

Sociological and Futuristic Study on the trends of Social Quality in South Korea

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Abstract. This paper presents a sociological and futuristic vision of the development of social quality in South Korea. Social quality in 2011 and in 2020-inclusion, fairness, safety and creativity-is explained and prospected. According to the result of current surveys and delphi, among four elements, the problem of fairness is the most serious. If the value of competition and growth become only the value to be counted, there is an obvious danger of deterioration of fairness.

Keywords: Sociology, Futures Study, Social Quality, Inclusion, Fairness, Safety, Creativity Introduction

1. Introduction

This paper presents a sociological and futuristic vision of the development of social quality in South Korea. Before doing this study, I conducted a series of studies focused on the changes of social trends in South Korea, including 'South Korea 2030' (2007) and 'Quality of life of South Korea in 2030'. Based on the experience and knowledge from these studies, I tried to figure out in this study the changes of social quality in South Korea that are consistent with a new paradigm that this active society is experiencing. This study was also conducted to understand and forecast the shifts in progress of social quality.

This study has been conducted so that the overall aspects of social quality can be embraced. In the first part of the study, a trend analysis was comprehensively done by using statistical data and qualitative data concerning main elements of social quality which are inclusion, fairness, safety and creativity since the 1980s in order to figure out how social quality has changed and to forecast how it will change in the future. In the second part of the study, results of the survey conducted to forecast the changes of social quality in 2020 are presented with some suggestions for better social quality.

This study is important as a sociological analysis of social quality, an analysis little tried before in South Korea. The study does not stop with a short-run analysis but looks into future-oriented forecasting. It is surely very difficult to conduct such a study because we must deal with future facts and problems that we have not faced or experienced yet. Sociologists, in general, attempt to limit their theorizing and analyzing to past and present issue for which data is already available.

However, through this study, I tried to understand where social quality in South Korea stands and also to suggest what should be done in order to bring about a 'better' social quality in the future. In fact, what we call social quality is the basic aspect of the overall happiness of individuals living in a society which are inclusive, fair, safe and creative.

2. Conceptual Approach and Research Framework

The concept of social quality has different meanings and forms depending on the academic discipline and social context. So it is difficult, if not impossible, to generalize a concept of social quality. My intention in this study is not to debate the concept itself. But it is necessary to make an attempt to identity and classify some important elements of social quality at the beginning of the analysis.

In sociological sense, social quality is composed of four elements: inclusion, fairness, safety and creativity. Level of inclusion is determined by how much a society is open to different value, different class,

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different race and people. Fairness of a society largely depends on how much fair competition is guaranteed. Safety concerns population problem (low rate of birth), economic crisis, national security, energy crisis and environmental problem. Creativity is determined by how much a society is ready for nurturing creative individuals.

These four elements of social quality are closed interconnected in virtuous cycle, individuals who do not worry about their safety condition tend to be more inclusive. In safe and fair society, people can be more creative thanks to better opportunities given to manifest their potentiality. Inclusion and fairness contribute for overcoming collectivism-one of serious problems of Korean society. If people are ready to accept different values, and to participate in fair competition, society will be more safe and creative.

3. Social quality: From Present to Future

This part of the study provides a comprehensive look at social quality in Korean society.

The study developed the trend change of social quality using data of the National Statistical Office (KOSTAT) and the Korean Social Science Data and Literature (KOSSADA). Although the data collected in this study were limited because of the difficulty in collection, they represent well enough the overall change of the main elements in social quality. Here, indicators of Delphi conducted by Ministry of Strategy and Finance in Aug. 2011 are also used (The scale of indicator is 0-10.).

First, the level of inclusion of Korean people on Southeast Asian culture is 3.36/10. It is expected to increase from 3.36 in 2011 to 5.48 in 2020. The main factor that will produce the change is the change of population structure. South Korea is suffering from low rate of birth and lack of laborers especially in industrial area. So, immigration will be inevitably increasing. South Korean have to adapt to this change of population structure and to be inclusive. Discrimination against minority such as disabled persons is also serious social problem. According to KOSTAT, 72.3% of people answered "this society discriminate disabled persons" (2011). Delphi indicator on the level of caring for disabled persons, alienated persons is just 4.05/10 in 2011. Korean society is also called 'society full of conflicts'. It means that there occur endless conflicts between political parties, between different regions, between different generations. Indicator on the level of accepting different perspective and thinking is just 3.52/10. However, specialists who participated in Delphi expect that indicator will increase from 3.53 in 2011 to 5.31 in 2020. The main reason for this change is the change in attitude and perspective of younger generations who grow up surrounded by more inclusive culture.

Secondly, indicator of the level of Nobles oblige is very important in fairness of a society. According to KOSTAT, trust level of people on social elites is very low – 21.1% on National Assembly, 50.1% on Government. Indicator of the level of Noblesse oblige in Korean society is just 2.67/10. The level of fairness is 2.60/10 in human resource affairs in Government, 2.50/10 in relation between politicians and CEOs. Different from the prospective on other elements of social quality, the level of fairness is not expected much even in 2020. The level of Noblesse oblige will be just 4.48, while the level of fairness in human resource affairs in Government will be just 4.71. The main reason for this prospective is the skeptical interpretation on continuous corruption of social elites in South Korea. One of the important issues concerning fairness of Korean society is opportunity of education. Surely, Korean society seems to offer equal chance of education to all members. Though, reality is different. Many members especially from low income family raise the problem of different quality of education. Some sociologists insist that this difference in quality of education mainly caused by private education costs will reproduce the class hierarchy of Korean society. Delphi indicator of the level of fair opportunity of education is just 2.57/10 in 2011. It will remain still at 4.48.10 even in 2020.

Thirdly, safety is also crucial element of social quality. Indicators are generally expected to be improved in 2020 compared to 2011. Level of safety will increase from 4.38 to 5.64 in food, from 3.38 to 5.19 in man-made catastrophes, from 3.67 to 5.12 in energy depletion, from 3.50 to 5.21 in natural and environmental catastrophes. The main reason for this prospective is based on very much improved safety technologies. One of risks that South Korea is being faced with is economical crisis. The level of capacity to overcome economical crisis is expected to drop from 5.57/10 in 2011 to 5.32 in 2020. The main reason for this

prospective is the emergence of new economic power such as China, India and Brazil and instable economic situation.

Finally, concerning the level of creativity, we can measure and prospect with some indicators on cultural industry, and technology. Recently, cultural industry in South Korean show the most creativity ever. Especially represented by Han Ryu and K-pop, Korean cultural industry is expanding its sphere of influence over whole continents. All indicators of the level of creativity are positive(5.24 in 2011 to 6.45 in 2020 in Film industry, 4.74 in 2011 to 6.31 in 2020 in Music industry).

4. Conclusion

Growing competition in South Korea has surely positive effect on national economy. But it can bring about decadence in social quality such as inclusion, fairness and safety. Signs of decadence of social quality, especially represented by social inequality, distrust between religions and races are often prominent in some developed countries. South Korea is no exception. If the value of competition and growth become only the value to be counted, there is an obvious danger of deterioration of social quality. South Korea now faces some important challenges, such as population diminution, growing social inequality, global economic competition, and an insecure political situation. Facing these challenges, South Korea needs to upgrade its social quality.

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