

Women and Homosexuals in the South Korean Defense Force :

Possibility and Limitation of Their Full Integration*

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· **Key words** : South Korean Defense Force, postmodern military, integration, women, homosexuals, threat, democratization, postmodernization

[ABSTRACT]

This study evaluates to what extent two minority groups, women and homosexuals, in the South Korean defense force have been integrated and what factors have played a critical role in increasing their integration and acceptance in the military. The key question of this research is to identify whether their integration and acceptance reflect the changing social and political changes in South Korean society. This research assumes that the degree of threat perception, democracy, and postmodern values in a country determine the overall extent of the two

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minority groups' integration and acceptance in the military—in other words, a decreased threat perception, an advanced democracy, and developed postmodern values are requisite conditions for full integration and acceptance. By examining policy changes toward the minority groups, this research finds that the full integration and acceptance of these two minority groups in the South Korean military remains very limited. Although the South Korean military faces social and political pressures for improving the two groups' integration, representation, and acceptance in the military, it does not fully respond to the pressure, as the military needs to maintain military effectiveness and unit cohesion under a high national security threat from North Korea. In South Korea, the logic of military effectiveness for counteracting the enemy seems more influential than the minority groups' rights.

I . Introduction

Several decades have passed since the third wave of democratization swept over the globe, with no other social or political force stopping the impetus of democratization. The prevalence of democratization has become real and tangible, and South Korea has not been excluded from this phenomenon. In South Korea, the military removed itself from domestic politics, and democratic civilian control of the military has been installed in accordance with democratic consolidation. In the meantime, South Korea has enjoyed unprecedented economic growth and has become a leader in the world economy. This economic success, coupled with democratic development, has led to substantial changes in the social structure and values in South Korea. A modern society is being transformed into a postmodern one, accompanied by changes in social values across the generations. Truly, South Korea has undergone one of the most dynamic social, political, and economic changes in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. However, North Korea's aggressive posture has remained. In the face of a high level of military threat, the South Korean people's deep concern about their national security has not subsided.

Under these changing external and internal environments, it would be interesting to explore the post-Cold War South Korean societal-military relations, highlighting the issue of integration and acceptance of two minority groups in the military: women and homosexuals. This study utilizes a revised analytical framework based on the postmodern military model (hereafter MWS model) suggested by Moskos, Williams, and Segal.¹⁾ There have been few comprehensive analyses of the issue in South Korea, as most studies on the South Korean civil-military relations have focused on military intervention and disengagement. In this regard, examining the issue of integration and acceptance of the minority groups becomes valuable. This study explores how much these two groups have been integrated and accepted within the South Korean Defense Force (SKDF), given the social, political, and security circumstances in South Korea. This research attempts to identify whether integration, representation, and acceptance of the two minority groups within the SKDF reflect the changing social and political changes in South Korea. This article consists of five parts, including this introductory section. Part two evaluates the postmodern military model and presents the core thesis of this study. Part three and four assess to what extent women and homosexuals in the SKDF have been integrated. This article then concludes with a discussion of the major findings and evaluation.

II. The Postmodern Military Thesis Revisited

The MWS model views that the scale and intensity of external threat has been sharply diminished in the post-Cold War era, as the nature of threat perception has changed from conventional threats (such as an enemy's invasion or nuclear war) to unconventional threats (such as terrorism and ethnic conflict). Under this change, traditional social values such as citizens' loyalty to the nation-state that bonded states' ties with society and citizens no longer buttress the armed forces' leading role in society. This change in the international system has also affected social values in the broader society. As a consequence, postmodernization²⁾ in Western advanced democracies where

1) Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams, and David R. Segal, *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces After the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

postmodern movement began in the 1960s has been further developed. Given these international and social changes, in order to keep its legitimacy in the eyes of society, the military has been required to transform its organization and form a new societal-military relationship on the premise that the military's structure and values need to converge with the changes in social values.

Based on this theoretical assumption, the MWS model expects that the integration and acceptance of the two minority groups (that is, women and homosexuals) in the military will be significantly improved in the post-Cold War period as compared with the pre-Cold War and the Cold War periods. More specifically, the MWS model argues that as the armed forces move toward the postmodern military, the role of women in the military increases dramatically. In the modern era, women were generally excluded or separated from the military, while in the late modern period, women were partially integrated. During this period, the role of women in the military was limited to auxiliary functions such as administrative, medical, logistics, and welfare services. Needless to say, a female's access to combat units was restricted. In the postmodern period, however, the role of women has expanded to almost all areas of the military and women have been fully integrated into the armed forces. This is the basic process of gender integration in the military that the MWS model expects.³⁾ With respect to the status of homosexuals in the military, the MWS model points out that homosexuals in the military were punished or discharged from the military in the modern or the late modern periods. In line with the increasing tolerance and acceptance toward these individuals in society, homosexuals have begun to be allowed to serve in the armed forces in the post-modern period.⁴⁾

Twenty Western countries have been examined by applying the MWS model, testing whether or not women and homosexuals in these militaries followed the expected trends in the model. Most Western countries conform to the expectation of the model. These countries include the United States,

2) This study accepts the definition of postmodernism outlined by the MWS model: "postmodernism subverts absolute values and introduces a profound relativism into discourse. The operative terms are pluralism, fragmentation, heterogeneity, deconstruction, permeability, and ambiguity." *Ibid.*, p. 4.

3) Charles C. Moskos, "Toward a Postmodern Military: The United States as a Paradigm," in Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams, and David R. Segal (ed.), *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces After the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 22-23.

4) *Ibid.*, p. 24.

England, France, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Unfortunately, no attempt has been made to test the model using Asian countries. In this context, this study applies the MWS model to the SKDF to find whether South Korea fits the model.

The MWS model properly outlined a typology for analyzing the current trend toward the postmodern military in some Western countries. However, the MWS model did not pay attention to dynamic processes of conflict, development, and interactions among national security concerns, political change, and social values in non-Western countries. The MWS model neither fully explains the role of political change in shaping postmodern aspects within the military nor the changing societal-military relationship. This limited attention to political and social variables means that the MWS model must be used with caution when analyzing young democratic states where democratic consolidation and postmodernization of social values are happening simultaneously. The role of threat perception, democratization, and social value, therefore, should be considered together in explaining societal-military relations.

Unlike the MWS model that considers the change of perceived threat only as a key explanatory variable, this study makes an effort to shed light on interactive effects of threat perception, political change, and social values on the two minority group's integration and acceptance in the military. In this manner, the core thesis of this study is that the degree of threat perception, democracy, and postmodern values in a country affect the overall extent of the integration and acceptance of the two minority groups in the military. Then, how and why do these three variables influence the degree of the integration and acceptance? Facing a tangible military threat, a state asks people to demonstrate one's loyalty to their country. Military service becomes one of the most fundamental duties of citizens. In the meantime, the military rationalizes its expanded role in politics and society under the name of national security. People accept the enlarged role of the army without much resistance because their high sense of insecurity is grounded on the premise that the national security issues significantly influence their economic, social, and personal lives. Armed forces in those countries experiencing high national security problems show major contrasts in structure and values from civilian society.⁵⁾ Social values and structures cannot take precedence over those of the military, given strengthened nationalism and continuing national

security concern. Armed forces retain their peculiar organizational form and values, arguing that any changes would weaken military effectiveness, which is not good for national security.⁶⁾ The military continues to strive for enduring institutional efficacy; the lines between military and society remain non-permeable.

By contrast, a decreased military threat would change people's threat perceptions and the relationship between the military and society. People who do not live under conditions of military insecurity would not provide their unconditional support and acceptance regarding the leading role of the military in a society. The concept of the nation-state, nation-in-arms, and the strong connection between state and citizen, prevalent under high military threat, begin to lose their influence on society. The logic of military effectiveness cannot play a considerable role in determining the direction of societal-military relations. The traditional argument of military effectiveness for counteracting enemies also cannot be influential and plausible. Without a visible military threat, armed forces have little choice but to accept social and government pressure on the military to converge with societal values and structure. As a result, the lines between military and society become more and more blurred.

Equally important as this change of threat perception is the development of democracy. Different causes and factors have affected the courses of action in democratization; thus, the process of democratization has varied throughout history and across countries. Nevertheless, democratization produces some common positive outcomes. Not only does it provide political rights and civil liberties but it also protects human rights and keeps peace in international relations. Besides, democratization brings about political, economic, and

5) Military values generally mean some ethical elements distinguishing the military from any other social institutions: obedience, honor, duty, loyalty, discipline, sacrifice, etc.

6) Military effectiveness is a broad term that includes such entities as technology, weapon system, leadership, unit cohesion, regime type, social structure, and civil-military relations. This is because many factors affect military effectiveness at multiple levels; thus, military effectiveness can be defined in a variety of ways. In this study, military effectiveness is defined as "material and nonmaterial sources needed for the military to complete successfully assigned missions." See Peter Rosen Stephen, "Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters," *International Security* 19-4 (1995), pp. 5-31; Biddle Stephen and Stephen Long, "Democracy and Military Effectiveness: A Deeper Look," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48-4 (2004), pp. 525-546; Suzanne C. Nielsen, "Civil-Military Relations Theory and Military Effectiveness," *Public Administration and Management* 10-2 (2005), pp. 61-84.

social equality through changing the power structure in favor of the middle class and lower classes.⁷⁾

When democratization is successfully completed, a stable or consolidated democracy is achieved. Protection for individual rights, civil liberties, freedom of expression, rights for collective actions, and human rights of minorities are firmly assured by the constitution and law. An autonomous civil society plays an important role in developing democratic system. These arenas interact and reinforce each other. People's will and dignity are well reflected in the process of rule. The basic democratic norms such as tolerance, interpersonal trust, and compromise are regarded as normal aspects in people's daily lives.⁸⁾ These democratic structure and values are further institutionalized and strengthened relative to the duration of democratic experience.

The shift of social values in a society is one of the foremost factors to affect societal-military relations. The change of social values from modern to postmodern is now occurring in many countries. Most advanced industrial societies in the West have already entered the era of postmodernity and this phenomenon is becoming more prevalent in other developing societies as well. Although it is not easy to grasp the concept of postmodernism, there is some consensus on what constitutes the attributes of postmodernism. The central elements of postmodernism are ambiguity, metanarratives, diversity, permeability, flexibility, relativism, and deconstruction. Major components of modern values, such as authority, hierarchy, rationality, efficiency, determinacy, absolutism are giving way to the increasing prevalence of postmodern perspectives.⁹⁾ What we observe in postmodern societies are the decline of the nation-state, citizenship, nationalism, and traditional social and

7) Edward N. Muller, "Income Inequality and Democratization: Reply to Bollen and Jackman," *American Sociological Review* 60-6 (1995), pp. 990-996; Kenneth A. Bollen and Robert W. Jackman, "Democracy, Stability, and Dichotomies," *American Sociological Review* 54-4 (1989), pp. 612-621.

8) Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

9) This study measures the extent of postmodern values in South Korea using Inglehart's postmaterialist indicators. See Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 20-25; Ronald Inglehart and Paul R. Abramson, "Measuring Postmaterialism," *The American Political Science Review* 93-3 (1999), pp. 665-677.

sexual norms.¹⁰⁾

In many aspects, the elements of postmodern society seem to run afoul of those of the military, because the military is basically a modern product in which modern values are deeply rooted. So, it is evident to see that the military faces a dilemma whether it should follow the change of social values or keep its traditional ones. If a society's values change, will its military change as well? If so, then, why? The military would respond in accordance with the change of social values because "a military system in a democratic society cannot long maintain its credibility and legitimacy if its ethical standards significantly differ from the civilian values of the larger society."¹¹⁾ Although the relationship between military and society is reciprocal, the military is more likely to reflect values of society rather than the other way around. This acceptance and convergence would ensure the military's credibility and legitimacy in a society. Changes in a society are easily witnessed in the military. Consequently, as societies shift toward the postmodern, the military moves toward the postmodern model.

The more complex issue here is to understand the dynamic relationship between military threat, democratization, and postmodernization. Development of democracy and postmodern values will change the society toward the postmodern and pressure the military to change its relationship with society toward the postmodern type. In response to social pressure, armed forces will strive to continue a modern or late-modern type of military because the military needs to maintain its effectiveness in order to counteract enemies. High national security concerns would bolster the military's positions. This tendency will continue as long as a high national security threat exists. In this context, this study asserts that a decreased threat perception, an advanced democracy, and developed postmodern values are requisite conditions for the full integration and acceptance of the two minority groups in the military.

10) David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 43; Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams, and David R. Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

11) Sam Sarkesian and Thomas M. Gannon, "Professionalism," *American Behavioral Scientist* (May/June 1976), quoted in Stephen C. Trainor (ed.), *Values, Culture, and Civil-Military Relations: Implications for the Postmodern Military* (Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 2000), p. 10.

This study assumes no remarkable change in the security environment in South Korea, which means a high level of military threat from North Korea remains constant in the post-Cold War era. This assumption is clearly manifested by a series of surveys that demonstrate the majority of the South Korean people have always been concerned about national security. In particular, North Korea's torpedo attack against a South Korean naval corvette on March 26 and surprise artillery bombardment of Yeonpyong Island on November 23 in 2010 reminded the South Korean people that the war with North Korea has not ended.¹²⁾

With regard to the degree of democratization in South Korea, it is fair to say that democratization has been completed and a fully consolidated liberal democracy has been achieved.¹³⁾ The two fundamental principles of democracy, namely political participation and competition, were institutionalized. Specifically, the two periods of peaceful power transition to an opposition party in 1997 and in 2007 represents a fully consolidated democracy in South Korea.¹⁴⁾ In addition, people's strong confidence in the superiority of democratic principles and system is one of the most important factors in achieving a consolidated democracy, as well as a good indicator of

12) The Research Institute of National Security Affairs (RINSA), "Bum Kookmin Anbowoisikchosa" [Survey of the People's Perception on the Security Affairs: 1995-2008] (Seoul: KNDU Press, 2008); A 1,200 ton South Korean corvette called *Cheonan* was sunk and 46 sailors were killed as the result of North Korea's torpedo attack on March 26, 2010. North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyong Island on November 23, 2010 killed two South Korean marines and two civilians, and injured more than 20 people.

13) This study defines a consolidated democracy as follows: "a state is to be considered as a consolidated democracy when it experiences at least 12 consecutive years of democracy without any interruption after it inaugurated the first freely elected government." This operationalization is also consistent with the "two-turnover test." Similar operative terms are consolidated, full-fledged, and advanced democracies. A stable, full-fledged, and advanced democracy is synonymous with the term consolidated democracy. See Timothy Power and Mark Gasiorowski, "Institutional Design and Democratic Consolidation in the Third World," *Comparative Political Studies* 30-2 (1997), pp. 123-155; Mark Gasiorowski and Timothy Power, "The Structural Determinants of Democratic Consolidation: Evidence from the Third World," *Comparative Political Studies* 31-6 (1998), pp. 740-771; Samuel S. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 266-267.

14) For the first time in the history of South Korean politics, President Kim Young-Sam peacefully turned over power to Kim Dae-Jung who was a presidential candidate from the opposition party in 2003. Again, former president Roh Moo-Hyun transferred power to the winner of the 2007 presidential election, Lee Myung-Bak, who was also a presidential candidate of the opposition party.

democratic sustainability. In terms of democratic desire, suitability, and preference, the Korea Democracy Barometer (KDB) surveys have demonstrated that a majority of South Korean people have continuously supported democracy.¹⁵⁾ Moreover, South Korea has accomplished remarkable achievements including the augmentation of people's political rights and civil liberties, freedom of speech, and consolidation of electoral democracy. These improvements in democratization are reflected in the evaluation of Freedom House, which rated South Korea as a liberal democracy that has remained "free" for more than twenty years.¹⁶⁾

However, the highly industrialized democracy of South Korea did not directly lead to a rapid shift toward a postmodern society. The core attributes of postmodernism are contrary to those of modern values. These characteristics of modern values are decomposed in a postmodern age. In particular, the rise of postmaterialism is a distinct aspect of a postmodern society. The distribution of materialists and postmaterialists in a society may reflect the degree of postmodernization.¹⁷⁾ In this context, the South Korean society is far from ready from entering a postmodern world. According to the World Value Surveys (WVS)¹⁸⁾ data, the overall proportions of postmaterialists are relatively small in South Korea in comparison to some advanced countries in the West where scholars agree that the militaries are postmodern. In South Korea, materialists outnumber postmaterialists by more than twenty percent, which means that the extent of postmodernization is not yet high. Although the rising number of postmaterialists in younger generations signals that South Korea is now in the transitional period, the prevalence of materialistic

15) To evaluate the level of mass support for democracy in South Korea, the KDB surveys have used three separate questions. "The first question asked respondents to express on a 10-point scale the extent to which they desire to live under the principles of democracy. The second question asked them to indicate on a 10-point scale the extent to which they think democracy is suitable for their country as a political system. The third question asked them whether democracy is always preferable to any kind of government or whether a dictatorship would be preferable in certain situations." See Doh Chull Shin and Jaechul Lee, "The Korea Democracy Barometer Surveys: Unraveling the Cultural and Institutional Dynamics of Democratization, 1997-2004," *Korea Observer* 37-2 (2006), p. 254; The Korea Barometer Data Center, available at <<http://www.koreabarometer.org>>.

16) See Freedom in the World, available at <<http://www.freedomhouse.org>>.

17) Ronald Inglehart, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-48.

18) See World Value Survey (WVS) data, available at <<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>>. South Korea participated in the WVS in 1981 for the first time.

motivations compared with postmaterialistic ones proves that South Korea is not yet a postmodern society. On the basis of this evidence, this study does not expect to see in South Korea—with its high threats to national security, consolidated democracy, and underdeveloped postmodern values—a shift in the women’s role in the military from exclusion or partial integration to full integration, not does it expect to see a shift in the treatment of homosexuals in the military from punished or discharged to accepted.

III. Women’s Integration into the South Korean Defense Force

Full integration of women in the military means that women are treated equally and fairly to their male counterparts. Any discrimination based on sex should not be accepted. In addition, women should be admitted to main roles in the military. By looking at women’s representation in the SKDF, as well as tracing policy changes toward women in the military, this section will explore the extent of women’s integration into the SKDF.

The first woman’s group in the South Korean military history was the thirty-one nurse officers who were commissioned as second lieutenants in 1948. Until 1967 when the Army Nursing School was established, the nursing corps functioned as a small branch under the army headquarters. The two-year program in the Army Nursing School was transformed into a four-year course in the Armed Forces Nursing Academy (AFNA) in 1980. Since then, the AFNA has produced about 3,000 nurse officers.¹⁹⁾ In addition, in the midst of the Korean War, the Women’s Volunteer Education Unit (WVEU) was created in 1950. A total of 500 female soldiers were recruited, of which 491 of them completed the three-week training program. During the Korean War, they actively became involved in non-combat roles, such as psychological warfare, troop information and education (TI&E), and POW investigators. To train and manage women in the military, the army established the Office of Women Soldiers in 1959, which became the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in 1970.²⁰⁾ While the AFNA mainly focused on training nurse officers, the WAC

19) The Republic of Korea Armed Forces Nursing Academy, available at <<http://www.afna.ac.kr>>.

20) Kyungja Min, “Hankuk yoeikun woi kiwon kwa baljun” [Foundation and Development of the Korean Women Soldiers], *Kunsa* [*Military History*] 68 (2008), pp. 327-349.

produced army officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who were mainly assigned to supportive roles. These two institutions, the AFNA and the WAC, served as the two major sources for female soldiers within the SKDF.

Throughout the Cold War period, women's representation in the SKDF was very minimal, due to the high threat to national security, underdeveloped socioeconomic structure, and the political system. North Korea's aggressive nature forced the SKDF to maximize its effectiveness to deter military confrontations. Thus, women in the military were regarded as subordinate to men. Military leaders believed women were not as physically and mentally qualified for combat and they were conceived as degrading military effectiveness and unit cohesion.²¹⁾ Furthermore, social and political circumstances were not hospitable to women either. Social expectation about women's traditional role was high, since the Confucian patriarchal values in South Korea have stressed the dominant role of men. The issue of gender equality was not a major concern for political leaders under the authoritarian military regimes. Therefore, discrimination on the ground of sex was prevalent and high political pressure for requesting gender equality and institutional mechanism did not exist in South Korea until the late-1980s, when the democratic transition began.

Reflecting these internal and external environments, women's integration in the SKDF was severely limited. Women in the military existed as a separated corps, rather than an integrated entity. As an independent organization, albeit under the command of the army headquarters, the WAC had separately recruited and trained women officers and non-commissioned officers. Approximately ten officer candidates and dozens more women for NCOs were recruited every year until the end of the Cold War. This served as the only way for women to become army officers or NCOs. The other military schools, including the army, naval, and air force academies, Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), Officer Candidate School (OCS), and NCOs were all closed to women. Notably, there was no way for women to become naval, air force, or non-commissioned officers until the end of the Cold War.²²⁾

21) Most retired senior military leaders whom I interviewed agreed that they had this point of view during their services.

22) During the Korean War, 126 women served as officers and NCOs in the Marine Corps. However, all of them were discharged from the military after the war, and the SKDF no longer recruited women for navy and air force until the mid-1990s.

In essence, women's participation in the SKDF was insignificant. They were excluded from combat roles; instead, they were mainly involved in such various supplementary functions as typists, clerks, military police, etc. Due to the restriction of access to combat arms, women could not join the mainstream of the army as it forbade women's promotion to senior military ranks such as general. The highest rank that women could reach was colonel. Only several colonel positions were made available for them. The competition for promotion occurred among women rather than with men because the WAC was managed separately by the army. Women's proportion was less than 0.2 percent of the SKDF during the Cold War period. By the early-1980s, the total average number of women in the army was 909 and even this small number was reduced to 614 in the mid-1980s.²³⁾

Given small numbers and limited access to decision-making posts, women had difficulties protecting their rights and opportunities. It was inevitable to see various discrimination against women within the SKDF. In particular, discrimination against women was manifested in policies about marriage, childbirth, and employment. The SKDF limited women NCOs' service term to a maximum of twenty-one years because there were already sufficient male NCOs in the army. Furthermore, according to army regulations, neither marriage nor childbirth was allowed to women NCOs during their service by 1983. In 1984, NCOs who ranked above sergeant first class could get married. Female officers could legitimately marry only after 1961. However, both commissioned female officers and NCOs were not allowed to become pregnant until 1988. If women soldiers became pregnant, they were forcefully and legally discharged from military service regardless of their rank.²⁴⁾ In this sense, one of my female interviewees shared her personal experience related to these unequal policies toward women in the military by saying that:

When I had to choose one option in either marriage or military service, I chose the military instead of having a normal family. I was married to the military and I never regretted my choice. Nevertheless, I made up my mind that I will fight against these kinds of unfair and unacceptable policies

23) Kyungja Min, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

24) Doo-Seung Hong, "Women in the South Korean Military," *Current Sociology* 50-5 (2002), p. 732.

toward women, and I and other women soldiers worked hard to make it.²⁵⁾

In the post-Cold War period, favorable socioeconomic and political conditions for women have risen in South Korea. Democratic transition and consolidation have successfully been completed in South Korea in which proponents of women's integration in the military and gender equality feel much more optimistic. Democratic countries are more likely to protect women's rights legally than nondemocratic states. Beginning in the late 1980s, women's rights began to improve in South Korea. Specifically, legislation of the equal employment opportunity law in 1987 facilitated lifting various unequal policies toward women in the military by forcing the SKDF to guarantee women's equal rights in employment opportunities. For example, the SKDF allowed married or divorced women to apply for officer or NCOs positions, which were previously forbidden to women. Also, women's participation in economic and political activities significantly increased. Since 2005, more than 50 percent of the labor force has been women compared to 40 percent in the early 1980s. In addition to enhanced economic activity, females' share in parliament and in professional, technical, administrative, or management positions rose from 13.3 percent in 1998 to 19.3 percent in 2007.²⁶⁾ This improved social, economic, and political status, coupled with the shift of social attitude toward women from traditional to a nontraditional role, contributed to the expansion of opportunities for women in the armed forces.

In association with these changes, great progress has been made toward women's integration in the military. On the eve of the Cold War's end, the SKDF disbanded the WAC, meaning that women in the military were no longer a separate corps and that they were being integrated into the military. As the first step, in 1990, the SKDF transferred women officers in the army into seven branches. These branches included infantry, intelligence, quartermaster, adjutant general, TI&E, and finance and medical administration.²⁷⁾ Since then, women's participation in the army has gradually

25) She is a retired army colonel and is still single. Interview was conducted by the author on May 7, 2008 at interviewee's personal office.

26) Statistical Information of Statistics Korea, available at <<http://kostat.go.kr/portal/index/statistics.action>>.

27) Doo-Seung Hong, *op. cit.*, p. 733.

been expanded to all army branches. Currently, female army officers are being assigned to nineteen out of twenty-three branches with the four exceptions being artillery, air defense artillery, armor, and chaplain.²⁸⁾

Starting with the admission of women to the Air Force Academy in 1997, women were eventually admitted to the other military academies (e.g., the Korea Military Academy in 1998 and the Naval Academy in 1999). Although women's access to military academies is restricted to a 10 percent quota, their admission to those schools signaled that the SKDF crossed a "major threshold"²⁹⁾ relating to women's integration in the military. In 2001, the SKDF also opened the naval and air force OCS and the NCOs schools to women. In the same year, the first women air force officers, naval officers, and NCOs were commissioned. In 2002, the first women pilots were assigned to fighter planes, and in 2003 naval women were allowed to serve aboard warships.³⁰⁾ Currently, both women officers and NCOs in the navy, marine corps, and air force, are eligible for almost all specialties with the exception of several specific areas, such as submarine, artillery, armor, and chaplain. These examples show that military regulations of the SKDF do not exempt women from all combat-related units and therefore women are no longer limited to non-combat roles.

Women in the SKDF during the Cold War experienced unequal policies. However, women are now treated equally with men and enjoy equal opportunity for assignments, promotions, and education. The army regulations about marriage and childbirth were revised in 1987, and in the following year, women officers and NCOs were finally allowed to be married and have children while in active duty service. In addition, the SKDF developed policies of women's absence during pregnancy (up to 60 days) and of early child-rearing (up to one year) in 1999 without any penalties or economic cost. The durations of maternity leave and child-care were later expanded up to 90 days and 3 years, respectively.³¹⁾ In order to assure women's

28) The SKDF only recruits chaplains who graduated from a seminary school. In South Korea, however, very few numbers of ministers in training are women and they usually do not apply to the military.

29) Charles C. Moskos, *op. cit.*, p. 22. The ROTC in South Korea opened to women in 2010.

30) The Women's Forces Development Group, "Yoisunge daihan byukkul kaera" [Break the Wall against Women: Vision 2010], *Kukbangyoisung* [*The Journal of the National Defense Women*] 1 (2003), p. 9.

rights and welfare in the military, in 2002, the SKDF established the Women's Forces Development Group (WFDG)³²⁾ in the Ministry of National Defense (MND). It was composed of several male and female officers from three military services and civilian ranks. Since 2003, the WFDG has published a semi-annual journal to introduce policy changes toward women and to publicize women's activities in the SKDF.

The military culture itself may be the most difficult barrier to overcome in achieving gender integration. In nature, the armed forces are a male-dominated organization. The masculine norms in the military are counterproductive for gender integration because it produces significant social and psychological problems such as sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority. Thus, the macho military culture was one of the main reasons for the combat exclusion policies in the United States.³³⁾ Most countries have encountered difficulties with those problems in managing the integration of women, including the American military's experience of the Tailhook scandal in 1991. South Korea was not an exception. Incidents of sexual harassment have occasionally happened in the SKDF.³⁴⁾ As an example, a case of sexual assault on a female petty officer second class was recently brought to light in the South Korean navy.³⁵⁾ Most male soldiers in the SKDF view women in the military as negatively affecting combat readiness, unit cohesion, and morale. This point of view was confirmed by the retired senior officers whom I interviewed. They explained that they themselves were deeply concerned about lowering military effectiveness due to women in the military. They believe women are not physically and mentally optimal for combat arms. Consequently, they had strongly agreed with the women's combat exclusion policy during their military service.

As of September 2011, 6,957 women are serving in the SKDF, which

31) The Women's Affairs Policy Division, "Mosungbohojungchaek woi yondobyol choojinsahang" [The Annual Projects for the Policies of the Protection of Motherhood], *Kukbangyoisung* [The Journal of the National Defense Women] 3 (2007), pp. 41-42.

32) The WFDG was renamed as the Women's Affairs Policy Division (WAPD) in 2006.

33) David R. Segal, *Recruiting for Uncle Sam: Citizenship and Military Manpower Policy* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989), p. 123.

34) Over the last five years (2007-2011), 37 cases of sexual harassment occurred in the SKDF. Yonsook Kim, "64.9% of Sexual Harassment Cases Are Not Prosecuted," *Yonhap News* (28 September 2011).

35) Sung-ki Jung, "Probe into Sexual Assault on Female Soldier Under Way," *Korea Times* (18 December 2008).

approximately accounts for 1 percent of total manpower and 4 percent of officers and 2.5 percent of NCOs in the SKDF.³⁶⁾ This is almost quadruple the number of women serving in the military during the Cold War. However, the overall women's proportion of the SKDF still lags behind that of Western countries.³⁷⁾ In consideration of the trend in Western democratic countries and social pressure, the MND pledged to increase the proportion of female officers up to 7 percent and that of female NCOs up to 5 percent by 2015 and 2017, respectively.³⁸⁾

Women's participation in decision-making processes in the military is an important indicator of women's full integration into the military.³⁹⁾ However, women's presence in senior ranks of the SKDF is far below that of men, which relates significantly to women's participation in the decision-making processes.⁴⁰⁾ There are only two female brigadier general out of a total 442 generals and ten colonels in the army; no senior female officers are found in the navy and air force.⁴¹⁾ Low-ranking officers comprise more than 88 percent of the total female officers. The situation of NCOs is not different from that of officers. Indeed, there is an absence of a critical mass of women in the SKDF who could press within the armed forces for policy change. This lack of high-ranking female officers prohibits women's active involvement in policy decision procedures for protecting their rights as well as for improving their status in the military. Staff officers' participation in the decision-making processes is more limited than line officers because they are not core members of the senior leadership. In this regard, women's inclusiveness in

36) Kyuduck Hong, "Kunnae yoesunginrukwoi yokhal whakdaerul woihan 4kaji jaengjum" [Four Debating Issues Regarding the Expanding Role of Women in the Korean Military], *Kukbangjeongchaekyonkoo* [The Study of Defense Policy] 25-3 (2009), pp. 70-77.

37) The women's proportion in the major NATO countries, such as in the United States, France, and Canada is more than 10 percent of total manpower. See the Committee on Women in the NATO Forces, available at <http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/index.html>.

38) The Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, *The Defense Reform 2020* (Seoul: Daehan Planning Printing Co., 2005), p. 29; Nackyu Yang, "Female Soldiers Will Be Allowed Access to Combat Roles," *Asia Economy Daily* (16 September 2011).

39) Helena Carreiras, *Gender and the Military: Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 200-201.

40) Senior ranks for women refer to colonel and general in this study.

41) The highest rank for women in the SKDF is brigadier general. From 2002 to 2010, four female colonels were promoted to brigadier generals. They were all nursing officers. Interestingly, two female colonels are scheduled to be promoted to brigadier generals in 2011. One officer is an infantry officer and the other officer is a military judicial officer.

key committees of the SKDF such as the promotion committee is very low. For example, a total of seven female army officers attended the promotion committee held between 2003 and 2006, representing only 2 percent of the total members of the committee.⁴²⁾

With the development of democracy and social values in South Korea's post-Cold War period, there has been a great deal of improvement in women's integration into the SKDF. The number of women in the SKDF has consistently increased and this phenomenon will continue in the future. Various barriers or policies against women have been removed. Women's role in the military, which used to be confined to non-combat roles during the Cold War, has expanded to nearly all areas of the military. Nevertheless, the highly restrictive advance to senior ranks may be problematic. Increasing the number of senior female officers who can detail women's opinions at decision-making levels will be necessary for further consolidating gender integration in the SKDF. Therefore, it is fair to say that the South Korean female soldiers have only been partially integrated into the SKDF.

IV. Homosexuals' Integration into the South Korean Defense Force

This study hypothesizes that there has not been a shift in the treatment of homosexuals in the SKDF in the post-Cold-War: that is, from punished or discharged to accepted. This argument is plausible because the acceptance of homosexuals in the military is more likely to increase as society becomes increasingly more tolerant toward homosexuality as a result of postmodernization. Counterfactually, it is also plausible to assume that if no significant changes pertaining to social acceptance toward homosexuals are made, then there would be no acceptance of homosexuals in the military. By tracing the SKDF's policy changes and treatment of homosexuals, this section identifies the status of homosexuals in the military.

Throughout the Cold War period, homosexuals in the SKDF were strictly

42) Mikyung Moon, Heejung Lim, and Youngmi Kim, "Kukbangyoisungwoi GEM hangsangbangan" [*An Improvement Plan of Gender Empowerment Management for Women in the Military*] (Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute, 2006), p. 67.

punished and dishonorably discharged from the military on the basis of article 92 of the South Korean military criminal act legislated in 1963: “a person committing sodomy or other acts of sexual harassment shall be punished by imprisonment for no more than one year.”⁴³⁾ Aside from that, homosexuals were forcefully expelled from the military according to article 56 of the military personnel management regulation that indicated homosexuals as inappropriate personnel for military service.⁴⁴⁾ Homosexuals in the SKDF had completely been ignored by the military. One of the main reasons was due to the lack of attention from the people and the government. Under the authoritarian and military regimes, homosexuals in the military, as well as in South Korean society, had never become an issue of public and governmental debate. The social acceptance of homosexuality was also very low. In the 1982 WVS, for example, 75.6 percent of respondents showed that “homosexuality is never justifiable” and only 3.4 percent of them responded that “homosexuality is always justifiable.” Given conditions, there were no civil activities or political pressures for improving homosexuals’ rights in the military. Prejudice and discrimination against homosexuals were rampant in society and obviously more serious in the military. Consequently, homosexuals remained in the closet.

With developing political liberalization and democratic consolidation, civil movements for gay rights began in South Korea as “political activism.”⁴⁵⁾ For example, some openly gay and lesbian associations, such as “Chingosai” and “Kiri-kiri”⁴⁶⁾ were created in the mid-1990s. Also, a NGO titled the Solidarity for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual) Human Rights of Korea was established in 1997 by Korean gays and lesbians.⁴⁷⁾ This NGO is actively involved in many activities, such as large-scale campaigns and appeals to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) for

43) Unfortunately, no empirical data is available for the exact number of homosexuals who were imprisoned or discharged from the SKDF during the Cold War period.

44) The Republic of Korea National Assembly, available at <<http://likms.assembly.go.kr/law/jsp/main.jsp>>.

45) Youngshik D. Bong, “All Koreans Are Equal, But Some Koreans Are More Equal Than Others: The Political Representations of Homosexuals in South Korea,” paper presented at the 2006 American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, 1-3 September 2006.

46) Chingosai means “friends relationship” and Kiri-kiri means “in groups.”

47) There were no prominent retired members of the SKDF among them. This was almost primarily a movement arising from civil society.

promoting LGBT's rights. In particular, the NGO targeted the improvement of gays' rights in the SKDF in accordance with America's introduction of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy in 1994 in which the military cannot ask a service member about his or her sexual orientation and can discharge homosexuals only when they voluntarily declare their sexual orientation.⁴⁸⁾

In the early 2000s, the issue of homosexuals began to draw public attention as the consequence of a television actor's coming-out and a transsexual singer's acquisition of female citizenship from the South Korean government. In 2006, a gay policeman for the first time openly declared his homosexuality and refused to continue his service. These series of events dramatically increased public and governmental awareness and made homosexuality a hot issue in society. However, the increased public and governmental awareness did not automatically lead to improved social tolerance toward homosexuals. The public remains conservative on this issue and so does the military. In the 2005 WVS, 65.4 percent of respondents regarded homosexuality as an unacceptable behavior and only 5 percent of them viewed that it was acceptable.⁴⁹⁾ Compared with the 1982 WVS survey, there was no noticeable change in people's attitude toward homosexuals. To be sure, negative social attitudes toward homosexuals are predominant in South Korean society.

Several attempts have been made to abolish anti-homosexual laws and regulations in the military. In 2001, an army corporal, who sexually harassed his subordinate in the barracks, was indicted for the violation of article 92 of the military criminal act, petitioned the Constitutional Court with respect to whether the provision of "other acts of sexual harassment" is against the principle of clarity. In the following year, the Constitutional Court ruled that punishment of individuals who committed "other acts of indecent sexual acts" was not in violation of the principle of clarity.⁵⁰⁾ In January 2006, the NHRC recommended the SKDF revise or abolish article 92 of the military criminal act, arguing that it contains prejudice and discrimination against sexual minorities.⁵¹⁾ More recently, in November 2008, a military court

48) David F. Burrelli, "An Overview of the Debate on Homosexuals in the U.S. Military," in Wilbur J. Scott and Sandra Carson Stanley (eds.), *Gays and Lesbians in the Military: Issues, Concerns, and Contrasts* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 17-31.

49) Korean Social Science Data Center, available at <<http://www.ksdc.re.kr>>.

50) Republic of Korea Constitutional Court, "KCCR 601, 2001Hun-Ba70, June 27, 2002," available at <<http://www.court.go.kr>>.

requested the Constitutional Court to review the constitutionality of article 92 of the military criminal act, asking whether it “infringes on the right to equality, the right to choose sexuality, and freedom of privacy.”⁵²⁾

In February 2006, an enlisted army soldier filed a petition to the NHRC claiming his human rights and privacy were seriously infringed. He insisted that he was physically and verbally humiliated by his superiors after revealing his sexual orientation. Moreover, he was forced to submit photographs of sexual acts with a man to prove his homosexuality and had to take an AIDS test without his consent.⁵³⁾ This mistreatment of homosexuals in the SKDF stirred up South Korean society and politics. Soon after this incident, many civil organizations and the Democratic Labor Party (the most liberal party in South Korea) strongly condemned the MND and urged it to revise laws and regulations related to homosexuals in the military. In response to these requests, in March 2006, the MND announced the new management guidelines on homosexuality that ensured gays’ right to privacy and forbade discrimination against homosexuals on the ground of sexual orientation. Nevertheless, the MND refused to revise or abolish laws and regulations pertaining to homosexuals in the military.

The SKDF has kept the gay ban in the military in the post-Cold War era. During induction, the SKDF tried to screen gays through the medical examination. Once a conscript is found to be a homosexual, he is usually discharged in accordance with the regulations on physical examinations of recruits, which classifies homosexuality as a type of mental disease, rendering the recruit unfit for military service. After being drafted, servicemen who engage in sexual intercourse or any kinds of sexual harassment with other members in the barracks are to be imprisoned up to a year and mandatorily discharged from the military. Those who voluntarily disclosed their sexual orientation are sent to mental hospitals and receive consultations or medical care. Service doctors decide their discharge depending on the extent of homosexuality. In order to distinguish a true

51) The Republic of Korea National Human Rights Commission, *Recommendation Proposal on National Action Plans for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights* (Seoul, January 2006), pp. 82-85.

52) Rahn Kim, “Is Homosexuality Ban in Barracks Constitutional?” *Korea Times* (16 November 2008). The Constitutional Court has not made its decision yet.

53) Kyung Lee, “The Military, Its Hellish Coming-Out,” *Hanguyreh* 21 (28 February 2006).

homosexual from an intentional draft dodger, doctors normally ask suspected gays to submit items proving their homosexuality, because only those who demonstrate high homosexual tendencies could be discharged from military service.

Needless to say, soldiers' views on gays in the military are very conservative; they think that homosexuals are basically incompatible with the military. Under such a masculine culture in the military, gays are not welcome by their colleagues. This is why maltreatment and violence toward gays inside barracks prevails in the military. The perspective of senior leadership of the SKDF is not different from that of the majority of soldiers. An opinion of a retired general explains well the perspective of the SKDF as to the gay ban in the military:

I strongly oppose allowing open homosexuality in the military, because lifting the gay ban will severely undermine military effectiveness of the SKDF by dismantling military morale, discipline, and performance. The military is a special organization that soldiers should stay in groups in close quarters. They need to sleep, eat, and take a shower together. Given situations, non-gay soldiers would feel uncomfortable staying with gays as well as it is also hard for gays. Thus, it may harm military missions and unit cohesion. A more serious case would be that if a commanding officer is gay, then it is easy to imagine what would happen in barracks under such a hierarchical organization as the military. Facing the aggressive North Korean threat, military effectiveness is critical to guarantee victory in a potential conflict with North Korea. So, I think that homosexuals should not be allowed to enter and remain in the SKDF.⁵⁴⁾

The number of homosexuals in the SKDF is now increasing. For example, the number of criminal cases involving the violation of article 92 of the military criminal law jumped from 29 between 2000 and 2003 to 176 between 2004 and 2007. However, the number of suspected homosexuals in the SKDF is expected to be much higher than the officially reported numbers

54) He is a retired ROK Air Force lieutenant general. Interview conducted by the author on May 1, 2008 at interviewee's personal office.

by the military. In a survey pertaining to the human rights status of homosexuals in the SKDF, the NHRC found that 15.4 percent of survey respondents (104 out of 671) answered that they experienced sexual harassment or assault in barracks by their same sex superiors. The big gap between the official number of gays and the potential number of gays may be due to the fact that only 4.4 percent of sexual victims reported their cases to the military police or the court because they fear any kinds of discrimination and disadvantages.⁵⁵⁾ Despite the trend toward increasing acceptance of homosexuals in the militaries in Western countries, there is no sign that the gay ban will be lifted in the SKDF. Discriminatory policies against homosexuals are still in effect. Obviously, the status of homosexuals in the SKDF remains in the modern and the late-modern periods in contrast to the expectation of the MWS model.

V. Conclusion

The primary goal of this study was to find out whether the SKDF reflects social and political changes of the broad society and how much those changes affect the military given the high tensivity in inter-Korean relations. In the post-Cold War era, the SKDF finds itself adjusting to rapidly changing social, political, and international environments. South Korea has become a consolidated liberal democracy. A gradual value shift from the modern to the postmodern has been under way in South Korean society with the country's economic prosperity, although some traditional social and sexual norms remain unchanged.

In accordance with political and social changes, a great deal of progress was made on women's rights in the military. The proportion of women in the SKDF has constantly increased and women have been allowed access to combat roles. In addition, women in the SKDF no longer exist as a separate corps. Despite this remarkable progress, however, female participation in

55) Republic of Korea National Human Rights Commission, "Kundainae sungpokruk hyunwhange kwanhan chosa" [*An Investigation on the Status of Sexual Violence in the Military*] (Seoul, February 2004), pp. 6-11; Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, "Sin guideline dongsungee daihan sin kwanrijichim" [*The New Management Guidelines on Homosexuality*] (Seoul, March 2006).

decision-making processes has been seriously restricted. The low representation of women in the military and the military's perception toward female soldiers (i.e., that women would degrade combat readiness) have been major obstacles for women's further integration into the SKDF. Female soldiers still experience the "glass ceiling" in the SKDF. The informal culture of the armed forces is also strongly masculine and is unlikely to change any time soon. These facts indicate that women soldiers have been only partially integrated into the SKDF.

Unlike the status of women in the SKDF, nothing has changed for homosexuals in the military. One of the principal reasons is that social tolerance and acceptance toward homosexuality is very low. Not only has the South Korean society viewed homosexuality as a social sin, but also it has regarded homosexuality as an abnormal behavior. Under this social atmosphere, it is easy to imagine how the military has treated gays in the barracks and how little it respects their right to privacy. More importantly, the SKDF has taken a strong stance against homosexuality in the military on the premise that it could severely undermine military effectiveness and unit cohesion. Homosexuals have been punished or dishonorably discharged from the military. Apparently, the SKDF is neither willing to lift the ban on gays in the military, nor allow homosexuals to serve in the military in the foreseeable future.

The SKDF has put more weight on military cohesion and effectiveness than on minority rights when it comes to deal with minorities in the military, mainly because of the tension in inter-Korean relations in the post-Cold War era. Despite the social and political developments, the SKDF has been reluctant to fully absorb those changes. Instead, it has selectively reflected the societal requests, if only those do not harm military effectiveness. To be sure, military effectiveness became the primary concern for the SKDF to determine defense policies and to interact with the society. Even when the SKDF faced social and political pressures forcing it to converge with the changes of society, the presence of a viable external threat allowed the military to maintain its effectiveness for counteracting a hostile entity. In this situation, the SKDF seemed to favor military effectiveness in the name of national security over social and political requests. Under the ongoing conflicts between the two Koreas, it seems that the need of the military overrules the voice of female soldiers and homosexuals in the SKDF. Consequently, both

the unchanged security situation and the underdeveloped postmodern values in South Korea make progress toward the integration of the two minorities in the military slow.

This study shows that the South Korean case does not conform to the expectation of the postmodern military model. Hence, a reexamination of the theoretical utility of the MWS model is necessary—while it provided a useful framework for examining the two minority issues in the SKDF, its application is limited. The theoretical argument of the MWS model cannot sufficiently explain the dynamics of societal-military relationships. As this study argues, therefore, the three explanatory variables of threat perception, political change, and social values should be used when accounting for the integration of women and homosexuals into the military. As the first application of the MWS model to an Asian case study, this study extends beyond the Western-oriented case studies. In order to confirm our findings, however, intra-regional and cross-regional comparative case studies will be necessary.⁵⁶⁾ These additional comparative case studies will help to solidify any shortcomings of the theoretical argument of this study as well as contribute to the further theoretical construction of the postmodern military thesis.

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56) The best candidate for an intra-regional comparative case study is Taiwan, as it not only has shared many historical and cultural similarities such as war, rapid economic success, external threat, and Confucian social values with South Korea.

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