

I don't remember what exactly caused my interest in the 2014 Sewol Ferry sinking. But ever since then I have been fascinated with how the government could get away with something so abhorrent. As I have grown older and lost this youthful naivety, I have become increasingly interested in different governments and their respective corruptive natures. Despite the wealth of corruption surrounding me here in the UK, it is East Asia that I have always circled back to in my studies.

My mother lived in Japan for many years before I was born and hearing about their culture and politics always sparked my interest as a child. Now, as an International History and Politics, viewing East Asia as a whole entity has allowed me to view the interactions between actors throughout history. This has led me back to my interest in South Korean politics.

With the current Hallyu Wave occurring, and K-Pop and K-Dramas becoming increasingly popular, there has also been a new interest in South Korean culture. This culture is often glamourised online, which erases all the South Korean people that suffer at the hands of government policy. I feel it important to document the direct effects of discourse and policy on under-protected groups. All too often, governments are able to make unaffected people forget tragic events, yet what about those still suffering in the aftermath? Throughout my research, I wanted to clearly show how the South Korean government have created a system where different lives are assigned different values. Yet, I also still wanted to include the youth in my research. Therefore I settled on the title: *The Economy of Life: Investigating the Symbiotic Relationship between the young far-right men and conservative governments in South Korea and its subsequent impact on values of lives.*

The Research

I began my research in mid-July with a much different research question in mind. I originally wanted to investigate the relationship between the South Korean government and the youth. With this question I knew I wanted to discuss two tragic events in South Korean history, being that of the 2014 Sewol Ferry Sinking and the 2022 Itaewon Crowd Crush. I wanted to see how these events shaped not just public opinion but more specifically the youth's opinions.

However, through talking with my supervisor, we agreed that the youth was far too broad a category to even attempt to tackle within the six-week timeframe. Therefore, I had to narrow my scope to a sub-category. Thinking of a new group to focus on did not come quickly, yet midway through my research, I kept stumbling across this same online circle of young men in South Korea. Not specific to any area of the country, instead residing on the Ilbe Storehouse website. After this discovery, my research project had a much more succinct focus which allowed me to progress in a consistent direction.

Yet, it was not to be so easy. A mere 48 hours after deciding the far-right young men, specifically Ilbe users, would be a research focus, the site decides to go down. It was inaccessible to me for almost two weeks. I had already completed so much research into this specific group and I finally felt that my project was all coming together, therefore I could not just scrap this idea. I instead turned my focus towards academic journals and news articles. This would turn out to be exceptionally beneficial to my research as it forced me to escape the rabbit hole that Ilbe created for me. I would spend hours on this site reading the most revolting posts about women, victims of tragedies, LGBTQ+ community, and so many other groups. This resulted in me knowing what these young men felt but not exactly *why*.

Misogyny is by no means a novel concept in South Korea. No corners of the earth are left unmarked by the oppression of women. However, in each area of the world, this misogyny manifests itself in a unique way. No single baby is born with an innate hatred, they are conditioned to form these vile opinions. Through my research, I was able to see just why the young men of South Korea had such a vehement hatred towards women and why they were so open about this. It was the direct result of government policy, mainly that of Conservative governments. Academic journals and articles allowed me to see this side to the story and I saw my essay almost fall into place.

I won't discuss my research content much more and you can read that when I finally read through my essay without changing every other sentence!

Impact

The impact of my research as I mentioned before was mainly to ensure that the effects of government policy in were made public. Though I am aware my reach will not be exceptionally great, just knowing that I have made efforts to make this documented and publicly so, I feel as though I have made my desired impact.

All too frequently, governments can get away with their policies that negatively impact under-protected groups as they can throw a new shiny proposal in front of the faces of the public as if they are magpies. Therefore, it is important to record their actions to ensure people cannot forget. If not directly affected by a tragedy, it is normal to not remember it. But there are some who have to wake up every day with this weight of injustice on them. I believe it is a person's duty to ensure that these people are not the ones who have to fight for their justice and equality. This is what I try and show through my research.

As humans we want to care for one another and work together as a community, but successive leaders have throughout history have caused us to view each other as competitors. With my research I hope to provoke those who engage to reflect on their own actions and how they have enabled precisely what the government wants us to do – compete. At the core of my research is my desire for humankind to stop this malicious cycle of hierarchy.

Personal Impact

Following on from this, my research has allowed me to reflect on my own actions in my day-to-day life. It has caused me to analyse the way I act and how I am doing exactly for what I stand against. Yet it has also made me find more empathy for privileged groups that previously I held only anger towards. Now, I understand more why they think the way they do, and how a lot of this has been drilled into them from a young age, practically indoctrinated. Therefore, I now view educating and conversations as the best way to tackle these issues, not just solely frustrations channelled into almost-rage.

It has also caused me to know exactly what I want to do going forward in my life. I have always known I wanted to be lawyer from a worryingly early age, yet now I have a more specific goal in mind.

Throughout my research, it became apparent that a lot of these problems could be avoided with more internet safety laws. Cyber-crime in South Korea is much more notable than in other countries. *Molka* is when a hidden-camera is installed, almost always with the aim of capturing women in

vulnerable positions. These cameras can be placed in public toilets, changing rooms, hotels, and even in victim's own homes without their knowledge. However, these crimes are not punished anywhere near enough. The low fines are sometimes never enforced, and jail time is rare. In addition to this, to have a video of yourself in a vulnerable position to be taken off the internet, you have to usually pay. Meaning in the end, the victim is paying more than the perpetrator.

This has caused me to find that laws in almost every country do not enable to victim to find their justice and has made me find my clear career pathway in cybersecurity law. Women and children are the main targets of such crimes and a career defending these groups in a new way would be exceptionally rewarding.

Supervisor Comments (Dr Jieun Kim, School of Languages, Cultures and Societies)

Lizzie has shown terrific work ethics throughout the six-week research period, showing both independent research skills and constructive incorporation of feedback. Starting from the topic she feels passionate about – the injustice against the Sewol Ferry and Itaewon disaster victims, Lizzie has gained a deeper understanding of the specific group (young far-right men) that played a significant role in shaping the public discourses and political dynamics around the disasters. She has identified and consulted a good number of literature, while shaping her own questions and understanding by looking closely at her chosen primary source of Ilbe website. She has also shown resilience in overcoming the challenges of language barriers and technical difficulties of website access through resourcefulness and flexibility. Lizzie is driven by a deep sense of duty for social justice, which I believe will serve her well to excel at her future career in law. I would encourage Lizzie to further hone her skills in analytical writing that help bring all the threads strongly back together (anti-feminist politics, cyberspace, disasters, value of life). I believe these skills of connecting the dots (pulling the threads together into a coherent and persuasive argument) will further propel Lizzie to make impactful changes, especially in this politically divisive era.