



Lingnan 嶺南大學
University 香港 Hong Kong

Department of Sociology & Social Policy

Sociology Seminar Series 2018-2019

Contemporary Korea Workshop:

**Polarized Embrace: South Korean
Media Coverage of Human Rights, 1990-2016**

26 October 2018 (Fri) at 10:00am

AM310, Amenities Building, Lingnan University



Abstract: Past studies of human rights discourse have centralized civil and political rights over other types of rights, and have thus yielded a biased understanding of how human rights have evolved. This scholarship has also neglected the role of the political slant of reporting agencies in framing topics and issues covering human rights. This study offers new theoretical and analytical solutions to such limits by analyzing a newly scraped and compiled data corpus comprising 101,689 South Korean newspaper articles—both right and left leaning—referencing the term “human rights”. The analysis of the data led us to reach three conclusions. First, South Korean media coverage demonstrates that human rights as a cultural symbol expanded tremendously in the country during the 1990s and 2000s. Second, there was an incredible degree of shift among multiple categories and topics of human rights during 26 years of that period. Initially, civil and political rights dominated but then gradually receded as economic, social, and cultural, and social minority rights moved to the forefront. Third, we found substantial variation in categories and topics of attention between conservative and progressive news sources; that is, progressive news sources allocated substantially more discussion to diverse categories and topics than conservative counterparts. These core findings lend support to imagery of a polarized embrace in which human rights are diffused yet in a highly polarized manner. Despite the ongoing debate regarding influences of traditional press media, this study argues that professional press certainly has provided important roles that remain pivotal in the digital media age for raising public awareness as well as holding potential rights abusers to account. Print media still serve as one of the best outlines for reaching a mass audience in the highly fragmented media environment.

Biography: Jeong-Woo Koo is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, Korea, Director of the Sungkyunkwan Center for Human Rights and Development, and Manager of SSK Human Rights Forum. He currently serves as a Council Member of the Global and Transnational Sociology Section at American Sociological Association. Prof. Koo holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from Stanford University and conducted research at Harvard University under the 2015-2016 Harvard-Yenching Fellowship. He was a member of the Rising Democracies Network at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and is a member of International Consortium on Closing Civil Space (i-Con) organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). His main research interests concern human rights issues, specifically focusing on national human rights institutions, human rights surveys, media coverage of human rights, and using machine learning techniques for human rights study. He is the founder of Human Rights Sensitivity Test, which is available online both in English and Korean (humanrightstest.com). He occasionally contributes to openGlobalRights and is a widely known media commentator in South Korea. His other research interests include international development, corporate social responsibility, and civil society/public sphere. He has written several policy reports in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Strategy, National Human Rights Commission of South Korea, and other government agencies. He is the author of two books, *Human Rights in East Asia: A Comparison of Human Rights Improvements in South Korea and Japan* (2010, Seoul National University Press) and *An Analysis of the Criteria and Methodology of Priority Recipient Selection for Country Partnership Strategy* (2014, Korea Institute for International Economic Policy Press). His scholarly publications have appeared in *Social Forces*, *Sociology of Education*, *Comparative Education Review*, *Human Rights Quarterly*, *Journal of Human Rights*, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, *Social Science History*, *Asian Studies Review*, *Korea Observer*, and numerous other Korea-based journals.

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