

A Study of the Emergence of Women's Trade Unions in South Korea

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Summary

This paper sets out to examine the implications of establishing women's only trade unions in South Korea. It is argued that the development of trade unionism becomes an establishment and loses the sight of social process. Feminist critiques contend that the tendency of trade unions to focus on institutional forms, such as collective bargaining, accentuates the male-biased nature of unions and the union politics operating within the dichotomy of work and home is inclined to exclude women. By looking at the rationales for the formation of women's trade, it will be argued that the strategy of women's separate organizing is to cover the missing link in the union politics. But also their activities represent the alternative form for the future trade union movements.

Introduction

The democratic trade union movement in South Korea began in female-concentrated light industries in the 1970s within the context of a developmental strategy centred around export-

growth industrialisation. In the end, women workers' struggles against the military dictatorship, ruthless exploitation, and inhumane treatment made a critical contribution to the demise of the Park regime that had last for two decades (Chun, 2000). Although the female workers' struggles had to face another military regime and therefore were severely repressed in the 1980s, it appeared that they provided the basis for the growth of democratic trade union movement as well as the economic development in South Korea. In 1987 when a space for political reforms was beginning to open up as a result of mass mobilisation for democratic changes, labour revolts swept over the whole country, which is named as the 'Great Struggle' later¹. The Workers' Great Struggle in 1987 was a critical juncture in the development of democratic trade union movements in South Korea. As a result, there was a considerable increase in the number of unions from 2, 675 in 1987 to 7, 883 in 1989 and the rate of the union membership from 12.3 per cent to 18.7 per cent in the same period of time. But also, it brought about the dramatic changes in the leading sector of labour movements from light industry to heavy-chemical industry, and thus their leading actors from female workers to male workers.

Once the male workers captured the central role of the labour movement, women workers were quickly pushed aside. The transformation of gender composition in the labour movement in South Korea has been accelerated by industrial restructuring since the late 1980s, shifting the focus away from female-dominated light manufacturing to male-dominated heavy and chemical industry. In the post-1987, labour movements in South Korea seemed to have conformed to the highly male-dominant and militarized trend. It is also criticized that industrial relations studies tend to consider the Workers' Great Struggle as a starting point of labour movements in South Korea, with little attention to the past labour movements led by female workers (Chun, 2000; Koo, 2001). The ahistorical assumption that male workers played a central role in the development of democratic trade union movements in South Korea – supported by the current gender composition in the trade unions and predominant norms of breadwinner – has been the basis to justify the marginalisation of women in the union politics. Also, as the trade unionism in South Korea has grown based on large-enterprise unions in the 1990s, it attracts criticism for the shift away from mobilisation of worker's struggles and the focus on collective bargaining².

The economic crisis, which hit over the entire economy in South Korea in 1997, was a litmus

¹ The Great Struggle derives from its enormous scale that the total number of workers who participated in the labour action. From July to September 1987, it is estimated to be 1.2 million, equivalent to approximately one-third of the regularly employed workers in enterprises with ten or more workers (Ministry of Labour, 1988).

² It should be recognized that the lack of the arguments on the role of the state in restructuring the market and attempting to integrate trade unions into that process makes the critics of trade unionism too general to capture the insights within the trade union politics. In this paper, it rather focuses on how the trade unions affects gender relations.

paper to measure how little women were integrated into the existing unions. In response to male-biased actions of unions and the revelation of women workers' vulnerability during the economic restructuring, three kinds of women's trade unions were formed in 1999. This paper will have a close look at what impels women workers to organize themselves. To examine the rationales of the creation of women's only trade unions needs to find out why trade unionism is limited to represent women's workers' issues, which is also closely related the historical overview of democratic trade union movements in South Korea. Therefore, this paper will start with the debates on trade unionism in the light of the limitations of trade unionism to challenge the capitalist system and to represent the interests of the whole working class. And it will go on to look at the feminist critiques of industrial relations, which argues that gender is missing, based on the divide of work and home, and thus women workers' double burden and their secondary status in the labour market are barely touched.

In spite of those criticism on trade unions, the interdependence between women and unions has been recognized, as workers' rights are eroded in the name of labour flexibility, which affects disproportionately women workers, on the one hand; as the union membership has been declining, on the other hand. Thus, the significance of trade unionism has been raised by a number of feminist activists and scholars. Pocock (1997) calls for the attention to "unionism's potential to improve the position of women, its limitations as a movement identified closed with masculine identity, and its possibilities for women into the future" (quoted in Broadbent, 2003: 2). Also, the agenda of gender equality has been suggested for unions as a means of mobilization (Colling and Dickens, 2001). Briskin and McDermott (1993) identify feminism as the 'future health of the labour movement' and as 'the most creative energy within the labour movement'. They put forward five ways to transform unions; making gender visible, challenging male standard, separate organizing, building alliances and coalitions, and militancy and democratic process (p. 5). And they argue that separate organizing women within the unions is an essential strategy for women to make their voice heard and further to achieve the other aims. However, women's self-organizing strategy not only challenges the institutional forms of trade unions, but also expands the boundary of workplace, which shows the potential to revive the aspect of trade unionism as a movement. Hence, in the last part, it will discuss the implications of women's self-organizing, referring to the case of South Korea.

Critical Review of Trade Unionism

Marx and Engels saw the role of trade unionism, in its political terms, as 'integral to the process of social revolution' to build up antagonism against capitalists with the attempt to abolish the competition by which the mechanism of the capitalist society operates (Hyman, 1971: 6).

Their optimistic view of trade unionism as a means to transform the capitalist society did not last long, since the ability of trade unionism to encompass the whole working class' interests beyond sectionalism was seriously doubted. In response, Lenin drew the conclusion that the abilities of trade unions to attain economic objectives within the framework of capitalism represents their inherent nature to 'integration within the system' merely by adopting bourgeois politics for the working class (Hyman, 1971: 14). Furthermore, once trade unions achieved an institutional form in the process of their development, unions have been criticized that they become an institution to hold up the system, rather than to represent workers' interests. Michels referred to the internal functioning of trade unions as the 'iron law of oligarchy', describing the impossibility for unions to operate on the basis of direct democracy, the irremovability of officials, and the social and ideological separation of leaders from their members (Hyman, 1971: 15-16).

Clarke (1978) points out that in the contemporary capitalist society, 'trade union action involves coming to terms with the power of capital rather than attempting to overthrow that power', mainly focusing on collective bargaining as a 'process of defensive accommodation to the external power structure (p. 15). He further argues that 'the conventional role of trade unionism may be accepted as merely a protective function exercised within the constraints of capitalist domination of the employment contract' and therefore the initial role of trade unions as a social movement has become obsolete (p.16). In the similar vein, as Wright Mills (1948) put forward that union bureaucracies and the controlling institutions of capitalism are "growing together", the relationship between labour and capital no longer seem antagonistic in the context that 'the interests of labour and business are complementary rather than contradictory', cooperating in the actual process of production and in the conduct of the political economy as a whole (Hyman, 1971: 20). Also, the degree of incorporation, disguised as the level of 'maturity' of industrial relations, requires 'peace obligation' of labour actions (Hyman, 1971: 21-22). In so doing, the union becomes "in a very real sense a part of the 'establishment'" (Wighnam, 1961, cited in Hyman, 1971: 23).

Disputing those pessimistic views of trade unionism, Hinton and Hyman (1975) state that "unions are naturally oriented towards furthering the interests of their own member within the framework of capitalism", even though they have less interests of the whole class through the abolition of capitalism (cited in Clarke, 1978: 19). This view is more clearly illustrated in Hyman's critics on Michels' notion of 'the iron law of oligarchy. The oligarchic control is enabled by mass apathy and workers' instrumental attitudes towards unions. However, if workers purely regard unions as a service organization to gain economic benefits, when union officials fail to bring about satisfactory results for their members, they are unlikely to be re-elected. This means that unions are subject to their members and also 'ought in some sense to operate democratically' (Hyman, 1971: 30). In addition, he argues that Michels' monolithic conception of union

organization statement that '[o]f far greater significances are the experience of membership involvement in shop-floor trade unionism' (p. 32). He seems to put forward a discreet optimistic view of trade unionism in the light of the 'autonomous nature of control' exercised by workers' spontaneous association on the shop floor. It means that the rank-and-file can exert influence over, or act independently of, the union leadership and thereby undermine its increasing role of accommodation and regulation (Hyman, 1971: 50).

Feminist critics of the institutionalized form of trade unionism and the focus on collective bargaining have something in common with Hyman's emphasis on shop-floor unionism towards more participatory and inclusive unionism. Briskin and McDermott (1993) points out that 'the relations between women and unions are undergoing a striking transformation at the core of which is the critical recognition of interdependency', particularly in the process of economic restructuring (p. 3). Put simply, women need unions for the reason that unions provide an arena in which they can actively assert fundamental issues affecting their home and work lives, whereas unions need women for the increase of their membership. But also they argue that feminism can provide an alternative approach to unionism, based on feminist values that foster more participatory and inclusive decision-making (p. 4). However, the Hyman's notion of the shop-floor unionism needs questioning in terms of its commitment to gender issues because rank-and-file union activities do not guarantee that unions in each work place are favourable to women without taking gender relations as a composition of industrial relations and without challenging the dichotomy between the public and the private, and between work and home. Also, the emphasis on the shop-floor unionism, taking for granted that workers are organized in the union, is likely to neglect women workers, who are mostly employed, as part-time workers, home-based workers, and the like, in unorganized sectors. In other words, without including women's standing points in industrial relations, industrial relations studies tend to hold only part of the picture of what constitutes the industrial relations.

Feminists deepen the criticism of the institutionalist bias of industrial relations to put the primacy it accords to the description of the institutions of trade unions and collective bargaining arrangements at the expense of social processes such as influence and mobilization. Greene (2003) argues that because industrial relations research has not mainly been concerned with uncovering *social processes* of industrial relations, women have been neglected (p. 306, emphasis is original). Treating women and men as atomized economic actors, neglecting how they combine in families to support each other and their children, it is argued that industrial relations has lost sight of family, community, and wider society together (Acker, 1999, cited in Greene, 2003: 307). In short, because of the unquestioned presumption of what constitute industrial relations, operating with the dichotomy between work and home, the mainstream industrial relations with

the emphasis on institutional forms and collective bargaining remain gender blind as well as overlook its social processes (Forrest, 1993; Greene, 2003; Wajzman, 2000).

Danieli (2003) identifies how industrial relations represents its gender blindness: the failure to recognize the gender of the 'actors' in industrial relations; the treatment of women but not men as gendered subjects; an emphasis on the structures, systems, institutions of industrial relations at the expense of action; dominance of research on male dominated industries and occupations; over reliance on quantitative research and formal systems. In particular, Wajzman (2000) attributes the continuing absence of regular and systematic consideration of gender in industrial relations to that 'women are generally treated as a special case in that men are still assumed to be the universal standard against which women are measured. It is women who are marked as 'gendered', the ones who are different' (p. 184). Similarly, Forrest (1993) also points out that when gender is taken as an explanatory variable in industrial relations, it relies on the same set of gendered assumption: that is, women do women's work and so are hard to organize. In other words, job segregation is taken as a given and offered as a partial explanation for women's lower rates of unionisation. On contrast, she demonstrates that 'men are never compared with women: men are assumed to be workers while women are not. Indeed, industrial relations construct men *only* as workers and never as men' (p. 331). Forrest (1993) asserts that gender relations as power relations need to be an analytical tool for industrial relations and job segregation must be theorized as a mechanism of job regulation. And it is concluded that 'unions, too, are part of the male power structure and active defenders of male privilege' (Forrest, 1993: 336), playing a role in the systematic undervaluing of women's work and women's skills without challenging sexual division of labour and with little consciousness of life beyond the factory gates (Wajzman, 2000: 191).

Alice Cook, in her introduction of the relationship between women and unions in eleven industrialized countries, illustrates that the extent that unions are responding to women's special needs and demands within the organization depends on women's sheer numbers and organized strength. With women's growing demands, unions set up women's division, and yet, it resulted in the second-class status of these divisions within the unions' line and staff department, either being walled off from the main centre of union politics and functionings, or instead becoming a assistant to male-determined projects with little to do with women's work problems (Cook, 1984: 17-18). Also, she reports that centralization of bargaining is an obstacle to the full representation of women among union leaders. When it goes far beyond the reach of local groups of workers, the process of bargaining *per se* is male-dominated and agreements have tended to formalize and perpetuate gendered inequalities rather than challenge (Colling and Dickens, 2001: 136). In particular, she points out that the close interrelationship between labour parties and trade unions makes negative effects on women's lives within the unions, because 'a good unionist qualifies for

a high post when he also plays an influential role in party affairs' (Cook, 1984: 23). Thus, working women's issues have been often raised by women's movements outside the union politics, calling attention to job segregation and women's endemic low pay. However, again, due to the alliances between the Labour Party and unions, working women's issues have been frequently treated as political matters and thus become the responsibility of the party rather than of the unions, and so they have been the subject of legislation rather than collective bargaining. Unions use the existence of legislation to excuse themselves from dealing with women's issues at the bargaining table, and thereby many women go to court or tribunal without their union's aid (Cook, 1984: 29).

In brief, the institutionalist-biased trade unionism has been criticized long even without a gender perspective. However, the important point made by feminist here is that the process of institutionalisation of trade unionism is closely linked to gender blindness of industrial relations. Industrial relations fails to go beyond the boundary of the factory and the dichotomy between the public and the private, and therefore not only neglects its aspect as a social process and excludes women's lives. In this regard, 'separate organizing' has been considered as a means to provide the basis for women workers to come together to bring up their issues and to empower themselves.

Women's Self Organising

Linda Briskin (1993) puts an emphasis on distinguishing between separatism as a goal – the end in itself, and a strategy – a means to an end. Separate organizing is a strategy of empowerment for women in their struggle to alter the political and economic configurations, whereas 'separatism often an explicit refusal to work with men and usually focuses on the building formation of dominant social structures' (Briskin, 1993: 91). Separate organizing as 'a pro-active choice on the part of women in order to strengthen their voices, respond to their particular concerns as activists or workers', grounds not only on the gender specific character of experience, but also gender specific needs (Briskin, 1993: 96). In addition, she points out that women's separate organizing, fuelled by gender specificity and gender power, challenge organizational practices; as a result, it can be a convergence of demands by rank-and-file unionists for more democracy and by union women for more voice, on the one hand, and of resistances to women's organizing by both patriarchal and bureaucratic interests, on the other hand (Briskin, 1993: 101). She argues that 'the success of women's separate organizing in unions depends upon maintaining a balance between the degree of autonomy from the structures and practices of the labour movement, on the one hand, and the degree of integration into those structures, on the other hand' (Briskin, 1993: 102). According to her, integration is necessary to produce the level of legitimacy, ensuring access to adequate resources, while autonomy is critical

to the foundation for a strong voice about women's concerns and the context for building alliances between the movement of union women and the community-based women's movements.

However, Briskin's model of women's separate organizing in the unions does not fully explain a various forms of women's autonomous organizing strategies in labour issues. But also it can be seen as an industrialized society-centred view point. It would not be necessary to gain legitimacy from the existing union body. Instead, when strong autonomous women's collectivity and voice exists, there will be already the needs for unions to be associated with them. The limited view of women's separate organizing within the union structure seems to be reflected in the interchangeable use of union and labour movements. Throughout her articles in *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy and Militancy*, she interchangeably uses the terms of union and the labour movement. However, as seen above, the critics of trade unionism and industrial relations say that unions have become an establishment, losing the sense of a social movement or the sight of a social process by overly relying on collective bargaining. In contrast, labour movements should not be bound into the union structure. Dickinson and Schaeffer (2001) argue that women's movements are labour movements since women-centred movements address the reproductive conditions of male labour, just as much as they address the social reproduction of female labour (p. 178). Their argument stems from the challenging notion of 'work' to include non-wage work, which is mainly taken up by women. In the similar vein, Cleaver (2000) also suggests that class struggles are not confined to the factory, expanding the narrowly perceived concept of the working class to the unwaged. In short, feminists' challenging unions by separate organizing can modify the union gender-friendly embracing more women into the union, and yet it does not challenge the given notion of work and workers as like the existing male dominated union disregards. As Rowbotham and Mitter (1994) put forward, without challenging the given notion of work, workers and their struggles, the experience of millions of human beings is marginalized, regarded as 'atypical', and their struggles to lay claim to distributive justice are overlooked (p. 2). Therefore, it must be considered that women's self-organizing strategies are shaped not only in the form of the union, and that unions can also have a variety of forms responding to the people's perceived needs and the market structure where it stands on.

There are a number of examples. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is registered as a union, but it is not simply organizing workers against employers. SEWA include small street vendors, contract workers, homeworkers and rural women workers, many of whom have no identifiable employer. Its main activities are to bargain with municipalities and people with power over raw materials, financial institutions, property and land by combining co-operative and trade union strategies. Jhabvala (1994) states that the co-operative supplements the union by providing an alternative but also necessary guard for poor women workers, and also it has a key feature in the organizational form that upholds the democratic participation of workers.

The second example is the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG), which was formed in 1883 in Britain. It is reported that WCG constituted a "microcosm of a woman's democracy, and a mirror of the politics of the millions of disenfranchised working women" (Scott, 1995: 30). This stemmed from its ability to mobilize the traditionally feminine activity of shopping for a radical redefinition of women's rights and capacities, referring to the Guild as 'basket power' as a means by which the women consumers of the movement could influence Co-operative policy (p. 34). Also, Guildswomen eagerly participated in Divorce Law Reform, going beyond a 'boundaries question' posed by the Catholic Church and the Co-operative Congress. Therefore, 'basket power' between 1890 and 1920 is considered to have played a role in advancing women's social and political rights by using the slogan as a springboard for an ambitious project of intervention in Co-operative and national affairs (Scott, 1995: 41). Therefore, Briskin's women's separate organizing in the unions can be seen as one form out of a variety of women self-organising strategies to cope with their working conditions. Thus, the form of women's organizing themselves can be variable according to their perceived needs.

The Creation of Women-only Trade Unions in South Korea

The financial crisis harshly hit over the South Korean economy in 1997 and the government had to admit to stipulate far-reaching reforms the IMF put forward. While the government attempted to make a corporative approach to industrial relations by establishing the Tripartite Committee in order to perform economic reforms, the economic restructuring mainly led to the massive layoffs rather than reforming the chronic problems, such as the *chaebol* system. Unions were the most powerful organisation to resist the reform, taking place a series of the General Strike throughout the country. However, their resistance against the state and capital cannot make them immune to the critiques of gender discrimination. The economic crisis, as Cook (1984) argues, has been 'a major test of how fully unions and other labour market institutions have accepted women in all areas of the labour force' (p. 8). Women workers suffered from their gendered vulnerability in labour markets and within trade unions far greater than male counterparts. The rate of female union membership fell to 5.6 % in 1998 from 11.6 % in 1987, while that of male showed relatively stable in the decrease from 15.3% to 14.9 % in the same period of time³. Even when women are permanent employees, women's jobs are more insecure. The labour force participation rate among females fell by 2.5 per cent from 49.5 per cent to 47.0

³ It should note that the considerable decline in the female union membership cannot be attributed only to the economic crisis. It should be seen as the total outcome of the gradual growth of the informal sector as well as the process of the economic restructuring to shift the focus of the industrial sector away from the light manufacturing since the late 1980s.

per cent, whereas among males it fell just 0.4 points to 75.2 per cent (KLI 2003, in Peetz and Ollet, forthcoming). Furthermore, in this regard, the unions demonstrate that they are actors to keep male priorities to discriminate women workers. It is reported that the proportion that the action to lay off women first was done through collective agreements have reached 32.8 per cent since the implementation of Gender Equity of Employment Law (Choi, 1999). For instance, the *Nonghyup* Bank, the largest bank in South Korea, announced mass layoffs prioritizing the dismissal of one member of a couple where both a man and a woman worked at *Nonghyup*. As a consequence, among 752 couples out of a total of 762 couples that accepted the dismissal, 688 female partners resigned, and afterwards, most of them were rehired as irregular workers, without union's organizational resistance. In the case of Hyundai Motors, the trade union reached an agreement on the least number of lay-offs, after a three-month struggle, resulting in 277 lay-offs, and half of them were women workers all employed in the canteen. More significantly, the economic restructuring sharply increased the rate of atypical workers⁴ as well as the rate of unemployment from more or less 2 % before the economic crisis to 8.4 % in 1999 - though it reduced to 5 % in 2001 (Lee, 2001). Female workers disproportionately take up atypical employment in the labour market, representing 62 % in 1997 to 70.9 % in 2001 (Bae, May 2002). Not surprisingly, the atypical workers are hardly protected by a social security net or by trade unions. In short, the economic restructuring process demonstrates that market reforms are based on a gendered workforce and also trade unions are part of actors to carry on a gendered market structure.

In response to gendered economic restructuring, women began to organize themselves. Interestingly, there are three bodies of women's trade unions, which all were formed, at the same year, in 1999. The first created women's union was the Seoul Women's Trade Union (SWTU) shaped by a regional trade union. The SWTU was created by fifteen women workers, who were

⁴ To define the atypical labour has been a crucial issue to analyse the current labour market in South Korea. Since atypical labour has been a social issue with its considerable increase since the economic crisis, the Korean Institute of Labour (2001) has researched on its extent, and concluded that only 26.4 % of workers are employed as atypical labour. This is because it has classified the employee who works for more than 36 hours per week and is hired for more than one year as the typical labour, and the remainder as the atypical labour (Lee, 2001: 190). Chang (2001) and Lee (2001) refer to 'atypical labour' as the remainder of the definition of typical labour referred to as a permanent and full-time employment that does not demarcate the tenure of employment, that secures the safety of employment relations through regulations of labour law, and that provides labour for a single employer. That is to say, that which does not meet more than one of those requirements of typical labour is defined as atypical labour. Given its definition, Kim (2001) argues that the proportion of the atypical employment in the labour market reaches up to 58 % (cited in Lee, 2001: 191). However, it is argued that the rate of atypical labour has taken up 68 per cent of the total employment (Kang, 2001). However, as the statistics demonstrates, it is no longer accurate to describe the informal workers as "atypical".

all employed in small-sized firms or as an atypical employee. This organization underlines the autonomous nature of women workers' activism, declaring the separatism from the existing trade union bodies, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU). Their focus is on organizing female workers employed in small enterprises with less than five employees and working as part-timers, contract-based employees, homebased workers, who are, in most cases, in low-income class with their basic rights deprived. Also, they involve the unemployed in their membership, challenging the notion of the work and as a consequence remaining illegal. In other words, the SWTU mainly targets at workers, who are the most neglected by unions regarded as the hardest to organize. The activists of SWTU state that they attempt to seek a new way in running trade unions that will enhance women workers' self-respects and promotes their self-achievements (www.women119.or.kr, Nov 2002).

Secondly, the Korean Women's Trade Union (KWTU) was formed by the Korean Women Workers Association (KWWA), which has a ten-year long history to deal with women workers' issues. The formation of KWTU is seen as the outcome of the accumulated activities of the KWWA. Its main concerns centre around the working condition of female workers and it seeks to organise female workers who are not covered by the existing unions. Like the SWTU, the KWTU is unaffiliated with the KCTU and recognizes the women's union as a means to empower women (Choi, 1999). While the SWTU was newly organized in Seoul by inexperienced women workers and thus has difficulties attaining sufficient membership and resources, the KWTU covers all regions in South Korea and has an accumulated knowledge and resource of women workers' issues by the experience of the KWWA. The KWTU has been actively engaged in unionizing of atypical female workers. For instance, golf caddies, who were unrecognized as workers, and thus did not have the right to form the union, organized themselves and won the legal status of their union. Subcontract female workers, who were hired in the Daewoo Motors, but not able to join the existing union, succeeded in building up their own union. And both of unions are affiliated to the KWTU.

Thirdly, the KCTU also created the Korean Women's Confederation of Trade Unions (KWCTU) with the recognition of the importance of organizing female workers. The KWCTU is recorded to have branches in eight regions. However, it appears that the KWCTU have not made visible activities. One women KCTU official in charge of women's issues mentions that most branches of the KWCTU tend to have only officials with very few members (Interview of female official of the KWCT, 2002). In other words, the KWCTU represents the same tendencies shown in the women's division within unions. Therefore, it can be inferred that the KCTU has little interests in mobilizing female workers, and it uses the creation of the KWCTU as tokenism. Indeed, Peetz and Ollett (forthcoming) indicate that "can't do" approach to the unionization of peripheral workers, many Korean unions have taken, can be attributed much to the gendered

nature of Korean unions (p. 234- 235).

In short, the economic crisis triggered the recognition of the need for women to unionise themselves. This was the critical conjuncture to unpack the gendered process of the economic restructuring and explicitly reveal the gendered nature of the labour market and also in the trade union. Therefore, the formation of women's trade union can be seen as an organisational reaction to resist the gender inequality embedded in the market system. But also, it is necessary to trace back to see what historical experiences enable for women activists to attempt to form women only-unions. First of all, as seen above, the two women's trade unions – SWTU and KWTU articulate the need to incorporate feminist values in their organizational structures and in their aims to empower women personally and collectively by mobilizing women. It can be inferred that the growing feminist movements since the 1990s influences women activists awareness of feminist issues. Secondly, women activists from both of SWTU and KWTU report that the external experiences of the SEWA in India, the KAD, Women's Trade Union in Denmark, and the Tokyo Women's Trade Union in Japan have stimulated their initiative ideas. Last, but not least, it needs to pay attention to female workers' struggles in the 1970s and the 1980s, which opened up and maintained the democratic trade union movement. The light manufacturing industry is no longer the main priority of the economic development, and yet workers involved in the sector become now ubiquitous in various sectors in different ways of employment from the past. Therefore, it will be feasible to presuppose that women activists may be well aware of a precursor of women workers' struggles, which should differ from male-led workers struggles.

The formation of women only trade unions in South Korea signifies that gender as social relations constitutes industrial relations. Given different structure of the labour market for men and women and different work experience of men and women, women workers call for organizing themselves to protect their workers' right. It is built upon a form of separatism from the male-dominated unions, but it should be read not only in a way of challenging the existing unions, but rather in a way of acting upon women workers' perceived needs derived from the gendered market structure. In the end, it will contribute to the protection of workers in non-unionised sectors and the integration of women workers' daily experiences into the union politics.

Conclusion

Global restructuring accompanies the expansion of informalisation of the workforce over the world. This has brought about the decline of trade union membership in general, and therefore the attention to the strengthening of union movements has been paid. In this paper, the absence of analyses of the state and the economic restructuring tends to give partial criticism on existing

trade unions. However it is to be recognized that, without integrating gender perspective into the union politics, trade unionism is apt to discharge a majority of workers, mainly women, standing for the interests of very a few workers. In response to the marginalisation of women workers' interests in the union politics, women workers organise themselves. This implies that it will represent women workers' interests and further challenge the notion of work and the boundaries between work and home. Also, importantly, their focus is on the mobilisation of women workers and the protection of their labour rights, not on collective bargaining or on the maintenance of organisation. It means that women's self-organising will play a significant role not only in empowering individual women workers, but also in reviving the aspect of trade unionism as a movement and a social process.

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