

#MeToo in South Korea and Japan

*A comparative study of newspapers' coverage of the
MeToo-movement in South Korea and Japan*

Inger Helene Johnsen Blegeberg



Master's Thesis in East Asian Culture and History
(EAST4593, 30 credits)

Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages
UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

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Abstract

This thesis aims to shed light on how the global MeToo-movement was received, perceived and reported by the media in South Korea and Japan, and how this affected the individual countries. The use of MeToo flourished in South Korea, and the media were consistently following all the high profile cases. In contrast, only a handful of MeToo-stories have breached the news media in Japan. By using online newspapers, three Korean and two Japanese MeToo stories have been retold by compiling information from articles, and then analyzed and compared. The political shift in South Korea made it possible for the MeToo-movement to gain support from the top, as President Moon early on openly declared his support. On the other hand, the unchallenged conservative ruling party in Japan has stayed quiet on the topic of MeToo and sexual harassment, even when their own politicians were involved, and the movement were left struggling at a grassroots level. This political difference is reflected in the freedom of press that has significantly improved since the Moon presidency started, while Prime Minister Abe's government has been putting more pressure on the media not to write about topics that does not benefit the country. Nonetheless, it is still too early to see the long-term results of the movement, and despite the excessive coverage by the media in South Korea, recent surveys shows that not much has changed in the workforce yet, calling for the question if the result of the movement really differed that much in the neighboring countries.

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Further, I would like to thank my friends and family for supporting me through my studies, and for all the little gifts of encouragement they have given me when needed. I apologize for all the plans that have been put on hold while I wrote this, and I promise I will make it up to you.

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I sincerely hope that this thesis can be of support for the women's movement in East Asia. I know that there are many topics and reasons connected to MeToo, but due to page limitations, I was forced to pick a few. The struggle for gender equality is long and hard, and I admire and standby all who play a role in this fight. You are my heroes!

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1. Introduction

From October 2017, the #MeToo movement has traveled around the world through the internet as a way for victims of sexual harassment to speak up. In more countries than not, the movement has spread through social media, bringing powerful men to courts after accusations of sexual harassment. All over the world, women and men have reacted differently to the claims of sexual harassment, users of the hashtag meeting both support and criticism from all genders. In Hollywood, big names have been exposed, and more and more victims feel empowered to speak up rather than keep quiet about their stories. Beginning with famous celebrities, stories of sexual harassment have surfaced from all kinds of industries and classes.

While the intent of the hashtag is mostly the same, how the hashtag has been used and received differ from country to country and culture to culture. A good example of such difference can be seen between South Korea and Japan. With both societies built on patriarchal systems that separates gender and promotes women as wives and mothers only, it is not surprising that sexual harassment and sexual assaults are highly overlooked in the two countries. Interestingly, the reactions and the resistance that the users of the hashtag met, shows that the movement affected the two countries as if they were on opposite sides of a scale. Starting from the prosecutor's office, the MeToo movement spread through the politic and art world, through the business world and further down, until stories of sexual harassment were discovered in any occupations throughout South Korea.¹ In Japan, on the other hand, there were only a hand-full of high profile cases, and the movement never caught the same momentum that it did in South Korea.

This thesis aims to shed light on and compare the media's coverage of the use of #MeToo in the two neighboring countries through newspaper articles. The media's coverage of MeToo both nationally and globally highly influences how much the general public pay attention to the cases in their own country.² One could argue that the only reason Harvey Weinstein was unable to buy himself out of the accusations against him was the media coverage of his case. As most of the MeToo cases includes some kind of uneven power relation between the victim and the accused, the publicity of the cases and MeToo as a whole became essential for the cases to not be swept under the rug and ignored. While the cultures in Japan and South Korea are different in a lot of aspects, the fact that both societies stem from patriarchal traditions and that both countries have reached approximately the same level of

¹ Shin, J., & D- Seon. *Hankyoreh*. (02.02.2018)

² Hasunuma L., & K. Shin. (2019)

modernity, one could expect the two countries to react to a global movement similarly, if not exactly the same. However, a search in three different online newspapers in each country shows a different outcome.

1.1 Motivation

While the use and reactions to #MeToo differ in the two countries, the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence is far from new in either of them. As patriarchal societies with low gender equality rate and strong traditions of men being the superior gender, women in these countries have had to suffer in silence even as women's rights became an important topic in other industrialized countries. According to the Global Gender Gap Report for 2020, South Korea was ranked 108th and Japan 121st out of 153 countries, putting them far below most other modern countries. This report aims to score the gender equality of a country by calculating factors such as pay gap, gender participation in the workforce, and education. In comparison, other modern countries such as Australia or the U.S. are ranked 44th and 53rd. Having lived in both South Korea and Japan myself, I have experienced the warnings from teachers and friends, and the occasional unwanted comment on the street; I was intrigued to investigate on the MeToo movement as it reached East Asia. Following a couple of newspapers from each country, it became obvious that the hashtag had gained a lot more attention in South Korea compared to Japan. The more I read, the more interesting it became. While Hasunuma and Shin's article *#MeToo in Japan and South Korea: #WeToo, #WithYou*³ now offers a general comparison, the topic is still under-discussed and a highly relevant topic in Asian feminism. A comparative study of the two countries can not only shed light on the issue of sexual harassment in the two societies, but also provide an insight into the struggle for equal rights and the weight women's opinions are carrying.

When the use of #MeToo was first introduced by Tarana Burke, an American women's rights activist, in 2006, it began as a means to show solidarity to survivors of sexual violence, particularly black women and girls, as well as other colored women of lower social classes.⁴ The hashtag's use was re-invigorated in 2017, now as a way of connecting victims of sexual harassment, and to show people that this is a cultural problem. When Harvey Weinstein was fired after being accused of sexually exploiting some of the women he had been working with, the actress Alyssa Milano posted a tweet on Twitter, asking everyone who

³ Hasunuma, L. & Shin, K. (2019)

⁴ Ohlheiser, A. (2017)

had experienced sexual assault or harassment to share their experience using #MeToo.⁵ After this use of #MeToo went viral, Burke said in an interview that she now feels that the movement has turned into an outing of ‘bad men’, rather than the supportive movement it was started as.⁶ Has the MeToo movement really done anything to help victims of sexual assaults, or has it gone too far and turned into this ‘outing of bad men’ as Burke describes it as? Does the movement carry a different impact on different cultures? As a major in East Asian History and Culture, I could not help but be curious as to how MeToo was perceived, used and discussed in modern patriarchal countries such as South Korea and Japan.

1.2 Research Question

The goal of this these is to shed light on how #MeToo is used and received in the two countries, and its relevance in East Asia by asking the following question:

How has the media, namely the newspapers, in Japan and South Korea been covering the MeToo movement, and how has this affected the impact of MeToo as a movement in the individual countries; what do they have in common, and what are the differences?

1.3 Chapter Outline

This thesis will begin with a brief overlook of the varying difficulties in navigating the different newspapers, and if there were any special challenges along the way in **chapter 2**. The accessibility of the stories tells us if the stories are a topic that easily reach people without any special interest in MeToo, or if it is something one would have to actively search for. **Chapter 3** will give insight to theories and existing literature on topics concerning the MeToo-movement in South Korea and Japan. Further, I will give a description and short discussion of five different cases of MeToo, three from South Korea **in chapter 4**, and two from Japan in **chapter 5**. Each case represent a different working environment, chosen to provide insight into how MeToo was handled in different industries. The cases will be retold in by compiling information found in the newspaper articles. As not all cases have had extensive media coverage, or have been followed up by the media on an inconsistent timeline, there might be stories with holes or that are unfinished.

⁵ Hasunuma, L., & K.-Y. Shin. (2019) p. 98

⁶ Jaffe, Sarah. (2018)

In **chapter 6**, I will map out and compare reactions to the movement, both among the public and from officials, such as politicians. Did some cases create more protests or support than others? Has MeToo received any political reactions in the two countries? While the media usually claim they are neutral in their reporting, they sometimes tend to cover one side of a story more than the other. Do articles show any signs of this? Are there any reports of progress or changes in the fight against sexual misconduct?

Chapter 7 will take a look at the political differences in the two countries, and how President Moon and Prime Minister Abe's political stand on feminism has affected how the MeToo-movement was received. In **chapter 8**, the focus will be on the freedom of press, and how the restricted the news media are by the government. Lastly, in **chapter 9**, I will discuss these underlying reasons with the information gathered about each case, and attempt to determine what role the media have played in relation to MeToo in South Korea and Japan. Has there been any recent changes on how to deal with sexual misconduct, and were the changes actually because of the MeToo movement, or was it just a lucky coincidence?

2 Methodology

The research for this thesis is based on newspaper articles from three different newspapers from each country. For South Korea, I have chosen two English newspapers, *The Korea Times* and *Korea JoongAng Daily*, and the Korean newspaper *Hankyoreh*. For Japan, two Japanese newspapers have been chosen; *Mainichi Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun*, as well as the English newspaper *the Japan Times*. The papers have been chosen for their size, and their accessibility online. It is important to notice that these newspapers are considered fairly liberal, and that conservative news media might have covered MeToo differently.

The research started with a quick search of #MeToo in the search bar of the six newspapers, to acquire an overall understanding of some of the most reported cases. This thesis looks into the cases of Seo Ji-hyeon (victim, South Korea) and Ito Shiori (victim, Japan), which are both known as the first cases of MeToo in their respective countries. Next, the cases against ex-Governor Ahn Hee-jung (perpetrator, South Korea) and ex-vice Finance Minister Fukuda Junichi (perpetrator, Japan) have been chosen for their seriousness and coverage by the media. Both Ahn and Fukuda were high standing politicians when they were accused of rape (in Ahn's case), and sexual harassment (in Fukuda's case), and the outcome of their cases are significant in understanding how South Korea and Japan have dealt with sexual misconduct accusations after MeToo spread in 2017. Lastly, the case against theater director Lee Youn-taek and the art society in South Korea will give a general overview of an upheaval in the art industry; a trend that could be seen in many countries after MeToo started in Hollywood, but for some reason never reached the Japanese art industry.

The newspaper articles will be used to follow the cases from the time they were publicized until they were either resolved, or where they are as of today (end of May, 2020). Hopefully, the articles will provide some answer to the following questions; How did the cases start? What was the public's reaction to the cases? How did the media cover it? Did the media angle the coverage from a specific side, or did they stay neutral? Were the cases covered by the media from the start until they were resolved? Were there some special aspects of any of the cases that the media paid more attention to? Do the media open the topic of MeToo for discussion, or do they simply cover the cases of MeToo as news coverage?

While the number of articles related to MeToo will provide some information regarding how much attention the movements have received in the media, this research is a qualitative one, and will focus mainly on what the articles do and do not say, rather than the

amount or frequency of the articles covering MeToo-cases. How detailed the information in the articles are will provide more information about the actual coverage of MeToo rather than numeral statistics of the coverage. Furthermore, it is important to consider the type of articles the search gives; is it mainly news articles covering new development in cases, or are they more investigative? Do they only cover press conferences, or have the papers interviewed people of interest directly?

2.1 Finding the Information

Originally, the plan for retrieving the information was simply to go to the newspapers online, use their search tool, and find the articles needed, which worked out well for the South Korean newspapers. A quick search using the word ‘MeToo’ gave me access to enough articles to give me a good picture of how the MeToo movement had affected South Korea. While there were a few articles about Harvey Weinstein in the U.S. and a couple of other MeToo cases from other countries, the newspapers only started to report about MeToo in South Korea at the end of January 2018, when prosecutor Seo Ji-hyeon went public with her story. From there on it was easy to navigate through articles and keeping up with how the different cases were evolving, or in some cases, devolving. While I did do some additional searches with the names involved in each case, it was not strictly necessary in order to obtain the full picture. Most of the articles covering cases of sexual harassment/violence after January 2018 mentioned ‘MeToo’ in some way, making them easy to find. All of the three South Korean newspapers chosen for this research were free to read, and did not require an account (as a part of the research, this was not checked beforehand.)

The three papers chosen for Japan proved a bit more challenging. All the newspapers had a search function, and while there were fewer results than the South Korean newspapers, they all had articles mentioning MeToo. The problem started with the need for a payment account. Each of the newspapers gave access to a small number of articles for free, before they required a paid account. Having a paid account seems to be common when it comes Japanese online newspapers, which lowers the probability that the readers go through several newspapers to gain information on a daily basis. Consequently, what they have learned about the MeToo movement depends on which newspaper they usually read.

In the case of *Asahi Shimbun* and *Japan Times*, I was forced to access their articles through the archives, in order to go far enough back in time (2015 because of Ito Shiori). Both archives consisted of articles from the paper version of the paper, rather than the online one,

giving insight to what was information people could get from simply reading the newspaper without access to internet.

While the search in *Japan Times* did mention MeToo almost 300 times since 2017, most of the articles talked about MeToo in other countries. There were a few reader's comments about Japan's lack of MeToo wave, but the only two Japanese cases covered was that of journalist Ito Shiori, as well as two articles about president of NH Foods resigning due to sexual harassment accusations against a subordinate. Not really consistently covering any cases except for Ito's after it reached court in 2018, the *Asahi Shimbun* gave life to the MeToo movement in another way. The newspaper had several forums where people could tell their stories, their opinions (both for and against) and ask questions about sexual harassment, bringing light to 'normal' people's experience with MeToo cases. The *Mainichi Shimbun*, although hidden behind payment, was easier to navigate, as I did not have to search through their archives, because the online newspaper provided the same access to articles as the South Korean newspapers did. Overall, it was hard to find in-depth information about any of the Japanese MeToo cases.

Generally, it was a lot easier to navigate the newspapers and the articles in South Korea, but the Japanese newspapers gave more insight to 'normal' people's MeToo experiences and opinions, through their forums and reader's opinion sides. Reading the South Korean articles gave the MeToo movement in South Korea a kind of 'celebrity status', with big headlines and high profile attendees, and it seemed like 'sexual harassment' was a concept most people had knowledge about. However, it did not ask the commoner on the street how they felt nor did it tell the story of the girl working at the convenience store around the corner. While it did not attract as much attention, the forums and opinions in *Asahi Shimbun* gave insight that is much more 'down to earth' in the everyday Japanese life. It also gave room for the men to express that they were confused about why the office parties were now split into tables of male and female, and how some workers felt that the atmosphere at the office had been too polarized in fear of doing something wrong. Still, the South Korean media's attention to the big cases, and thorough reporting gave the movement more attention overall, and put more pressure on the need for change.

3 Conceptual Framework

3.1 Existing Literature

Over the last couple of decades more and more universities in South Korea and Japan have founded and supported feminist scholars, now offering classes and degrees on the topic of women's and gender studies. To adapt gender equality to their own culture, scholars and research centers have focused on the theory of Asian Feminism, trying to reach the same goal of gender equality as western feminism, but without completely having to rearrange their culture.

Since the 1990's, the topic sexual violence and gender violence have become important topics among the women's studies, especially in relation to patriarchies. Korean scholar Chang Pilwha argues that the sexualisation of women in patriarchal societies reinforces the oppression of women's own sexuality.⁷ In addition to establishing women's body as a sexual outlet for men, it promotes chastity and the image that a woman should be 'pure'. Chang further argues that a more open conversation about sexuality, especially women's, can help break down the patriarchal thought that women exists to provide for men's needs. In South Korea and Japan, this patriarchal separation of gender has been reinforced in the family systems, *hojeok* and *ie*.⁸⁹

In South Korea, like many other Asian societies, this patriarchal household stem from the Confucian ideology. Still, rather than having to remove Confucianism altogether to acquire gender equality, some scholars, like Ahn Pyoungchu, argues that the Confucian ideology is highly adaptable, as it has survived for centuries, and that it can be adapted to the feminist agenda.¹⁰ This would help overcome what Lee Sang Wha describes as a 'passive reception of Western Feminism'.¹¹

In contrast, feminist scholars in Japan, such as Ueno Chizuko and Ochiai Emiko, argues that the Japanese patriarchal family system *ie* is not a traditional system integrated with the culture, but a step towards modernization that the government pushed through during the Meiji-restoration.^{12 13} Ochiai argues that while the *ie*-system might seem like a step back

⁷ Chang, P. (2005)

⁸ Ueno, C. (2009)

⁹ Lee, S. W. (2005)

¹⁰ Lee, S. W. (2005) p. 93

¹¹ Lee, S. W. (2005) p. 91

¹² Ueno, C. (2009)

towards a more ‘Asian’ society, it was an attempt to keep up with the neoliberalism spreading in the world at the time, while at the same time making something uniquely Japanese. It is a wide concern among feminist scholars in Japan that this step that was once made towards modernism, and as a way of connecting the family to the state, is now used as an excuse to reject gender equality due to ‘traditions’. The next section will give a short description of certain concepts necessary to better understand patriarchy and sexual violence in South Korea and Japan:

3.2 Patriarchal Hierarchy

Patriarchy is a social structure where an older male in a family is the head of the family, and in patriarchal societies, this extends to most parts of the power structures, both privately and publicly. According to the Oxford dictionary of Critical Theory, a patriarchal society is ‘inherently hierarchal, privileging one group of people, namely men, over another for no other reason than gender’.¹⁴ The term is often used related to feminism, to describe societies in which men are in control on both a micro and macro level, making it hard for women to step up or be heard, simply because they are women. In East Asia, the fight is not only getting women into leading positions, but also to let them leave the life as housewives and combine family and work life. The Korean traditional *hojeok* and the Japanese *ie* have many similarities, but while *hojeok* does indeed come from a longstanding Confucian tradition, scholars in Japan argue that the Japanese *ie* is actually a modern concept, not a traditional one.

The Korean household system *hojeok* is a patriarchal stem family system build on the Confucian family system that was used in China in the 15th century. As the family needed sons to continue the lineage, daughters were sent to marry into other families when they became of age. The daughter was then to follow the word of her parents-in-law and if she did not, she would shame her natal family’s reputation. In regards to the modern MeToo, one of the significant issues with this system is how little power the women have had through their lives. Living her life obeying first her father, then her in-laws, her husband, and when he died, her son, meant that the women in the household could not rise to a power position in the family. The only power she could feel was from the power over her daughter(s)-in-law.¹⁵ Furthermore, the household was segregated, with the women’s quarters in the back, and the

¹³ Ochiai, E. (2014)

¹⁴ Oxford A Dictionary of Critical Theory, s.v. “Patriarchy”

¹⁵ Lee, S. W. (2005)

men at the front close to the public sphere.

As this system has slowly moved towards a more nuclear family system in South Korea, where individuality and democracy within the household plays a bigger role, the *hojeok* system was officially abolished in 2008.^{16 17} Yet, the segregation between genders in the household still has lingering effects on women's role in the public. According to the Confucian way, since women were held away from the public, they did not have the opportunity to establish themselves in an important position in the society, or have a socially independent, recognized position. Being raised solely to take care of her husband's family and bear sons for him, she was not to have any opinions or needs herself. Consequently, women were deemed unable to take part in moral decision making, as a person with no needs cannot have moral thoughts.¹⁸ In short, the Confucian way of separating private from public in turn separated the women from the public, making any women's issue a private issue, not a public one. This effectively kept the women unable to speak up or take part in the public sphere, and undermined women's need for her own life, as she was to live for her husband and sons.

The role of the 'traditional' *ie*-system in Japan is often used as an argument by the conservatives and nationalists against modern and/or global concepts such as feminism. They take pride in the tradition, promoting it as something uniquely Japanese, playing on the thought of Japanese vs. the outside world. In reality, this 'tradition' of the *ie*-system is neither old, nor traditional. The system was built during the Meiji-restoration in the late 19th century, to promote family values, and systemize both the private and the public sphere. While the idea of a patriarchal stem family indeed came from how the *samurai* families and nobles had lived before, the common people was not familiar with this type of family. The separation of gender, putting the women inside of the household to do their 'women's role' was not possible for the common people before the industrialization, and in that aspect, the 'traditional' *ie*-system would not be possible without the modern concept of housewives.¹⁹

In many ways, the Japanese *ie* and the Korean *hojeok* are built on the same values and make up the same family system. One thing that differs however is the fact that the Japanese government made the *ie*-system not just to concretize the idea of family, but also to connect the family to the public sphere, while at the same time keep them separate. The family should function as a closed unit that answer to the head patriarch, but the patriarch in turn should

¹⁶ Lee, J. K. (2005)

¹⁷ Cho, C. *The Korea Herald*. (06.04.10)

¹⁸ Lee, S. W. (2005) p. 96

¹⁹ Ueno, C. (2009)

answer to the state. While state before family is indeed one of the Confucian ways as well, the state authority's strict regime trumps each *ie* individually.²⁰ The *ie*-system might have been implemented under the cover of creating a modern family through tradition, but feminist scholars such as Ueno Chizuko argue that the system is not about familism, but more about nationalism and way to tie the Japanese society together, as well as a transition into capitalism.

In order to understand why South Korea and Japan have acted so restrained to feminist movement and a new modernization of the family unit, one must notice that both Japan and South Korea have experienced a rapid decrease in birthrate the last decades. As the elderly population are retiring, the number of participants on the workforce decreases. Keeping the family unit intact is one of the attempts to increase the birthrate.²¹ In turn, as an attempt to ensure the family unit, it is harder for single-mothers to find a full-time job that pays well enough to support the family alone. Women are often hired for part-time position, so that they have the opportunity to have a family as well, but this makes women cheap labor, and increases the pay gap between men and women.²² In short, the patriarchy that we can find in these two countries today is in reality not so much about tradition, as it is about control and cheap labor. While women joining the workforce will help the issue today, the countries are still dependent on a new generation to take over.

3.3 Sexual Violence

Sexual violence has been, and still is, a highly discussed topic among scholars within several fields, such as criminology, law, and psychology. When used in context of feminism, it is often connected to patriarchal societies, or power imbalance. It is often used along the term gender-based violence, and while it can happen to anyone or by anyone regardless of gender, it is often used in a heterosexual situation, where the victim is female, and assailant is male. Even though such a generalization is inaccurate, it would be wrong to ignore the fact that most perpetrators of sexual violence are men, and most victims are women.²³ Especially in the case of MeToo, to ignore this, would be as wrong as ignoring the power imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator.

The feminist movement can be divided into four different waves since it started in the

²⁰ Ueno, C. (2009) p. 79

²¹ Chang, K. S. (2010)

²² Broadbent, K. (2001)

²³ Cahill, A. J. (2009) p. 16

mid-nineteenth century.²⁴ The fourth wave, which we are currently experiencing, focuses on the sexual harassment, rape culture, workplace discrimination and harassment connected to social networking sites. It was this wave of feminism that prompted the MeToo-movement. The topic of sexual harassment and sexual violence have become one of the hottest topic among women's studies scholars all over the world, theorizing, analyzing and discussing data in hope of finding a solution to end gender violence. By connecting sexual violence to theories about masculinities and hegemonic power, feminist scholar aim to show sexual violence as a symptom of highly misogynic societies. Mari Lilleslåtten argues that sexual violence is not really about sexuality at all, but rather about the power to execute such action over somebody else.²⁵ She further points out that in work related cases, the victim of harassment are more prone to quit their job, rather than the perpetrator being forced to quit.

The concept of 'victim blaming' can be used in any situation where the public blames the victim for what they experienced, but it is most commonly used in relation to sexual violence. In some cases, 'victim blaming' bleeds into 'victim shaming', not only blaming the victim for being assaulted, but making them feel shameful about it. Because of the *hojeok-* and *ie-*systems, as well as the general Confucian ideology, women in South Korea and Japan are supposed to be chaste and not even thinking about sex.^{26 27} This victim blaming can come from anywhere, even from the victim's friends and family, and often make the victim afraid of asking for help or support from the people closest to them.²⁸ There is also the perception that victims are 'good' or 'bad' victims, or sometimes described as 'real' and 'fake' victims, or not 'victim enough', as a way to discredit the victims.^{29 30}

Now, more than three years after this MeToo-movement started, several articles have been written on the topic. Alison Gash and Ryan Harding's article about MeToo in regards to legal discourse analyzes why MeToo was necessary in the U.S.A., a country that in theory should have a legal system able to properly handle sexual violence cases. They point out that the use of #MeToo is not simply about bringing perpetrators to justice, but raising awareness about how the legal system fails, and how big of a problem sexual violence really is.³¹

²⁴ Srivastava, K., S. Chaudhury, P. S. Bhat, & S. Sahu. (2017)

²⁵ Lilleslåtten, M. (27.12.17)

²⁶ Lee, M. (2017)

²⁷ Chang, P. (2005)

²⁸ Personal communication. Director of Korean Sexual Violence Relief Center, Seoul. Interview done in relation to my earlier research assignment about reporting sexual violence in South Korea. (October 25, 2019)

²⁹ Gash, A., & R. Harding. (2018)

³⁰ Campbell, R. (1998)

³¹ Gash, A., & R. Harding. (2018)

3.4 Social Movements

In this thesis, the use of #MeToo will be referred to as a movement, as it was only able to reach the two countries because of its global impact. Furthermore, this research was done on the basis that MeToo had the potential to be a movement in the two countries, but did not necessarily become one in the individual countries. According to Oxford's *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*,³² a social movement requires three main points:

1. Public campaigns directed at specific government bodies to push for a change.
2. Special purpose coalitions, such as rallies or marches etc.
3. Public representation of WUNC; worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment.

As MeToo began on the internet, and is connected throughout the world with the hashtag, it is a part of the growing method of digital activism. The internet has created an easy way to connect with likeminded people across country borders, and it does not necessarily require a headstrong leader like the more traditional social movements do.³³ The internet is often seen as a free space, where people regardless of political beliefs have the opportunity to connect with likeminded people. However, it is important to remember that even internet platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube, all have people overseeing posts, and can affect how much attention political activism receive.³⁴ They can also be restricted by local laws, as in China, where the hashtag MeToo quickly was banned on the Chinese social media WeChat and Weibo by governmental censorship.

3.4.1 Women's Movement

South Korea

The women's organizations in South Korea have worked hard to secure the path to gender equality the last thirty years. Since gender quotas was introduced to the South Korean politics in 2000, women's organizations have come together to enhance the public awareness in the political field, and push for women's representation in political activities such as legal reforms and education for women to become leaders.³⁵ Through the years, several collaboration organizations such as *Women's Political Alliance* and *Women's solidarity for the 17th General Election* were established between women's organizations to secure a higher

³² Oxford, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, s.v. "Social movemen". (2018)

³³ Dolata, U., & J. Schrape. (2018) p. 32

³⁴ Dolata, U., & J. Schrape. (2018) p. 37

³⁵ Oh, K. J. (2016) p. 340

number at their backs.. While these collaborations are often dismantled after elections, it shows that the women's right organizations in South Korea know the power in number, and are willing to push aside individual agendas to reach more general goals toward gender equality.³⁶

During the 1980's, the women's movement in South Korea was divided into two sides; the once who followed the 'progressive' movements against capitalism and class struggle, and the groups and organizations that followed their own agenda. The 'progressive' side often followed the socialistic politics, and when the socialistic nations of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe fell in the early 1990's, this part of the women's movement weakened as well.³⁷ This gave way for various new women's organizations, and through the 1990's, sexual violence became one of the most important topics of the women's movement in South Korea. Since then, a broad network of women's organization has taken up the fight against sexual violence, both by supporting victims, and by pushing for changes in the legal system.³⁸ Organizations such as *Korean Sexual Violence Relief Center* and *Korean Woman-link* have been fighting for the rights of sexual violence victims since the late 1980's.³⁹ For these organizations, the revelations caused by MeToo were not news.

Japan

The women's organizations went through a boom during the 1990's in Japan, and the government created several laws to support women's rights, such as laws for childcare leave and nursing care insurance, making it easier for women to combine housework and work life. The global idea of feminism seemed to have reached Japan, and the government was taking cues from women's rights organizations when they wrote up the Basic Law and Basic Plan for a Gender Equal Society in 1999.⁴⁰ Sadly, this step towards a 'feminist state' came to an abrupt stop in the early 2000's, with the discussion of the term 'gender free' being used as the main argument. In 2005 the discussion over the 1999 Gender Equal Society Law at the Diet reached its peak, with now Prime Minister Abe Shinzo at the head of the opposition.

This struggle over what could have been Japan's first real step towards a gender equal society caused several rifts in the feminist society in Japan. The discussion of the use of the

³⁶ Oh, K. J. (2016) p. 343

³⁷ Cho, J. (2005)

³⁸ Lee, M. (2005)

³⁹ Personal communication. KSVRC, Seoul. October 25, 2019

⁴⁰ Kano, A. (2011) p. 43

word ‘gender free’ spread to the women’s organizations as well, and the women’s rights organizations that had been part of a strong collaboration were split into sides. Furthermore, the revised Gender Equal Society Law left much to wish for, and many women’s rights activist became suspicious of how much the recent state feminism had been a win for the women, or just enough for the government to have something to show the audience.⁴¹ This split the women’s rights organizations once again, this time into the ones close to the government, who were happy to take it at the government pace, and the more radical women’s right organizations who opposed the government’s lack of willingness to change.

This, of course, does not mean that Japan are lacking in women’s rights movements, or grassroots activism, but the disappointment, suspiciousness and disagreement that came from the struggle of the early 2000’s makes it difficult for the women’s movement in Japan to come together for a singular cause, as they are so politically polarized. Furthermore, the neo-liberal idea of a free market is able to exploit the first Japanese law for gender equality from 1985, that stated that both genders should have the *opportunity* to work at a company, but not how or what they could expect.⁴² With this as a starting point, the laws against gender discrimination have been criticized for not helping women’s rights, as it should, because it has been ‘tailored by men’.⁴³ As LDP are now without any real political opposition and the party has become more top-to-bottom than bottom-to-top in its hierarchy the last decades, it becomes harder for the grassroots to be heard.⁴⁴ Even so, the number of female politicians on a local level is slowly increasing, and among the non-partisan representatives, women score a higher number than men. However, these female politicians often focus specifically on women’s rights, and lose the bigger fight with no major political party to back them up and provide a more general political agenda.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Kano, A. (2011) p. 54

⁴² Ueno, C. (2010)

⁴³ Ueno, C. (2010) p. 4

⁴⁴ Mishima, K. (2019)

⁴⁵ Takao, Y. (2007)

4 South Korea

4.1 The Prosecutor's Office

While the MeToo movement started in the U.S.A. in the fall of 2017, it did not gain any real attention among the South Korean news agencies until the end of January 2018. It is not to say that no one in South Korea had used the hashtag until that day, but it was when prosecutor Seo Ji-hyeon went on national television and told her story of how she was sexually harassed by a senior prosecutor during a funeral in 2010 that MeToo really became a topic in the South Korean society. Seo was attending the funeral of a colleague's father when her senior prosecutor groped her buttocks. The senior prosecutor, Ahn Tae-gun, was at the time a director general at the Ministry of Justice and was accompanying the justice minister to the funeral. Seo was seated beside Ahn at the dinner table, and when he started groping her for what she described as 'a considerable amount of time'. She tried to move away from the groping, but felt that she could not openly create a scene, as there were too many people around, including the Justice Minister. She was shocked to have been sexually harassed so openly in a room full of people working within the legal system without anyone reacting. The Justice Minister even made a comment about how "he was not sure if he's attending to me, or I'm attending to him", but Seo is unsure if he said so after noticing Ahn's groping or as a comment to his drunkenness.⁴⁶

Seo claims she talked to her superiors about the issue immediately, but that their only response was to settle it by getting an apology from Ahn himself. However, she never heard from him. Following the event, Seo received critique on several of her cases, and ended up receiving a disciplinary warning from the prosecutor general. She insists that the then-deputy minister of criminal affairs at the Ministry of Justice later covered up the assault, and that the trauma of her experience led to a miscarriage. In 2015, she was assigned to a position at the Prosecutor's Office in Tongyeong, which in her opinion was a clear demotion. By then she was a senior prosecutor with fifteen years of experience, and her work had earned her two awards from the Justice Minister, and the position in Tongyeong would normally be given to a junior prosecutor with about four years of experience.

⁴⁶ Kim, S. *JoongAng Daily*. (31.01.2018)

4.1.1 After Seo went to the Media

This case is understandably an important case in the MeToo movement in South Korea, not only because it was the first big one, but also because it hit directly within the legal system. Without hiding her name or face she sat on national television and told her story, claiming that the prosecutor's system was biased towards male prosecutors, and that females who spoke up about their mistreatment was punished for making a 'big deal' out of inappropriate behavior. Less than a day after the Ministry of Justice officially claimed that there was no irregularities about Seo's re-assignment to the Tongyeong office, the Prosecutor-General promised to launch an investigation looking into it, as well as her other claims.⁴⁷

Unfortunately, as eight years had passed since the incident, Ahn could not be investigated or punished for sexual harassment due to statute of limitation expiring, and Ahn himself claims that he does not remember the incident Seo reported, as he was intoxicated during the time of the assault.⁴⁸ However, as Seo's transfer to Tongyeong happened in 2015, the seven yearlong statutes of limitation has not yet expired, and Ahn was arrested for abuse of power for his role in the unfair transfer Seo suffered from after reporting him for sexual abuse. The arrest was made in January 2019 after a lower court ruled him guilty, and he was sentenced to two years in prison. Ahn appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court, and was released in the beginning of January 2020, after serving only one year of his sentenced, as the Supreme Court overturned the lower court's two-year sentence, ruling that the transfer was done within legal boundaries, and thereby declared that it could not be seen as an abuse of power.⁴⁹

4.1.2 The internal Probe by the Justice Minister

The critique against the prosecutor office did not end at Seo's story about Ahn groping her. From stories that describes a highly sexist working environment to corruption, the Korean prosecutor organization was deemed by the public to be in need of a proper internal clean up. Even the team tasked with investigating prosecutor organizations routines for dealing with sexual harassment did not escape the scrutinizing. The team was led by Cho Hee-jin, the female chief prosecutor of one of the Eastern Prosecutor Office in Seoul, with six out of seven members in the team being female prosecutors. However, Prosecutor Lim Eun-jeong of the

⁴⁷ Kim, Y. *Hankyoreh* (31.01.2018)

⁴⁸ Unknown. *Yonhap via Korea JoongAng Daily*. (27.02.2018)

⁴⁹ Lee, S. *The Korea Times*. (10.01.2020)

Northern Prosecution Office in Seoul called for a different prosecutor to lead the team, as she claims that Cho herself told her to keep quiet about a similar sexual assault she experienced fifteen years earlier.⁵⁰ Lim claims that she told her story about the sexual assault on her social media, but that Cho told her to take down the post and that she needed to ‘seek psychological treatment’.⁵¹ Seo herself agreed with Lim’s claim that Cho was unfit to lead the investigation, claiming that she had a conflict of interest and questionable motives, but her demand to change Cho as leader went ignored. When the investigation team’s report was released after three months of investigation, Seo’s attorneys criticized the investigation for being unfair, and pointed out that the team had failed to interview several key figures in the case, claiming that the team had not taken the investigation seriously. Seo’s attorneys further pointed out that the team had the wrong objective from the beginning, as they made the team a specialized team for sexual harassment, rather than abuse of power, even as the statute of limitation had expired for the sexual harassment part of the case. Therefore, not addressing whether Seo’s transfer had been abuse of authority to punish her for her speaking up or not.

Lim is known for criticizing the prosecutor’s organization, and frequently posts criticisms on the internal board for prosecutors. She has also formally reported several incidents of sexual harassment or intolerable behavior within the prosecutor’s office without the higher-ups taking any action to deal with the problems. Lim was quick to support Seo after she told her story, as Lim had supported her back in 2010 when Seo tried to report the incident. Both Seo and Lim claim that Seo went to Rep. Choi Gyo-il, a member of the conservative Liberty Korea Party (LKP), a prosecutor-turned-lawmaker who at the time worked for the Ministry of Justice, to ask him to launch an investigation regarding Ahn’s sexual harassment. Seo met with him, but no investigation was launched, and Lim further claims that he berated her afterwards, telling her that she made a big fuss about something that the person in question was keeping quiet.⁵² ⁵³ Rep. Choi first denied having heard of Seo’s sexual harassment case until 2018, before he changed his answer, claiming that they had a meeting, but that there never was any talk about an investigation. He still denies berating Lim, and cannot recall having spoken to her about this case. While both Seo and Lim claim that Rep. Choi was involved in covering up the sexual harassment claim against Ahn and Seo’s transfer, Cho’s investigation team did not interview Rep. Choi about the case.

⁵⁰ One of Lim’s superiors had tried to kiss her in an elevator.

⁵¹ Yoon, H., S. Park, & S. Kim. *Korea JoongAng Daily* (06.02.2018)

⁵² Choi, H. *The Korea Times* (01.02.18)

⁵³ Editorial. *Hankyoreh*. (31.01.2018)

In addition to the team set up by the Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Justice has formed a committee to investigate all alleged sex crimes within the ministry and the institutions that falls beneath it, like immigration offices. The committee has proposed that the Prosecutor's Offices around the country should take more responsibility to enforcing the law of gender equality by hiring and promoting more women.⁵⁴

4.1.3 Discussion

What made Seo's case so newsworthy in South Korea? First, it is important to notice that Seo's reason to tell her story was not the molestation in itself, but rather the power abuse that followed. While the former prosecutor Ahn was named publicly as the molester in the story, her critique expanded to several high positioned prosecutors at the Prosecutor's Office. As a prosecutor herself, it is highly doubtful that Seo did not know that the statute of limitations had expired for her sexual harassment case, and her groper did not even work at the Prosecutor's Office anymore. As she stated in her interview, she came forward with her story to raise awareness of what was going on within the Prosecutor's Office, and because it took her eight years to realize that she was not to blame for what had happened.⁵⁵

Seo's case fits right into Gash and Harding's theory of using MeToo as a conscious-raising method.⁵⁶ After she had tried to notify her superiors through the right channels at her work place, she found her case not only dismissed, but also felt she was punished for speaking up. Her first interview on JTBS Newsroom was never about her story alone, but a big shout out about the toxic work environment women had to endure at the Prosecutor's Office. To those who criticize the MeToo movement for being a 'mob rule' and that victims are publicly humiliating their perpetrators by outing them openly, this is the perfect example of the laws not working in practice. If there is one place that one would expect the laws to work as intended to protect women, the Prosecutor's Office should be it. When Seo's attempt to do it the right way within the Prosecutor's Office was met with demotion, how could any changes be made from the inside? By telling the public, the pressure from the outside and higher institutes, in this case President Moon himself, gave the Prosecutor's Office no other choice but to finally properly investigate what had happened when Seo first reported the incident, and further how the office dealt with sexual harassment cases in general. On January 30,

⁵⁴ Lee, S. *The Korea Times*. (16.07.18)

⁵⁵ Choi, H. *The Korea Times*. (01.02.18)

⁵⁶ Gash, A., & R. Harding. (2018) p. 10

President Moon himself held a press conference, stating that he took Seo's claims seriously and ordered the government to look into cultural reforms that can create an environment where victims can speak up without fear.⁵⁷

When Seo fired up MeToo in South Korea, it was with a clear message; yes, it happens here as well. Furthermore, while Seo's decision to go as big as national television was very brave, her speaking up might not have been as big of a risk as it can be for other victims speaking up. At worst, she was risking her job at the Prosecutor's Office, but even without that job, she could still use her education as an attorney. As a full-time working woman with a higher education and several career opportunities, she was better economically prepared to face the consequences she might face by telling her story. Many victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault keep quiet in fear of losing their job, or the economic costs they will suffer if the case is taken to court.⁵⁸ Her choice of using a national television show such as the JTBS Newsroom further helped minimizing the risk of her story being shut down or ignored. Still, this would not have been possible if the JTBS Newsroom had not been willing to present her story.

As Seo's case mainly ended up focusing on the abuse of power, Seo has, to a certain degree, managed to avoid the victim blaming. There have been few open critiques about how she was dressed, or how she behaved on the day she was groped. Furthermore, while Rep. Choi claim that Seo herself did not ask for an investigation, there has been little focus on whether she act enough like a 'victim'; her stance in the media storm has been proud and determined.

Still, her battle has not been without sacrifices. Her public speaking did start a retaliation against her, with some colleagues and the general public accusing her of using this as a way to get a better position and/or use it as a gateway to enter politics. The pressure and retaliation of the case has taken a toll on Seo's mental and physical health and she has been on sick leave from her position at the Prosecutor's Office while receiving treatment at a hospital.⁵⁹ Overall, her courage to speak up started a snowball of accusations against high-profile men in all industries through South Korea, and should be applauded.

⁵⁷ Seong, Y., & K. Kim. *Hankyoreh*. (31.01.2018)

⁵⁸ Personal Communication. *KSVRC, Seoul*. October 25, 2019

⁵⁹ Kim, S. *The Korea Times*. (08.02.18)

4.2 The Politician

In the beginning of March 2018, the Governor of South Chungcheong Ahn Hee-jung declared that he would resign from his position as governor. The resignation came the day after his secretary Kim Ji-eun went public on JTBC Newsroom with accusations about her boss raping her. According to Kim, the governor raped her on four different occasions, the latest only a month prior to her interview. As his secretary she claimed she had no choice but to comply with his sexual advances, and that she was in no position to say ‘no’ or fight him off. She says she was trained as his secretary to tell him ‘yes’ even when everyone else said ‘no’, that she should have no opinions, and that she should ‘live like his shadow’. While afraid to speak up, she sent out ‘SOS signals’ to people she worked with, and a senior colleague noticed the situation, but even after Kim told her about it, nothing was done.⁶⁰

Kim said she had gathered the courage to speak up after reading about Seo’s case within the prosecutor’s office, and that she knew that there were other victims as well. She further stated that she had been afraid of the changes she would face after doing the interview, but that she was more afraid of Governor Ahn himself. Claiming she had been afraid that her case could possibly be made to ‘disappear’ and that harm might be done to her after speaking up, she hoped that going public on a broadcast would offer her some protection and support from people to reveal the truth. Ahn’s office first claimed that the accusations were false and while Ahn was a married man, their sexual relationship had been consensual. Nonetheless, Ahn himself posted an apology to Kim on his social media account only hours after Kim’s interview at JTBC, stating that the office had been wrong in saying it was consensual, claiming it was all his fault.⁶¹ The police launched an internal investigation into the allegations the day after Ahn resigned from his position.

4.2.1 The Investigation and Court Case

This case against Ahn was the first MeToo-case to hit a high position politician in South Korea. Not only was Ahn Hee-jung a governor, but he had been the runner up for the presidential position at the last election, but losing to Moon at the Democratic Party primaries. At first, the allegations against Ahn gained the media’s attention for its high profile and severe accusations, however, the case has been called a ‘roller-coaster scandal’, as the case

⁶⁰ Kim, S. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (06.03.18)

⁶¹ Kim, S. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (07.02.18)

has faced twists and turns as it made its way to the Supreme Court in September 2019.⁶² Kim's claim that there were more victims out there might prove to be right, as another rape claim came barely the week after, followed by a third, and several sexual harassment claims.

By March 18th, Ahn changed his official statement during his second round of questioning at the Seoul Western District Prosecutor's Office. He then claimed that he had thought their relationship had been consensual, before apologizing to those who had loved and supported him.⁶³ By the end of March 2018, Ahn was facing rape accusation from both Kim, and a second anonymous victim who supposedly was a part of the Institute for Better Democracy, a political think tank established by Ahn.

When the court case against Ahn started in July 2018, the prosecutors requested four years imprisonment for the rapes committed against Kim Ji-eun, arguing that his strong social and political influence had been used to his advantage against Kim's more unstable position, disguising it as something work-related. Ahn maintained his statement of innocent, and asked the jury how he could have used his position to violate a person's human rights. Several witnesses were called in to testify in favor of Ahn. Ahn's wife, Min Joo-won claimed that Kim had been trying to 'seduce' her husband from the beginning, and that she had once entered their bedroom in the middle of the night to stare at the bed during a work-trip. In addition, a second of Ahn's secretaries testified that the atmosphere during the presidential campaign was not in any way hierarchical, undermining Kim's claim of an atmosphere where she was unable to say no or fight back.⁶⁴ On August 14, a local court in Seoul ruled Ahn not guilty on the ground that there was not enough evidence, and that there was "a lot of doubt" around Kim's testimony. While the prosecutor's had claimed that Kim had been in a 'dissociative state' where she had to detach herself from reality mentally, the court found it hard to believe.⁶⁵ The prosecutors appealed the case, stating that they had enough evidence to have Ahn sentenced for raping Kim four times, and sexually harassing her six times within the span of half a year. When the appeal was handed in, the prosecutors further claimed that the verdict had not been in line with the Supreme Court's rulings in similar cases.⁶⁶

The appeal to Ahn's case started in December 2018, but as the court room decided on a closed-door session, there was little media coverage while the case was ongoing.⁶⁷ When the

⁶² Shim, K. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (02.02.19)

⁶³ Lee, S., & J. Hong. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (20.03.18)

⁶⁴ Shim, K. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (27.07.18)

⁶⁵ Lee, S., & J. Hong. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (15.08.18)

⁶⁶ Unkown. *Yonhap via Korea JoongAnd Daily*. (21.08.18)

⁶⁷ Unkown. *Yonhap via Korea JoongAng Daily*. (22.12.18)

Seoul High Court disclosed their verdict in February 2019, Ahn was found guilty of misusing his authority over Kim, and the court accepted nine out of ten claims of sexual misconduct. It was acknowledged that Kim had no reason to lie about what had happened, and that she would not gain anything by accusing the ex-Governor. Ahn was sentenced to three and a half years in prison, and the court stated that Ahn's use of power to bend Kim's free will into accepting his sexual advances was a very serious issue. Ahn's lawyers stated that he would appeal the court ruling to the Supreme Court, and that the verdict was 'unexpected and incompatible with common sense, and the punishment too severe.'⁶⁸

September 10th, 2019, the Supreme Court ruled to uphold the verdict on Ahn, finding him guilty on all ten claims made by Kim. The court acknowledged and heavily considered the case's context and ruled Ahn guilty of 'sexual intercourse by abuse of authority', and kept the former sentence of three and a half years. Supreme Court Justice Kim Sang-hwan stated "when the court adjudicates a sexual assault or harassment case, it considers the issue of sexual discrimination on the context of that case and strives to realize gender equality by respecting the principle of 'gender sensitivity'. Lightly ignoring the honesty behind the victim's testimony without sufficiently considering the special circumstances the victims was placed in, in each individual and specific case of sexual abuse cannot be regarded as proper evaluation of evidence based on the values of justice and equality." Furthermore, the court dismissed most of Ahn's testimony that the relationship was consensual, as he had repeatedly changed his testimony throughout the trials.⁶⁹

While the Supreme Court was strong in their uphold of Seoul High Court's verdict on Ahn's misuse of his social, political and economic status, the ruling have raised a certain discussion. While rulings with 'gender sensitivity' has been used before this case, it is still a loose term, which let the court relax the standards of evidence admissibility from women in sexual abuse cases. The disagreement is intense among judges and lawyers on the use of such a principle, and as of September 2019, 56 out of 57 cases where the principle was used were ruled in the victim's favor that year.

⁶⁸ Shim, K. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (02.02.19)

⁶⁹ Shim, K. *Korea JoongAng Daily* (10.09.19)

4.2.2 Discussion

The case against Ahn Hee-jung is a classic example of a rape case that probably never would have made it to court due to lack of evidence: no witnesses, no physical force, no threats. Nonetheless; no consent. Cases like this tend to fall into the grey area of sexual assault in most countries' law against rape. While Sweden changed the law against sexual violence to include the need for explicit consent to the sexual act, the role of consent in rape cases has yet to become a common thought globally.⁷⁰ With Ahn's high position as a governor, going on national television to tell her story was probably Kim's only chance to get legal justice.

The court case against Ahn quickly became one of the most important fight for women's rights organizations across South Korea: if a rape case against such a high standing politician without physical evidence, force or threat could be ruled in the victim's favor, there might be hope for all victims of sexual violence as well. It came as no surprise, although a disappointment, when the lower court ruled Ahn not guilty. While Kim had no opportunity to resist in her position as Ahn's secretary, her story simply did not match up with the general idea of what a 'real rape' is.⁷¹ Kim's win in the high court and Supreme Court was a huge step in the direction of prosecuting rapist without any physical evidence, force or threat. Still, while the court ruled based on the principle of 'gender sensitivity', what the court put weight on were two things; Kim had no reason to lie about what happened as well as risked everything by speaking up, and Ahn changed his testimony several times during the trials.⁷²

As Kim's perpetrator was her immediate boss, she lost her job the moment she spoke up. In addition, her public outing on national television made her the perfect target for people who did not believe her, or wanted to criticize victims of sexual violence in general. Accusation of Kim being a gold-digger came not only from people on the internet, but from former colleagues and Ahn's family.⁷³ At one point, the media's coverage of such accusations against Kim during the court hearing became so popular that several women's rights organizations claimed it was like a second assault on Kim. Still, one of the main reasons for Kim's television attendance was to tell the public and hope for their protection in the case against Ahn.

Kim's case is a classic MeToo case in a different way than Seo's was. While Seo used the opportunity to raise awareness and push for change, the MeToo movement worked as a

⁷⁰ Unknown. *BBC*. (24.05.18)

⁷¹ Gash, A., & R. Harding. (2018) p. 5

⁷² Shim, K. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (10.09.19)

⁷³ Shim, K. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (28.07.18)

way to free Kim from the hierarchal work situation she was trapped in. In the end, they both share the same issue of patriarchal hierarchy and not being heard. The fortunate arrival of MeToo in South Korea helped Kim get justice in a situation where her only other option would be to stay quiet and quit her job.

4.3 The Art Industry

4.3.1 Playwright Lee Youn-taek

One of the most serious MeToo stories in South Korea is the accusations against famous playwright and theater producer Lee Youn-taek, who was first accused by an actress on February 13, 2018, and then rapidly accused by several other women from the industry in the days that followed. The accusation ranged from making actresses give him intimate massages to rape resulting in abortion and payment for silence.

Lee Youn-taek is a well-known name in the theater industry in South Korea, and he has worked with several big theater companies, such as the National Theater Company of Korea. At the time he was accused, Lee was the lead producer of the theater group Street Theater Troupe (STT), which he himself started in 1986. STT were quick to comment the accusation, and posted an official apology on behalf of the organization to everyone who felt that they had been treated badly only two days after the first accusation.⁷⁴ However, Lee was criticized for not directly apologizing himself, and on February 18, 2018, he held a press conference where he apologized to everyone who felt wronged by him, and stated that he would resign from all of his current positions in the theater world. While he admitted to the forced massages, he denied any rape or sexual assault accusations made against him. Still, he stated that he was willing to submit to any punishment, including legal responsibility.⁷⁵ Kim So-hee, the incumbent lead of STT, stated later that day that she would disband the theater troupe, claiming that the issue of sexual misconduct within the troupe was not something that they could resolve.⁷⁶ According to one of the victims, she was sexually assaulted by Lee in 2015 while they were working with the National Theater Company, and the national company stated that they would not work with Lee in the future, however, the company would not take

⁷⁴ Yoon, S. (1) *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (19.02.18)

⁷⁵ Nam, J. *Hankyoreh*. (20.02.18)

⁷⁶ Yoon, S. (1) *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (19.02.18)

any legal measures.⁷⁷

Although Lee did deny any rape accusations, he did admit to what he thought of as ‘consensual intercourse’, and further admitted that while he had not realized that some of the things he did could have been a serious offence, there were times when he felt guilty for not being able to control his desires. After Lee’s press conference, Kim Su-hee, the first actress to accuse Lee of sexual assault, condemned Lee’s wording of consensual intercourse and hinted that she was considering taking legal action against the producer.⁷⁸ Nine days later the police officially opened an investigation after receiving criminal complaints against Lee from sixteen different actresses. By March 15, over 206 000 people had signed a petition to the Blue House demanding a throughout investigation of Lee Youn-taek, and on March 17 he was summoned by the police for questioning.⁷⁹

The revelation of how Lee and other prominent figures in the art industry had seemingly been allowed to demand sexual favors from women in a lower position than them was not well-received among the art enthusiasts. On February 22, the theatrical community held a protest called ‘Theater With You’, sympathizing and supporting the victims, while demanding a change in the hierarchal system within theater groups. This protest became so popular that it pushed the theatrical community for change, and in the weeks after, the protest received stories from more victims every day. When asked, many writers and producers, both male and female, admitted to having known about the abusive sexual culture within the theatrical community and regretted not doing anything to stop it.⁸⁰

While the abusive sexual culture within the theatrical society was a well-known secret among the people in the industry, it is understandable that people choose to remain silent, whether they are victims or bystanders. The theatrical society, not only in Korea, but also everywhere, is a pyramid system, and speaking up against the wrong person can easily put you on the bottom, or kicked out of the industry. It is no coincident that the current use of #MeToo started in Hollywood, and the same upheaval can be found within the art industry in many countries. The prominent people on the top, such as Lee, decide who is picked for which role, how much media attention that person gets, and the worker’s future roles. After all, nobody wants to hire a ‘troublemaker’. It is important that the victims speaking up about MeToo are not punished, and while Kim So-hee told her story using her full name, most of

⁷⁷ Yoon, S. (2) *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (19.02.18)

⁷⁸ Nam, J. *Hankyoreh*. (20.02.18)

⁷⁹ Yu, S., & E. Chung. *The Korea JoongAng Daily*. (16.03.18)

⁸⁰ Kim, S., K. Choi, & Y. Kwon. *The Korea JoongAng Daily*. (05.03.18)

Lee's accusers have remained anonymous.

During Lee's questioning, the police focused on determining if he had misused his position and authority to sexually assault group members, rather than the sexual acts. The commissioner of the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency explained that while for some of the cases of alleged sexual misconducts the statute of limitation might have expired, he could still be punished for them if found guilty of abuse of authority.⁸¹ The police requested an arrest warrant for Lee the following Wednesday, March 21, for multiple sexual harassment charges. In total seventeen victims filed 62 criminal complaints of sexual misconduct against Lee, going back as far as 1999 to as recent as 2017. However, because of the statute of limitation, only 8 victims and 24 cases were still punishable by law, none that included sexual abuse.

In September 2018, the lower court found Lee Youn-taek guilty of all charges, stating that Lee had "repeatedly sexually assaulted members of his troupe who were under Lee's power and actors who appeared in [his] plays". While Lee argued that the victims' testimony was not trustworthy, and that he had only intended to provide acting lessons, not assault anyone, the court did not find any reason to doubt the victims' stories. The court also took into consideration that the victims had chosen to reveal their identities to expose Lee's actions, and that therefore the risk had been high. To give the victims some cover the court gave them aliases during the trial. The court also argued that even if Lee did these actions as a part of theatrical training, it was still assault if the victim did not agree to it, but put up with it. The court sentenced Lee to six years in prison and 80 hours of therapy, and banned him from working with children and teenagers for the next ten years.⁸²

While the victims and the victims' supporters were happy about the outcome of Lee's trial, they still felt like the sentence was too easy considering how much pain he had caused over so many years. Moreover, while Lee earlier had agreed that he would take the punishment for what he had done, he still appealed the court's ruling. The second trial in Lee's case was held in April 2019, where the High Court upheld the lower court's ruling, and in addition found him guilty of "abuse of occupational authority", adding another year to his prison sentence.⁸³ He appealed the High Court's ruling, but the Supreme Court upheld the sentence.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Yu, S., & E. Chung. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (16.03.18)

⁸² Lee, S., & H. Moon. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (20.09.18)

⁸³ Yoon, S. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (10.04.19)

⁸⁴ Unkown. *Yonhap via Korea JoongAng Daily*. (25.07.19)

4.3.2 A Snowballing of Accusations

While the case against Lee Youn-taek was one of the first MeToo cases among the Korean art society, as well as one of the harshest sentenced one, it is only one of many scandals to hit the Korean art world. Nobel Prize of Literature nominee poet Ko Un was accused by several poets in his literary circle, starting with the poet Choi Young-mi who wrote a poem about an assault she witnessed.⁸⁵ After the revelation of his systematic sexual abuse against young and inspiring poets under his wing, the Ministry of Education is now discussing withdrawing his works from textbooks, and the Seoul Metropolitan Government has taken down an exhibition held in his honor at a library in the city.⁸⁶

Furthermore, a survey done by the Korean Film Council (KOFIC), 10% of women working within the film industry in South Korea have experienced ‘unwanted sexual demands’, and 20% have experienced forced sexual contact. Among the respondents, over half of them said that they had sensed that it was a sexual harassment problem, but had not done anything about it, and almost 40% of the victims said that they had escaped the situation by ‘feigning ignorance’.⁸⁷ The topic of sexual harassment became so hot within the art industry, that actor Choi Il-hwa went as far as holding a press conference apologizing for any sexual misconduct he might have done, accepting full responsibility – before anyone having even accused him of anything. This backfired however, as his apology triggered a former actress to speak up about him raping her 25 years ago.⁸⁸ After this story came to light, Choi apologized once again, and said he would quit acting altogether. He was also removed from the board of directors of the Korean Actors Association.

4.3.3 Discussion

Sadly, this type of hierarchal system within the arts are not a phenomenon special to patriarchal South Korea. After all, MeToo started within the world of acting in Hollywood, and most countries where MeToo have been used, the theater world has been one of the hardest hit industries. As former dancer Eric Kaufman points out in his article about sexual harassment in the musical industry, the worker’s body is often seen as available to employer authority, and what can one do, when your livelihood, physical and emotional wellbeing all

⁸⁵ Kang, H. *The Korea Times*. (20.04.20)

⁸⁶ Lee, s. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (22.02.18)

⁸⁷ Yoo, S. *The Hankyoreh*. (07.02.18)

⁸⁸ Park, J. *The Korea Times*. (26.02.18)

are linked to your employment status?⁸⁹

Kaufman himself never actually considered himself a victim, at least not to the extent of being traumatized, but his thoughts on why he should not dare to speak up about the incidents shows that he was, at a minimum, not comfortable with what had happened. While Kaufman's experience is that of a young, homosexual male dancer within the musical industry, his article highlights the general problem of the hierarchy within the art world. Uncertainty of whether or not what he was experiencing was wrong, or if he was overreacting or reading the situation wrong is not different from how some of Lee's victims felt. The stories of what Lee, Ko Un, and other high standing art profiles in South Korea did all have the undertone that such behavior was nothing new, but that they had simply done what others had done before them. Kaufman describes the culture by saying that '[he is] stunned at the extent to which these dynamics felt like natural, if sometimes unpleasant, aspects of work', underlining that this is not an singular issue among some people in power, but such a big part of the everyday life as an artist, that people have just accepted it.⁹⁰

In industries such as the theater world, or the poetical societies, connections are sometimes just as important as the work you do. As one of Ko Un's victims state, his influence in the literary world was so enormous that he could openly masturbate while calling for female writers to satisfy him in a bar in Seoul.⁹¹ As the publishing firms were eager to publish Ko Un's work, and he sat as a member on several editorial boards, they would publish authors he recommended to please him. How do you report a person that holds so much power over your dream career? Not only would speaking up against him be hard and probably ignored, but you risk negative rumors about you being spread across the industry. 'Will I be recommended for future work?' 'Will I come to be known as no fun or difficult to work with?' 'What happens if I resist too aggressively?'⁹² These thoughts that went through Kaufman's head when he was thinking about reporting his incidents are relatable in any industry where reputation, connection and obedience are necessary to survive in a hierarchal workspace. 'It is not worth the anticipated fallout from a complaint'.⁹³

⁸⁹ Kaufman, E. (2019)

⁹⁰ Kaufman, E. (2019) p. 89

⁹¹ Kang, H. *The Korea Times*. (20.04.20)

⁹² Kaufman, E. (2019) p. 89

⁹³ Kaufman, E. (2019) p. 90

5 Japan

5.1 Ito Shiori

While Ito Shiori is now described as the face of the MeToo movement in Japan, her fight for justice started as early as 2015. Back in 2015 Itō was a journalist right out of college wanting to advance her career, so she contacted the well-known journalist Yamaguchi Noriyuki who was working for the Tokyo Broadcasting System in the U.S.A. After meeting him for dinner at a sushi restaurant, she woke up to him raping her in a hotel room. Ito says she does not have any recollection of what happened between her feeling dizzy in the restaurant and waking up in the hotel room. When she first went to the police, they said that these cases were common, but hard to prove, and discouraged her from filing a report as it could damage her career. Ito, however, was adamant they investigate her case, and pleaded for them to watch the hotel surveillance tapes. After watching the video of Ito being carried into the hotel, and getting the taxi-driver's testimony, the police finally decided to investigate her case.⁹⁴

The police gathered enough evidence to press charges against Yamaguchi for incapacitated rape (so-called 'quasi-rape'), and set out to arrest him at Narita International Airport before his return to the U.S.A. in June 2015.⁹⁵ However, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Investigation Bureau called off the arrest last minute, and the case was handed over to Prosecutor's Office August the same year. The case was dropped July 2016, after the Prosecutor's Office held a voting among a group of randomly picked civilians who concluded that the evidence was insufficient, and Ito's appeal of the decision not to legally charge Yamaguchi was officially rejected later that year.^{96 97}

5.1.1 Ito's Fight for Justice

The relations between Ito and Yamaguchi fits into the classical issue of sexual abuse due to power relations, moreover, there is another aspect that makes this a prime example of men in power getting away with illegal actions unpunished. Yamaguchi is known for having a close relationship with Prime Minister Abe, and Ito, as well as lawmakers, have questioned if that was the reason for the case being dropped. The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department has

⁹⁴ Ito, S. *Politico*. (04.01.18)

⁹⁵ O'Dwyer, S. *The Japan Times*. (26.01.20)

⁹⁶ Shinya, E., & S. Abe. *Asahi Shimbun*. (19.12.19)

⁹⁷ This is a common way of making up a jury in Japan.

admitted to calling of the arrest in July 2015 last minute, but has not given an explanation as to why, raising further suspicion that Yamaguchi got inside help.⁹⁸ After the arrest was cancelled, Ito tried to engage the media, in hope of raising awareness and putting pressure on the Prosecutor's Office to continue her case. However, only one newsmagazine, *Shukan Shincho*, ended up writing about her story.⁹⁹

As her criminal complaint was turned down by the Prosecutor's office, Ito decided to file a civil lawsuit against Yamaguchi. The court was opened for hearing December 2018, but Yamaguchi did not attend, choosing instead to send his lawyer with a document asking for the case to be dismissed. The police and ministry officials were summoned to explain why the arrest was called off at the last moment and whether it was a break from standard police protocol or not. When asked if such an action was common, the official answered that it was difficult to draw any conclusion even if they had gone through all relevant records, which they had not. Yamaguchi's side of the story still differs from Ito's, and while she claims she passed out midway during dinner, possibly from Yamaguchi spiking her drink, Yamaguchi claimed that Ito had had more alcohol than she could handle. Her last resort was a civil suit, and Ito sought ¥11 million for the damages.¹⁰⁰

In the court hearing in July 2019, Ito retold her version of the story, repeating that she had felt dizzy during the dinner, and that she had tried to protect her body, telling him 'no' when she woke up while he was raping her. Yamaguchi on his side kept denying the charges, and stated that there was no 'unlawful sex' and that the act had been consensual. This trial also included a counter lawsuit filed by Yamaguchi against Ito, where Yamaguchi sought ¥130 million for the defamation he suffered because of the book Ito wrote about the case.¹⁰¹

On December 18 2019, the court ruled the case in Ito's favor, stating that Yamaguchi was to pay Ito ¥3,3 million for the damage done to her. The court found that Ito's story was concise and that it did not fit the definition of slander, as she had tried to do it the quiet legal way before she spoke to the public. They further took into consideration that Ito had reported the incident to the police, as well as seeking support from medical staff and sexual violence centers, indicating that it had in fact happened against her will.¹⁰² It was also mentioned that Ito had asked the taxi driver to take her to the nearest train station, but that the taxi driver had

⁹⁸ Osaki, T. *The Japan Times*. (23.11.17)

⁹⁹ Ito, S. *Politico*. (04.01.18)

¹⁰⁰ Otake, T., & T. Osaki. *The Japan Times*. (07.12.17)

¹⁰¹ Kyodo. *The Japan Times*. (09.07.19)

¹⁰² Shinya, E., & S. Abe. *Asahi Shimbun*. (19.12.2019)

taken them to a hotel on Yamaguchi's request.¹⁰³ The court dismissed most of Yamaguchi's allegations, stating that he had changed parts of his testimony, and that it was inconsistent. As opposed to criminal cases, where the prosecution requires evidence of what happened, a civil case verdict is based on which side of the story sounds most likely to be true.¹⁰⁴

During the press conference the day after the court's ruling, Yamaguchi stated that he was upset about the ruling, and that he would appeal the case as soon as possible. He claimed that the court, while hearing both sides, had blatantly taken Ito's word against his and subjectively rejecting his statements. Yamaguchi even went as far as calling Ito a 'habitual liar', saying she lied about what happened; down to how much alcohol she had that night. He further blamed the media, both locally and internationally for telling a one-sided story, pushing the case in Ito's favor. He strongly denied having used any of his contacts in politics or elsewhere, to call off the arrest warrant and make the Prosecutor's office drop the case. While he still claims that what happened that night was consensual, he admitted that it had been 'inappropriate' to have sex with someone who was seeking advice on career opportunities. Yamaguchi's counter lawsuit, seeking ¥ 130 million was rejected by the court.¹⁰⁵ The counter lawsuit was based on Ito's defamation of Yamaguchi in her book *Black Box*, but the court ruled that Ito had written the book to raise awareness and improve the legal and social conditions surrounding sexual crimes by writing her own story, and not because she wanted to hurt Yamaguchi's reputation.¹⁰⁶

At her own press conference, Ito said that although she was surprised by the court's ruling, she was pleased that the court recognized her fight for public disclosure around sexual violence cases. The case, and its ruling have become 'one of the landmark cases for Japanese sex crimes' according to Ito herself. Yamaguchi appealed the court's ruling in the first week of January 2020, stating that the fight was not over, and that the damage done to his reputation could not be repaired.¹⁰⁷ To push for his innocence, he pointed out that no real rape victim could laugh as Ito did during his press conference after the court's reveal of the verdict. Ito gained access to Yamaguchi's press conference because of her status as a journalist, and a picture of her smiling during his press statement went viral, people pointing out that she has not been acting as a victim of sexual violence should.¹⁰⁸ He later claimed that he had never

¹⁰³ Osumi, M. *The Japan Times*. (19.12.19)

¹⁰⁴ Editorial. *Asahi Shimbun*. (20.12.19)

¹⁰⁵ Kyodo. *The Japan Times*. (21.12.19)

¹⁰⁶ Editorial. *Asahi Shimbun*. (20.12.19)

¹⁰⁷ Shinya, E., & S. Abe. *Asahi Shimbun*. (19.12.19)

¹⁰⁸ Tozawa, A. *Asahi Shimbun*. (27.02.19)

meant that victims of sexual violence could never laugh again, but that it seems odd during that exact situation.

Ito Shiori has been painted as a heroine among women's rights organizations both inside and outside Japan. Yet, Ito does not think of herself as brave, but rather as a *henachoko* (a novice).¹⁰⁹ While she was afraid of the backlash, she felt as she had no other choice but to go public in her fight for justice. Still, the backlash of her publicly accusing Yamaguchi of rape was much worse than she had imagined. She has been criticized by people both online and in real life, with people bashing on her clothes, her behavior, her alcohol consumption and calling her a gold digger.¹¹⁰ Even high positioned female politicians within the LDP made comments on TV, claiming that her clothes and behavior on the night in 2015 left no doubt to her plans of the evening.¹¹¹ Others have gone as far as saying Ito could not be a true Japanese, because a Japanese woman would not speak about such shameful things.¹¹² While Ito have suffered a lot of 'victim shaming', she has gotten just as much critique for speaking up at all. Her friends and family have suffered as well in an extended victim shaming, and Ito now mainly lives in London, as she could not stand to live in Japan anymore.¹¹³

5.1.2 Discussion

While Ito's case of sexual violence was brutal, it is the fight for justice that followed that makes this case remarkable. Except for the part where Ito had dinner with Yamaguchi, the act that followed fulfilled most requirements for it to be a 'real rape'.¹¹⁴ Ito was incapacitated, she was forced, she went for a medical examination afterwards, and the police had evidence supporting her story. As far as sexual violence cases go, this one should have had a decent chance at being prosecuted in court.

The big question is why Yamaguchi's arrest was suddenly called off at the last minute and why the Prosecutor's Office suddenly decided that the police did not have sufficient evidence. If it is indeed true that Yamaguchi's close relationship to Prime Minister Abe was the reason, then this is no longer simply the issue of sexual violence victims being let down by the legal system, but evidence of a corrupt system where the right connections can help

¹⁰⁹ Kowaka, R., M. Kiki, & M. Yabuta. *Asahi Shimbun*. (15.09.18)

¹¹⁰ O'Dwyer, S. *The Japan Times*. (26.01.20)

¹¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Albds3-1Z-0&t=1s&fbclid=IwAR03bkWS0ejZMHPoDtjyVFK1ILE5BYz1-5flUkg-kvWTB4vFc19NzGP8Is>

¹¹² Ito, S. *Politico*. (2.1.2018)

¹¹³ Kowaka, R., M. Kiki, & M. Yabuta. *Asahi Shimbun*. (15.09.18)

¹¹⁴ Gash, A., & R. Harding. (2018) p. 5

you get away with anything. If this is the case, then Ito's fight was not just against the patriarchal system where women have less to say and sexual violence is disregarded, but a fight against corrupt political forces that were actively trying to to save a friend.

While Ito took all the right steps and the police at first claimed to have sufficient evidence, it did not shield her from the 'victim blaming'. People taking Yamaguchi's side thoroughly went through all the things she did leading up to the assault. Furthermore, Ito's strong personality through this case did not fit the idea of how a victim 'should' behave. The pressure on victims to behave vulnerable, broken and defenseless is so solidified in Japan, that sexual victims that do not behave this way get criticized by other sexual violence victims that they are not acting enough like a victim, so their stories might not be true.¹¹⁵ Sadly, as encouraging as Ito's current victory in court can be, the backlash against her is just as much of a warning to not speak up.

5.2 Vice-Finance Minister Fukuda

Fukuda Junichi was sitting vice finance minister when he was accused of sexual harassment by a female reporter April 16, 2018. The reporter remained anonymous to protect herself, but handed in an audio recording of some of her conversations with Fukuda to the magazine *Shukan Shincho*. On the recording Fukuda asks the reporter questions such as "can I touch your breasts?"¹¹⁶ The day after, Fukuda denied all accusations, saying that while he worked closely with many women, and enjoyed 'bantering' with them, he had never said anything that could be considered sexual harassment. He urged the reporter who made the accusation to come forward, so that they could have a proper conversation with two sides of the story. Finance Minister Aso Taro supported the call for the reporter to step up, but some women, among them lawmaker Fukushima Mizuho, have raised concerns about the pressure that puts on the victim, and the psychological stress of having to openly tell their story.¹¹⁷

At Fukuda's denial, the *Shukan Shincho* decided to release parts of the audio recording to prove their story. The Ministry of Finance was at this point already dealing with accusations of corruption, and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) urged that the sexual harassment accusation should be dealt with quick and efficiently.¹¹⁸ Fukuda stated that he was considering pressing charges against *Shukan Shincho* for defamation.

¹¹⁵ Yamamoto, N., & S. Tanaka. *Asahi Shimbun*. (27.02.20)

¹¹⁶ Okubo, W., & D. Oka. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (20.04.18)

¹¹⁷ Oka, D., & N. Furuyashiki. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (17.04.18)

¹¹⁸ Takeuchi, N. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (18.04.18)

While Finance Minister Aso admitted that the voice in the audio recordings sounded like it could belong to Fukuda, he claimed that Fukuda had been already been reprimanded and was showing remorse, so they would not punish him any further. He stayed adamant that the reporter should come forward so that they could settle the case legally. Finance Minister Aso was criticized for not taking the issue of sexual harassment seriously and that there was no way to know if the legal team the Finance Ministry had set up would be neutral in the case.¹¹⁹

The Ministry of Finance's way of handling this case was met with protests from the press and media, with the Public Finance Press club (Zaisei Kenkyukai) sending them a letter of protest, stating that they would not submit any of their members to the investigation. They raised the question about how well the reporter's privacy would be protected by the legal team and that the reporter's anonymity should be secured as to avoid a 'secondary victimization'.¹²⁰ The press and media once again criticized Finance Minister Aso for not launching an investigation until after parts of the recordings was published.¹²¹ On April 19, a group of lawyers submitted a petition to the Ministry of Finance, asking them to retract their request for the victim of sexual harassment to come forward. The petition was signed by over 27 000 people.¹²²

As an answer to the Ministry of Finance's request for the reporter to come forward, TV Asahi officially stated that the reporter was one of their workers, and that an internal investigation had reached the conclusion of sexual harassment. TV Asahi was still adamant that they would protect their reporter's privacy, and did not state a name. Fukuda resigned from his position on April 18 2018, but still claimed that what he had done had not counted as sexual harassment.¹²³

When Finance Minister Aso defended Fukuda in the beginning, he claimed that there was no such thing as criminal sexual harassment. The Cabinet confirmed this, stating that sexual harassment, as it is defined in the law is not a criminal offence, and for any punishment to be applicable there must be other circumstances as well, such as forcible indecency or stalking.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Editorial. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (18.04.18)

¹²⁰ Secondary victimization is a term used for victims who are put in a position where they once again feel violated, like during the police questioning.

¹²¹ Ide, S. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (19.04.18)

¹²² Nakamura, K. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (20.04.18)

¹²³ Narita, Y., & E. Ishiyama. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (19.04.18)

¹²⁴ Noguchi, T. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (18.05.18)

5.2.1 Discussion

The case against Fukuda was the MeToo case that received the most consistent media coverage in the newspapers chosen for this research in Japan. However, it was probably not the individual case that made this case so reported in the media, but rather that the media felt the need to protect their own, and that the Ministry of Finance's call for the victim to step up was pushing the security for reporters as a whole.

However, Finance minister Aso's reluctance to investigate his vice minister made this case more complicated and media worthy than it needed to be. Had Aso held an internal investigation that could have found Fukuda guilty or not, or at the very least pretended to take the accusation seriously, the media would probably have, although maybe reluctantly, accepted the decision. Instead, the need to protect his vice minister put Aso and an already scandal-shaken Ministry of Finance in the media's spotlight once again. While Fukuda was the accused and he kept straight out denying what there was actual audio proof of, the criticism was directed towards Aso and the ministry as a whole.

Even with all the critique against the Ministry of Finance for their handling of the case, the media frenzy died within two weeks of Fukuda's resignation from his post as finance vice minister. Yet, the case did spark a discussion about the vulnerable positions reporters, especially female reporters, are put in during private interviews that are standard with high profile interviewees. Sadly, some of the responses to this problem can be seen as a step in the wrong direction. Chairman of the Japan Business Federation, Sakakibara Sadayuki, acknowledged the issue, but followed up with an implication that women interviewing men on a one-on-one basis could lead to misunderstandings, and as most interviewees are men, the solution might be to not let female reporters do such interviews at all.¹²⁵ Such comments, especially from men in higher positions, are often used in discussion regarding sexual harassment in working environment. A woman doing her job is too tempting for the men working around her, and instead of teaching the men how to behave the easiest solution is to remove the temptation. However, this way of thinking goes against Prime Minister Abe's plan for 'womenomics', a plan to increase the amount of women in the workforce in order to help the falling economy.

¹²⁵ Editorial. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (30.04.18)

6 Reactions

6.1 South Korea

In South Korea, the cases were all thoroughly followed up by the media, and the media did interviews with the involved and people around them in order to get all the facts into the light. It is easy to follow the stories from the beginning to the end through the news articles. It was interesting to see, however, whom the media focused on. In the case at the Prosecutor's Office, the media's focus was mostly on Seo herself, rather than her groper, Ahn Tae-gun. This might be because the sexual assault in itself was not as violent compared to the others (as the two others consisted of rape), and that what she really wanted to tell the public about was the abuse of authority done in the aftermath of her reporting it to her superior. It may also be that the accused did not hold an influential position in the society, making him more of a symptom of a bigger problem, rather than the problem itself. In the cases against Governor Ahn Hee-jung and Lee Youn-taek the perpetrators were both powerful, top of the pyramid, bosses of their institution, and both had to give up their position days after the first accusations against them. Their cases also became high profile criminal court cases, where the public, especially women's rights activists, demanded a proper punishment for their crimes.

Furthermore, the victims in the art industry had the support not only from those among them, but most of the public as well. Theatergoers gathered outside the theater in protest of the pyramid hierarchy within the theater society, and Lee's theater troupe was disbanded the day of his resignation. The accusations within the art world tended to have more visible reactions as well, such as art exhibitions being taken down, TV-shows being cancelled, and discussions about removing famous writers from curriculum in schools.

Ahn Hee-jung resigned from his office as Governor, and lost his place in the KDP. Even as a potential president candidate, the political party deemed the damage too severe. In Seo's case, President Moon was quick to officially show his support, demanding an investigation of the Prosecutor's Offices as a whole, and saying that any issues brought to light by the MeToo-movement must be dealt with properly. However, Seo is still fighting for her accusation of power abuse at the Prosecutor's Office, as Ahn Tae-gun walked free this January.

It is not to say, however, that the cases did not meet any opposition. Ahn Hee-Jung's wife claimed that Kim had been after her husband since the beginning, acting almost like a

stalker at times, and she has faced multiple accusations of being a ‘gold digger’. And while most of the theater society has been standing up for the victims, there are some who say that they experienced the same, but never thought of it as an act of sexual assault, and that such power abuse was just how the theater had always been. Some accused through #MeToo, like actor and theater teacher Jo Min-ki, took their own life, and the public on the internet was not slow to blame the MeToo accusers for murder. Nevertheless, the accusations against Jo Min-ki seems to be true, as he confessed and apologized to the victims in his suicide letter.¹²⁶ The newspapers, however, have been pretty consistent in staying neutral, or siding slightly with the victims. There have been few articles on men who feel affronted by the movement in general, and the media generally gives a picture of many angry women (and some men), fighting against the sexual violence that the patriarchal society so far have ignored.

6.2 Japan

The MeToo movement never seemed to properly gain the media’s attention in Japan. In the case of Ito Shiori, the newspapers did not really report anything about her case until December 2018. While she is known as the face of MeToo in Japan, especially outside of Japan, her connection to the movement has more to do with her book launching in October 2017, which is when the movement started in the U.S., as well as the international media attention her story got. While she had publicly fought for justice since 2016, the news media did not pick up the case until 2018, when she decided to file for a civil complaint. The reactions to her case by those who knew about the case from the beginning, however, was devastating. Her case might just have been one sexual violence case among many others, but her rapist’s connection to Prime Minister Abe led to some harsh bashing from the political side. Still, her case did not gain much media attention until later.

Vice-Finance Minister Fukuda might have been forced to resign from his position, but he still denies all accusations, there have been no investigation, and he had to face no judicial punishment for his behavior. Although he has a high position within the ministry, the government and Prime Minister Abe have stayed quiet about the case. Finance Minister Aso have stayed promptly on Fukuda’s side, and while he has been criticized for his way of handling the case, Aso and the Ministry of Finance have faced more serious scandals over the last few years, overshadowing this issue efficiently. While the case has be mentioned in

¹²⁶ Yoon, S. *Korea JoongAng Daily*. (10.03.18)

relation to MeToo, the hashtag was not used when the victim spoke up, and most of the news articles about Fukuda does not mention it at all.

Although it is not a direct reaction to or part of MeToo movement in itself, there has been a growing number of demonstration in cities on the 11th of every month since April 2019. The Flower Demonstration (フラワーデモ) was originally a protest against several cases of rape where the perpetrator was found not guilty, especially one where a father who abused his daughter.¹²⁷ The demonstration have slowly spread through Japan, and for each month the demonstration is held in more and more places, gathering more and more people. While the MeToo-movement never properly caught on in Japan, these demonstrations are proof that people are reacting to the injustice that victims of sexual violence suffer. While the demonstration is not connected to any specific MeToo case, the protestors usually hold signs such as #MeToo, #WithYou, #KuToo, or other statements regarding women's sexual rights, and hope to change the criminal legal system in regards to sexual violence.¹²⁸

MeToo in itself never got the media's proper attention in Japan, and cases like Fukuda, while reported, were not marked with MeToo. These Flower Demonstrations, however, seem to receive more media cover for each protest held, and it does not look as if they will stop any time soon.

¹²⁷ Unknown. *Asahi Shimbun*. (17.04.19)

¹²⁸ #KuToo is a hashtag used in the fight against the mandatory use of high-heeled shoes for women in Japan.

7 Political backdrop

Since the middle of the twentieth century, both South Korea and Japan have faced a rapid modernization, as well as democratization.¹²⁹ To handle the economic decrease and the overgrowing amount of elderly in the countries, both governments started implementing more of the female population into the workforce beginning in the late nineteen-nineties, as a way to decrease the need for foreign workers. How involved in the fight for gender equality are the current leaders of the countries? Can the reason behind why President Moon and Prime Minister Abe reacted so differently to MeToo tell us something about why MeToo became more of a movement in South Korea contra Japan?

7.1 President Moon

When Moon Jae-in ran for president he called himself the ‘feminist-president’. During his campaign, he promised that 30 percent of his party’s cabinet positions would go to women, and for the first time in South Korean history, this number has been reached.¹³⁰ When Moon was elected president in 2017, he was the first liberal president in over decade, and he was not shy with his liberal goals. More gender equality, lower wage gap, more welfare, better air quality and a cleansing of corruption left from the former presidency are only a few of his campaign promises.¹³¹ In addition, he wanted to change the presidency from a five-year, one term presidency, to a four-year, two-term presidency, which would make it possible for Moon to be re-elected in 2022.

While it is positive for the women’s rights activists in South Korea to have a president that support their fight for gender equality so openly, one cannot help but wonder if the MeToo movement, and the fact that it hit the Prosecutor’s Office, was a gift basket for President Moon. His quick response to Seo’s accusation, and the fact that he held a press conference to highlight his support was definitely good publicity. While the committee he sat up to control sexual harassment issues in public working environment could have been one of his plans from the beginning, Seo’s case gave him the back-up to push it through in a matter of days.

With one of Moon’s presidential campaign promises being that “anti-corruption

¹²⁹ Kang, J. S. (2017) p. 295

¹³⁰ Mobrand, E. (2019) p. 116

¹³¹ Unknown. *The Korea Herald*. (10.05.17)

activities will be sought in the public sector involving personnel processes of high-ranking government officials”¹³², the outing of a systematic sexist working environment at the Prosecutor’s Office gave him the opportunity to start this less than a year into his presidency. During his ‘MeToo press conference’, President Moon personally ordered the prosecutors to initiate a cultural reform, and that any perpetrators should be punished severely.¹³³ It is important to notice that the majority of the Prosecutor’s Office are conservative, and that President Moon’s government had wished for such a reform from the beginning.

The Korean Democratic Party (KDP) did not hold back in the case against Governor Ahn Hee-jung. Without waiting for any investigation to begin, Ahn was expelled from the KDP effective immediately the same day as he resigned from his position as governor. The party’s chairwoman posted on Facebook that as a member of the KDP and a mother of daughters she had no other choice, and that she is bracing herself for a change in gender culture.¹³⁴

7.2 Prime Minister Abe

When Prime Minister Abe and the LDP were reelected in 2012, they did so with ease. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) had sat at the throne for merely three years before the LDP won back the power. The DPJ took a huge blow after losing the election, and since then Japan has lacked any real political opponent against the LDP. Even with the low voting rate in Japan (between 50-60%), a monthly poll done by the NHK shows that half of Prime Minister Abe’s supporters vote for him simply due to lack of alternatives.¹³⁵ This means that the party’s highly conservative thought goes unchallenged, making it harder to push through changes like gender equality.

While a part of Abe’s plan to save the Japanese economy is called ‘womenomics’, it has little to do with the fight for actual gender equality, and more to do with the need for women in the workforce. With decreasing birthrate and a rapidly growing elder population, the nationalistic Japanese government chose to rely on their women, rather than importing foreign workers. Still, Abe’s promise to create a society where ‘all women can shine’ should create the opportunity for a more gender equal society as well.¹³⁶ In order to help women into

¹³² Unknown. *The Korea Herald*. (10.05.17)

¹³³ Seong, Y., & K. Kim. *Hankyoreh* (31.01.18)

¹³⁴ Kim, S. *Korea Joong Ang Daily*. (07.03.18)

¹³⁵ Kingston, J. (2018) p. 881

¹³⁶ Song, J. (2015) p. 113

the workforce the government promised several policies to support them, such as help with childcare, more women in white-collar jobs, and more women in higher positions. They even push companies to adopt a more active female-friendly human resource management.¹³⁷ This should have been a good tool to fight issues such as sexual harassment at work. Even so, as can be noted by Abe's silence on the topic of sexual harassment, there seems to be an unwillingness to acknowledge this as a cultural problem that needs to be dealt with in order for a diverse workforce to function properly. By simply making it a *josei mondai* (女性問題, women's problem), they are not only ignoring the issue, but consequently disregarding half of the Japanese population as well. Even in the case of Fukuda, one of Abe's own ministers, he kept quiet and asked the Ministry of Finance to efficiently deal with it on their own. While Fukuda resigned, it held no consequences for his membership in the party.

¹³⁷ Song, J. (2015) p. 125

8 ‘Sontaku’ and Freedom of Press

Freedom of press is often used as a factor when evaluating how democratic a country is.^{138 139} Freedom of press, and in extension freedom of speech, can easily give insight to how controlling the government is. Scholars Christine Kalenborn and Christian Lessmann argues that in order to control corruption, both governmental and private, a certain degree of press freedom is needed, and vice versa¹⁴⁰ This part will give an insight to the development of press freedom in South Korea and Japan over the last couple of decades.

There is no direct translation of the word ‘sontaku’ (忖度) in English, but in short it can mean to ‘guess’, in this situation to ‘guess what would make your superior most pleased’.¹⁴¹ In recent years, this word has become highly relevant when talking about freedom of press in Japan. The Abe government experienced several scandals, especially during their first years, revealed by a few brave investigative news media. Over the years Abe answered by instigating several initiatives that, without straight out censoring the media, muzzled its voice. In 2013 it became illegal to access any governmental documents that the government did not want in public for up to sixty years after they were written, and the penalty can be up to ten years in prison. Furthermore, in 2014, Abe appointed a new head of the national broadcasting company (NHK), who had not prior experience with media, but knew how to follow the ‘Pyongyang rules’ (the media cannot say ‘left’ if the government says ‘right’).¹⁴²

It is not a coincidence that the newspaper that had most articles about MeToo picked for this research was *Asahi Shimbun*. While all three newspapers are considered liberal, *Asahi Shimbun* is known for pushing the government’s limits, which has gotten the news agency in trouble several times. Conservative, pro-Abe media such as *Sankei*, *Yomiuru*, and *Nikkei* have used every opportunity to discredit *Asahi*, especially on their reporting of comfort women, with President Abe’s open support.¹⁴³ Although *Asahi*’s reporters attempt to do investigative journalism, the financial threat of being sued for defamation has grown over the last years, and the stories are often stopped by the editors or publishers in fear of opposing the government. This self-censorship to not ‘step on any toes’ is probably one of the reasons why it is so hard to find MeToo stories in Japanese news outlets.

¹³⁸ Galston, W. A. (2003)

¹³⁹ Carolan, E. (2014)

¹⁴⁰ Kalenborn, C., & C. Lessmann. (2013)

¹⁴¹ Story, G. <https://journal.accj.or.jp/sontaku/>

¹⁴² Kingston, J. (2018) p. 882

¹⁴³ Kingston, J. (2018) p. 884

Reading about the Fukuda case in *Asahi Shimbun* makes it seem like the reporter went to another news agency to stay anonymous, and that the rest of the press had her back. However, what is not informed about is that the reporter had first gone to her superior at *Asahi TV* with her recordings, but were scolded when she wanted to air a report about it. The risk of losing the private access to the Ministry of Finance through the *kisha club* (記者, the press club) was too great to expose Fukuda's sexual harassment, which was actually a well-known secret among the news media.¹⁴⁴ *Asahi TV* could not afford to break the scandal, but once it was public, they had no problem openly supporting their reporter.

Due to the military rule, the media in South Korea was highly regulated and controlled up until the 1990's. To work around this control, reporters and activists started using other means to tell the news that the conservative, controlled official newspaper would not tell.¹⁴⁵ As the Internet became available for more and more people, these freestanding journalists and activist moved their platform there, through blogs and news sites. This group of *citizen journalists* quickly grew and pulled readers from the conservative newspapers, until the newspapers were forced to report more liberal topics to stay in the competition. The citizen journalist were given the protected legal status as Internet journalists in 2005. While the freedom of press in South Korea has been varying in degree the last two decades, it has seen a considerable improvement since the Moon presidency started in 2017.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Kingston, J. (2018) p. 889

¹⁴⁵ Kern, T., & S. Nam. (2009)

¹⁴⁶ Reporters Without Borders. S.v. South Korea. <https://rsf.org/en/south-korea> (accessed 24.05.20)

9 Discussion

9.1 The Cases

As presented here, it is clear that the MeToo movement hit the two countries very differently, and while both countries are far down on the Global Gender Gap Report, there are several differences in the current government's attitudes towards sexual harassment. The cases chosen for this thesis were chosen because they are somewhat alike each other. The cases of Seo and Fukuda are both cases of sexual harassment at work where the victims have tried to go the legal way, but end up becoming victims of the hierarchal system of their industry. Their cases are both connected to the government, and the outcome of the cases relied on how seriously the government chose to react. However, there is a stark contrast in how the media covered these two cases. Being the first to really break the silence, Seo's case attracted the media's attention even before President Moon declared his support. It did not seem like the media were afraid to take up the story, and they did not seem afraid to step on any toes while investigating it. Furthermore, President Moon's open support for the movement a couple of days later gave the media a direct 'go ahead' to keep reporting cases of MeToo.

As for the case of Fukuda, one must not forget that while the liberal media covered the case after the story was public, the reporter was censored by her own news agency, *Asahi TV*, even as *Asahi* is considered to be one of the most liberal news agencies in Japan. With the *kisha club*'s (the press club) system of personal one-on-one interviews with politicians as the only way for insight into the government, the news agency chose to self-censor a possible scandal story, rather than risk losing the opportunity for information. This *kisha club* method and self-censoring is one of the reasons why Japan rank as no. 66 on the 2020 World Press Freedom Index, twenty-four places behind South Korea.¹⁴⁷ It is also important to note that, while the Fukuda case is known as one of Japan's few major MeToo cases, the newspapers themselves never refer to it as such. This might be a compromise of covering the story, in a way of following the 'sontaku' rule: the scandal is already broken, but by not calling it a part of MeToo, we report this as an individual case, and not a part of a global movement or a systematic problem, and we are not criticizing the government *too much*.

However, the support that Seo and the anonymous reporter received were, at least as reported in the media, not that different (excluding President Moon's support for the

¹⁴⁷ Global World Press Freedom Index 2020. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> (accessed 24.05.20)

moment). In Seo's case, female prosecutors immediately came forward to support their colleague and back up the claim that this was not a singular case of harassment, but a systematic one. The media were also quick to obtain the women's rights organizations opinion on the matter, and the media overall seemed to be on Seo's side. In Fukuda's case, the media were also at the reporter's side, however, only after the scandal was broken and the Ministry of Finance had asked the reporter to come forward. Still, taking this as an attack on reporters' privacy and security, the media stayed on the reporter's side and her right for anonymity. She also received support from the outside, when a group of lawyers handed in a petition for the ministry to retract their demand for the name of the reporter, with over 27 000 signatures, indicating that her case had indeed gained support on a grassroots level.¹⁴⁸

The case of Kim and Governor Ahn Hee-jung was probably a thorn in the side for the KDP, but it might as easily have been a blessing in disguise. While cases of sexual harassment, or in this case sexual violence, can lead to major problems for a political party, especially one that is run by a self-proclaimed 'feminist president', the KDP's quick way of excluding him from the party might have tipped the case in a favorable direction for the party. While one might argue that the party were too quick to judge Ahn, as they pushed him out of the party before a criminal complaint had even been filed, this dismissal probably saved the party in several ways. First of all, it showed that the ruling party stood their stance on sexual misconduct, and would not tolerate it even within their own walls. In addition to backing up President Moon's earlier open support for Seo's case, this also stated that KDP is not the corrupt party that ruled before them, ticking off yet another one of their election campaign promises. Secondly, the dismissal removed the party as a 'guilty' party in the situation, contrary to what is seen in the recent sexual harassment cases against American politicians, where the parties as a whole and their political standpoint have come under question as well. The KDP were simply victim to having a bad seed among their peers, not even taking into consideration how that person was a former presidential candidate, or asking how such a thing could happen in their work force. By reacting to the accusations the way they did, the KDP managed to play the role of both the hero, and partly the victim, living up to their campaign promises while at the same time saving their own skin.

In comparison, the LDP's reaction to the accusations against Fukuda was the complete opposite. Rather than taking any responsibility, or even defending Fukuda as their own, the ruling party and government simply asked their Ministry of Finance to clean up their mess.

¹⁴⁸ Nakamura, K. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (20.04.18)

With the Ministry of Finance already dealing with several other scandals, and Prime Minister Abe's government having suffered corruption accusations, it might not be so surprising that a sexual harassment accusation did not reach high up on the priority list. Still, the case could have been handled in a more responsible way had the Ministry of Finance only taken it seriously and started an investigation right away. Due to the other scandals circling the ministry and the government, it is even possible that the ministry might have gotten away with a superficial investigation and a small punishment for Fukuda, maybe a change in the vice minister position, as the media does not have full access to the documents. Instead, Fukuda's denial and Finance Minister Aso's stubborn loyalty to his colleague put the ministry in a position where the media industry demanded answers and actions. As Fukuda still denies the accusations to this day, one can suspect that his voluntary resignation was not voluntary at all, but a simple solution for the ministry to remove the problem. Still, the LDP in itself took no stand in the case, neither for nor against, and did nothing to change his political position within the party. As the news agencies in Japan are highly 'encouraged' not to write anything against the government or the ruling party, the LDP managed to stay out of harm's way by simply ignoring the issue all together. Still, the Prime Minister's silence on the issue of MeToo says just as much as President Moon's support, that sexual harassment is not an issue to the leader of the country, and it is not a criminal offence.

While the Japanese government kept 'neutral' in the case of vice minister Fukuda, they did acknowledge the risk for journalists meeting with high positioned officials on a one-on-one basis. An emergency anti-sexual harassment plan was drawn up, stating that all Cabinet Office officials need to attend training sessions against sexual harassment.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, they opened up a forum where the press could air their concerns, however, this measure have been criticized by the press. The media is afraid that any concern or complain against the one-on-one interview method could lead to restrictions on interviews, further leading to more restrictions around governmental documents and information.¹⁵⁰

The case of Ito Shiori might be a bit tricky as a MeToo case. First of all, her fight for justice, and later publicity, started years before the MeToo movement made its way across the globe. While it was a lucky coincidence that her book '*Black Box*' was released around the same time MeToo started up in Hollywood, her story had already gained attention in other countries. Second, Ito did not finally get the courage to speak up about her story because of

¹⁴⁹ Tanaka, H. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (06.06.18)

¹⁵⁰ Aoshima, K. *Mainichi Shimbun*. (20.06.18)

MeToo, she had already held a press conference about it back in 2015, although only one media picked up her story.¹⁵¹ Still, her story fits right in with the other MeToo stories of power abuse and struggle to report, and although unplanned, she gave MeToo in Japan a face. While the lower court's decision was appealed by Yamaguchi, her victory in the lower court might signal a final closure after five years of struggle. Even so, it does not seem like Ito's fight against sexual harassment and sexual violence in Japan is finished. She has reportedly spoken at several of the *Flower Demonstrations*, and have been in contact with women's organizations both for support in her own case, and to give the activists a 'face' to follow.

Although Ito's latest victory in court might count as a step in the right direction, Yamaguchi's claim that the court's decision was compromised by pressure from the international press was probably at least half-true. As her book, and later documentary for the English BBC, gained international attention, the pressure on Japan to legally handle the case grew with it. It is significantly harder to ignore a case where the story has already become a book, a documentary, and the victim the face of the 'hidden sexual violence problem in Japan'. With the media's attention worldwide, the wrong court decision could cause an uproar among women's rights organization both nationally and internationally.

As with the case against Fukuda, Prime Minister Abe stayed suspiciously silent in the case against Yamaguchi. While this case did not directly involve the political party, the question around Yamaguchi's connections to the Prime Minister in regards to his interrupted arrest, was not an appreciated stab against an already corruption scandal struck government. Yamaguchi denied having used any of these sorts of connection, but the Prime Minister's Office stayed quiet, neither admitting nor denying the suspicion.

Where Seo's story, and every MeToo story after that, were eagerly eaten up by the media in South Korea, both the case of Ito and the case against Fukuda were met with reluctance by the Japanese news agencies. However, the reasons might not be the same. In Fukuda's case, *Asahi Shimbun* were afraid of the backlash and possible lawsuit they could have faced if they decided to break their reporter's story to the public, however; they still backed her up once the story was broken. On the other hand, the unwillingness to write about Ito's story could be because of the hierarchal system within the media industry. The motivation behind it could be viewed as the media's need to protect their own. Yamaguchi is a famous journalist with a chief position in an overseas office on a Japanese news agency. Ito was a fresh out of college reporter who was looking for a possibility to further her career. In

¹⁵¹ Ito, S. *Politico*. (04.01.18)

the ‘sontaku’ culture within the media industry in Japan, it makes more sense to protect the famous, respected journalist, than a journalist that has no real footing in the industry yet.

Another interesting aspect is that fact that MeToo never reached the art industry in Japan, at least not according to the newspapers. In South Korea, high profile artists have been taken down across the industry, from the theater world to the literature, from the musicians to the TV-shows. On the other hand, in Japan, the celebrities of the art industry have stayed quiet. Consequently, there have been no big names that could interest the media, and no one to start an upheaval of the power abuse within their industry.

9.2 Women’s Movement against Patriarchal Hierarchy

The issue of sexual harassment is by no means a new or unknown issue in neither South Korea nor Japan. Spycams, groping on public transportation and a general chauvinistic attitudes are some of the problems women in these countries face on a daily basis. While it might seem like the MeToo movement was not adopted by solid women’s rights activist network in Japan, it did. Looking at *Asahi Shimbun*’s forum and opinion articles, there is no doubt that the hashtag has been used frequently on social media in Japan, and looking at the *Flower Demonstrations*, it has played a role in protests. They even developed it further, using hashtags such as #WithYouJapan and #KuToo. However, it seems like the actual impact of #MeToo never hit further than the grassroots. On one hand, this could be because of the disunity among the women’s rights organizations, and that the organizations connected to the current government would rather prioritize other gender equality issues more in line with the ‘womenomics’ Prime Minister Abe is rooting for.

On the other hand, it could be hindered by the suspiciousness connected to western feminism. The Confucian way of thinking of gender has become an important discussion topic among scholars dealing with feminism in Asia. While some argue that the Confucian patriarchy is the root of the gender inequality in their countries, some, like scholar Huh Ra-keum, have argued that the Confucian thought can be reconstructed in the idea of feminism. The argument for this is that Confucianism has survived hundreds of years by adapting to the change of times, and that the same should be possible with the introduction of gender equality.¹⁵² The idea that western feminist theory will not work properly in the east is used by scholars and politicians on both sides of the gender equality discussion, and there are upsides

¹⁵² Lee, S. W. (2005)

and downsides in both cases.¹⁵³ It is understandable that Asian feminist scholars wish for more Asian women studies, and in turn Asian feminism, a route to gender equality that can coexist with their own culture. However, this argument against western feminism could also be used as a way to disregard feminism as whole, and some have gone as far as saying that could possibly destroy the national traditions and cultures. This nationalistic resistance against outside ideology could be why the Japanese government have yet to take a proper stance on the MeToo issue, and why newspapers avoid connecting sexual harassment cases with #MeToo, but rather use ‘Japanese expressions’ like *sekuhara*.¹⁵⁴

While the family systems in South Korea and Japan separates the society by gender, it also creates a separation between public and private. Especially in Japan, this *uchi to soto* (内と外, inside and outside¹⁵⁵) idea, has brought a blatant difference in who a person is at home compared to who they are at work or in public. Consequently, the idea that some topics are not to be spoken of in public is still strong in these two countries, and sexuality is one such topic. While this separation between public and private has decreased over the last decades, it is an occurrence found in both countries, and do not really explain why the MeToo-movement became so big in South Korea, but not in Japan.

9.3 Politics

The political factor is not negligible for the big difference of the impact of MeToo in South Korea and Japan, especially in how it affected South Korea. The political shift brought forward by Moon and the KDP in 2017, mean South Korea has gained a government who is reaching for change and a better society – in the liberal direction. While South Korea is still horribly far down on the Global Gender Gap Report, ranked 108th out of 153 countries on the 2020 report, the country has managed to climb seven spots since the last report from 2018, passing Japan on its way up. One could say that the coincidence of the political change in South Korea and the arrival of MeToo was a series of fortunate events, on both sides. Supporting the movement and cleaning up the Prosecutor’s Office gave President Moon a ‘freebee’ to execute some of his campaign promises, while consequently gaining the votes from female voters. The 2020 Parliamentary election ended with 163 out of 253 seats to the

¹⁵³ Lee, S. W. (2017)

¹⁵⁴ Ironically, *sekuhara* is an abbreviation of the word *sekushuaru harasumento*, which is simply the Japanese spelling of sexual harassment. Still, *sekuhara* is used more than the original Japanese word 性的嫌がらせ, and is now considered by most as a proper Japanese word.

¹⁵⁵ Uchi to soto can also be used to describe the separation of Japan from the rest of the world, or people who belong vs. people who does not.

KDP, and a record number of female seats.¹⁵⁶

Japan's Prime Minister Abe's stand on feminism can be traced back to his leadership in the discussion against the earlier, more proactive, version of the Gender Equal Society Law in 2005. While Prime Minister Abe have spent the last couple of years working on involving more of the female population into the workforce, his political goals are not gender equality, but including more women in the workforce while keeping the conservative family. While President Moon gained voters for his feminist support, voters that his party is dependent on for re-election, Prime Minister Abe's absence from the issue might have kept his conservative supporters happy. While LDP does not have any real opponents, and Prime Minister Abe is getting closer to becoming the longest sitting Prime Minister in Japan, there is no guarantee that the party will not exchange him for someone else, should he fail to lead the politics in the party's interest. In contrast to South Korea's seven spots climb on the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, Japan fell eleven spots in the same period, from 110th to 121st place.

9.4 Freedom of Press

Furthermore, the political influence on the media in the two countries are indeed crucial in this research. While South Korea is still ranked as low as 42 out 180 countries, freedom of press has improved significantly after the political change, climbing almost thirty spots from its lowest in 2016 (70th out of 180).¹⁵⁷ While certain topics, like North Korea, are still controlled, and defamation by press is still punishable by up to seven years in prison, the general press freedom in South Korea seems to thrive under Moon's presidency. Even without such an improvement, the media would probably still be allowed to write about MeToo, as it fits in under Moon's feminist politics. Furthermore, the citizen journalists put pressure on the traditional newspapers to write about more liberal topics, lessening the difference between conservative and liberal news media to some extent.

With Prime Minister Abe and LDP being victims to several scandal disclosures in the media, the press freedom in Japan has gone the opposite way of South Korea. From ranking 53rd out of 180 in 2013, Japan now rank as 66th, although they had fallen as far as 72nd in 2016/27. The *kisha club* makes it difficult for freelance journalists and international press to gain access to high ranked officials in the government, and the consequences for being too critical of the government has led to a sort of self-censoring in the more liberal news agencies,

¹⁵⁶ Ock, H. *The Korea Herald*. (16.04.20)

¹⁵⁷ Reporters without border. *World Press Freedom Index*. s.v. South Korea. <https://rsf.org/en/south-korea>

forcing them to choose their fights (stories) wisely. Furthermore, the discrediting of liberal news agencies led by pro-Abe ones makes the press industry in Japan highly polarized, and the Japanese public seem overly tolerant with a coopted media, and how it is manipulated.¹⁵⁸ In addition, the *kisha club* the citizen press in Japan from having the same effect on the traditional newspapers as in South Korea, as the citizen journalist does not have access to the governmental interviews. This secure readers for the traditional newspapers, even as internet sites such as *BuzzFeed Japan* have become more popular.

Any social movement or political protest needs more than just participants; they need recipients to agree or disagree with their stance to be able to start proper discussion. To get those recipients they need people to see and hear them (and in this case, read them), and without it the movement will only be visible for those who seek it. While the political shift in South Korea is a lucky coincidence for the MeToo movement, it could only spread as far as it has with the help of the media. The media's attention to the movement and hunger to follow up on the cases made it obvious, even to those uninterested, that MeToo hit hard in South Korea. However, the movement stagnated in Japan without the media to push it to the front line, forcing it to stay in the category of digital activism, rather than a social movement.

It is still too early to say if the MeToo-movement has had any lasting effects on societies around the world. Still, according to a survey done by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions done in 2019, more than half of the respondents answered that they had received less sexual jokes or sexual harassment after the MeToo-movement started than before. However, the survey also found that this was mostly in occupations that are generally more gender neutral, while in occupations and industries that are still prone to be gender discriminatory, not much has changes. This includes workplaces where work roles are still divided by gender, or companies that have many female employees, but few in leading positions.¹⁵⁹ This might imply that even though the MeToo-movement in South Korea has been very visible in the newspaper, very few things have actually changed on the floor of the companies.

¹⁵⁸ Kingston, J. (2018) p. 883

¹⁵⁹ Park, D. *Hankyoreh*. (15.04.19)

10 Conclusion

The three cases from South Korea and the two cases from Japan discussed in this thesis showed a stark difference in the reporting in the newspaper of the MeToo-movement in the two countries. After prosecutor Seo broke the silence in South Korea, the media have eagerly reported every MeToo accusation featuring a high profile person. The updates on the stories were frequent and consistent, and not hard to find. In Japan, on the other hand, few of the MeToo-stories broke the news, and few high profile people spoke up. The stories that were reported in the news, such as the case of rape victim Ito Shiori or the case against vice-Finance Minister Fukuda, were only covered due to additional circumstances, such as international pressure or demands for the victim to come forward. Furthermore, the art industry in Japan has remained silent on the topic, not providing any ‘role models’ for people to rally behind, while the art industry in South Korea experienced an upheaval against a system that sexually exploit women in vulnerable positions.

With President Moon raising to power in 2017, the South Korean politics have turn towards a more liberal path, and with Moon calling himself a ‘feminist president’, providing a government that not only accepted the notion of MeToo, but openly supported it. As the MeToo-movement seemingly flourished with President Moon’s support, the movement somewhat helped the president by providing an excuse to rapidly execute some of his more liberal election campaign promises. On the other hand, Prime Minister Abe’s government in Japan can unchallenged keep up with their conservative politics, with no liberal party big enough to run for governmental election. Prime Minister Abe’s ‘womenomics’ plan to get more women into the workforce is not necessarily a step towards gender equality, but an attempt to strengthen the workforce and economy in a country with a rapidly aging population and declining birthrate without the help of foreign workers.

Since Moon became president in 2017, the freedom of press has improved significantly. While the freedom of press had decrease because of corruption within the conservative presidencies preceding Moon, Moon’s governments fight against the corruption consequently improved the freedom of press in order to create a more transparent picture of the state. In contrast, the LDP government in Japan has suffered so many scandals and cases of corruption revealed by the press, that they reacted by taking several steps in order to decrease the freedom of press over the last decade. The concept of ‘sontaku’, and the self-censoring done in fear of upsetting the government keep even liberal newspapers like *Asahi*

Shimbun from doing too investigative reports or criticizing the government. Furthermore, the *kisha club* ensures that the new news outlet, such as the citizen journalism seen in South Korea, are unable to gather official information and news, keeping the public dependent on traditional newspaper for certain information. Furthermore, the common need for a paid account for reading newspapers online in Japan make people less inclined to check out several newspapers on a daily basis, giving the readers less variation in reading material.

Lastly, the separation of the genders through the family systems in both South Korea and Japan, as well as the separation between private and public might explain why MeToo-stories was met with resistance. Still, this does not explain why the countries reacted so differently. If anything, this should have subdued the movement in South Korea to the level it stayed at in Japan.

While the newspapers in South Korea promoted MeToo as something huge and life changing, the survey showed that improvement had only occurred in industries where gender discrimination originally had been a smaller issue. In the industries where gender discrimination is prominent, there was almost no change.

It is still too early to see if the MeToo-movement truly has changed anything in the two countries, or if the awareness raised with it is temporarily. While this thesis only show fractions of the reasons for the MeToo-movements effect in the two countries, it still gives an inclination regarding how the reception of global movements can be affected by the political rule, freedom of press, and other underlying reasons in the society. It also shows how strong victims in these situations must be, and how important the public's reaction can be in order for a significant change to from such a movement.

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Appendix

These are the newspaper articles used for this thesis. They are divided by paper, starting with the three South Korean ones, then the three Japanese ones, and lastly other sources.

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