orchard and Wiener.

[38] Antje Wiener, *Antje Wiener Norm(Ative) Change in International Relations: A Conceptual Framework Norm(Ative) Change in International Relations: A Conceptual Framework*, *Paper Series (United Hospital Fund of New York)*, 2020.

legislation, or state policies, usually driven by states, international organizations, and policymakers. Social validation occurs in the referring stage, where norms gain legitimacy through public discourse, media representation, and institutional endorsement, involving actors such as courts, political parties, civil society organizations, and opinion leaders. Finally, cultural validation happens at the implementing stage, where norms are adopted, reinterpreted, or resisted in everyday life by individuals, grassroots movements, and local communities.

This segmentation highlights that norm legitimacy is not determined solely by legal codification but by ongoing negotiation across institutional, societal, and cultural arenas. In the context of this research, this layered framework enables an in-depth examination of how the global norm of gender equality is contested and translated within South Korea's political structures, public discourse, and cultural practices.

By distinguishing between constituting, referring, and implementing, her framework allows for a multi-layered understanding of norm dynamics. It highlights the role of diverse agents and provides a deeper explanation of the complexities within the international system. For a conceptual framework, these stages can be applied to trace how a specific norm such as gender equality, moves from global formulation to national discourse and, finally, to local enactment, identifying points of friction, reinterpretation, or resistance along the way.

1.8 Research Methods

Research methodology is a scientific approach used to obtain data systematically and purposefully. It follows three key principles: rationality, empiricism, and systematicity. Rationality ensures that research is based on logical

reasoning and theoretical foundations. Systematicity guarantees an organized and structured research process in order to maintain scientific integrity, data must be valid, reliable, and objective, ensuring accuracy, consistency, and neutrality. By adhering to these principles, research methodology upholds credibility and contributes to knowledge advancement.

1.8.1 Types and Approach of Research

This thesis is categorized as explanative research using a qualitative approach. Explanative research seeks to analyze the reasons behind a phenomenon by exploring its underlying causes and relationships, without manipulating variables. In this study, the explanative method is applied to examine how and why South Korea engages with and contests gender equality norms, especially within the tension between traditional Confucian discourse and international normative pressures.

A qualitative approach is chosen to explore the social, cultural, and political influences that shape South Korea's interpretation and adaptation of global gender equality norms. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on measurable variables, this qualitative approach allows for a deeper and more interpretive understanding of how gender norms are negotiated across various actors, including the state, international organizations, and civil society. It focuses on meaning-making, discourse, and normative struggles that are embedded in South Korea's socio-political context.

This study relies on secondary data and library research, including official treaties (such as CEDAW), government policy documents, international organization reports (like those from the UN and OECD), and

materials from domestic and transnational feminist movements. Data were analyzed through a constructivist thematic analysis, which assumes that meaning is socially constructed and shaped through discourse. Themes were developed not merely by categorizing data, but by interpreting how norms such as gender equality are framed, resisted, or redefined by different actors. The process of analysis followed Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic method, which fits with the constructivist perspective of this study. In addition, the logic of discourse analysis supports the understanding of how language and narratives influence the framing of gender roles and national identity.

By applying this method, the research aims to explain the interplay between international gender equality norms and South Korea's domestic sociopolitical dynamics, showing how global norms are not simply adopted but are constantly contested, adapted, or reinterpreted through cultural and political processes. This framework aligns with the study's use of Antje Wiener's norm contestation theory, which emphasizes the dynamic and multilayered nature of norm diffusion and engagement.

1.8.2 Research Scope

This research focuses on South Korea's engagement with gender equality that has been contested between 2022 and 2024, particularly within context of the rising anti-feminist discourse during the presidency of Yoon Seuk-yeol. The year 2022 marks a critical point in this discourse, as Yoon's campaign and subsequent presidency were contributing to heightened political and social tensions surrounding gender issues. The same year,

South Korea ranked 104ᵗʰ in the Global Gender Gap Index further underscoring the country's ongoing struggles with gender equality. This research then concludes in 2024 because the gender equality movements intensified and called reforms in various of sectors including politics until business and social policy. The same year was also marked as the end of the Yoon's administrations as South Korea President.

1.8.3 Unit and Level of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this research is South Korea, examined within the level of analysis of a nation-state under the administrations of Yoon Seuk-yeol. This research seeks to understand how South Korea, as norm-recipient actor, engages with, reacts to, and contest and translate the diffused gender equality norms within its unique socio-cultural and political context.

1.8.4 Data Collection Techniques

This research utilizes qualitative data collection methods, primarily relying on document analysis and discourse analysis to examine how South Korea navigates gender equality norms amidst traditional Confucian discourse. Document analysis involves systematically reviewing government policies, legislative records, official reports, and international organization publications related to gender equality in South Korea. Additionally, academic literature, books, journal articles, and news media are reviewed to understand scholarly perspectives and public discourse on gender equality norms. There will be specific keyword used during the data collection such as, gender equality, South Korea, Confucian discourse, gender discourse, gender in South Korea politics and norm contestation.

Most of the data will be contained through publisher such as Sage Publications, Korea Journal Central, Korean Woman's Development Institute, JSTOR, ScienceDirect and Taylor & Francis Online .

1.8.5 Data Analysis

This research employs a constructivist thematic analysis to interpret qualitative data from secondary sources such as international treaties, policy reports, organizational publications, and movement-based materials. Rather than breaking the data into coded units, the analysis is based on careful reading and reflective interpretation of how different actors, both term of domestic and international construct, frame, and negotiate the meaning of gender equality norms. This approach views themes not as fixed categories, but as constructed insights that emerge from understanding how language, power, and context interact across different texts. The analysis is carried out by identifying patterns of discourse, recurring arguments, and normative tensions across the materials. These constructed themes help trace how global norms travel into domestic settings, and how they are shaped by both structural forces and local agency.[39] By focusing on meaning-making and narrative, this approach aligns with the study's constructivist foundation and supports a deeper understanding of norm contestation in South Korea's gender equality politic by involving the method to norm contestation cycle analysis, revolving around formal validations, social validations, and cultural validations.

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[39] Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations*, 2018. 33.

1.9 Systematic Structure of Writing

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research topic, outlining the background of gender equality on South Korea, and presents the research problem, objectives, and questions. It also situates the study within the broader context of international relations and norm diffusion theory, particularly focusing on Antje Wienner's theory of norm contestation as the main framework.

CHAPTER II: SOUTH KOREA'S GENDER EQUALITY

This section explores South Korea's initiatives in promoting gender equality, including legal reforms, policy changes, and societal movements. It also examines the country interactions with external actors.

CHAPTER III: TRADITIONAL CONSTRAINTS AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES

This chapter explores the intersection and conflict between South Korea's traditional values and the international discourse on gender equality. It underscores the friction between contemporary efforts to promote gender equality and the entrenched Confucian principles that have historically shaped societal norms in South Korea, as well as the role of international organizations, treaties, and global discourse in promoting gender equality.

CHAPTER IV: NORM CONTESTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter explores and analyzes how gender equality norms are contested, reinterpreted, or resisted within South Korea. It applied Wienner's three stage framework consisting constituting, referring, and implementing in order to investigate how gender equality norms received, negotiated and adapted by South

Korea.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The final chapter summarizes key findings, reflecting on South Korea's progress and ongoing challenges in achieving gender equality. It provides insights into future prospects and recommendations for navigating the balance between tradition and modern gender policies.