

## Expected Sacrifices and Inescapable Oppressions: A Durkheimian Lens in Analyzing Historical Cases of Suicide in Korea

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### Introduction

In 2022, South Korea ranked highest among OECD countries with 23.6 suicides per 100 000 persons, compared to the OECD average of 11.1.<sup>1</sup> Relatedly, suicide is the leading cause of death among various age groups in South Korea, including that of teens to thirties.<sup>2</sup> Suicide rates within this age group have also seen significant increases over the past two decades; for example, suicides per 100,000 teens rose

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- 1 Statistics Korea. 2021 Cause of Death Statistics. (2021년 사망원인통계 결과) (2022).
- 2 Choi, Bo-Ram., & Bae, Sung-Man. "Suicide ideation and suicide attempts of undergraduate students in South Korea: Based on the interpersonal psychological theory of suicide". *Children and Youth Services Review* 117, no. 1 (2020): 1; Lee, Kang-Woo., Lee, Dayoung., & Hong, Hyun-Ju. "Text mining analysis of teachers' reports on student suicide in South Korea". *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 29, no. 4 (2020): 453.

68.8% from 2000-2011.<sup>3</sup> Statistics on the trends of suicide rates have pointed to a rise in the actual rates among the South Korean elderly<sup>4</sup> as well.<sup>5</sup> In comparison, trends of the average general population of OECD countries, along with most elderly populations around the world have seen decreases in rates over past years.<sup>6</sup> Thus, suicide is increasingly prevalent in South Korea and deserves study.

While 21st century South Korea<sup>7</sup> continuously ranks among the top countries in the world in terms of suicide rates, suicide is certainly not a new phenomenon in South Korea. Suicide has a long history dating back to the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897) and beyond. This historical analysis will review selected cases of how suicide has been understood and practiced throughout time in Korean history. In this article, I choose to mainly focus on suicide from Korea under Japanese occupation (1910-1945) and worker suicide in 1980s South Korea. This choice is due to the fact that suicides increased dramatically in both of these time periods in Korean history.

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- 3 Lee, Woo-Kyeong. "Psychological characteristics of self-harming behavior in Korean adolescents". *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 23, no.1 (2016): 119.
  - 4 *Elderly* refers roughly to those aged approximately 65+.
  - 5 Chiu, H. F. K., Takahashi, Y., Suh, G. H. "Elderly suicide prevention in East Asia". *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 18, no. 11 (2003): 973; OECD. "Suicide", in *Health at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris (2015): 56.
  - 6 Kelly, Sue, Bunting, Julia. "Trends in suicide in England and Wales, 1982-96". *Population trends* 92, no.1 (1998): 30; OECD. "Korea's increase in suicides and psychiatric bed numbers is worrying, says OECD". *OECD Health Statistics* (2013), OECD Publishing, Paris (2013): 2; OECD. "Suicide", in *Health at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris (2015): 56.
  - 7 I use the terms "Korea" and "South Korea" both in this article. Since this is a historical article that analyzes multiple time periods, the times at which "Korea" is used is meant to represent the time until 1945 that Korea was one country. Where "South Korea" is used, even when discussing aspects of the country's history, I am only discussing South Korea specifically and not meant to be representing North Korea, which has undoubtedly had a different course of history since the split.

Examining suicide historically may also provide a salient perspective to add to Durkheim's suicide typology,<sup>8</sup> which is one of the most well-known works on suicide in the social sciences. Durkheim wrote *Le Suicide* in 1897, coincidentally the last year of the Chosŏn dynasty. Notably, Durkheim made claims about suicide that were related to the specific time period that he was writing in, such as his inference that one of his proposed types, fatalistic suicide, had little "contemporary relevance."<sup>9</sup> While it is evident that Durkheim had situated his study in Western Europe and thus his arguments were based on geographic data from outside of Korea, Durkheim nonetheless also had Asia in mind when arguing about suicide (see, for example, Durkheim's discussion on altruistic suicide in Japan).<sup>10</sup>

More specifically, in examining historical cases of suicide, I demonstrate here that there is plausible overlap in terms of classifying suicides into Durkheim's typology. The concept of suicide is fluid, ever-changing, and can be marred with contradictions. Durkheim's suicide-typology, which was based on inferences from suicide rates, consisted of four distinct types of suicide. Historical cases of suicide in Korea demonstrate an overlap between Durkheim's suicide types, making for a novel perspective towards perhaps the most well-known social study of suicide.

### Durkheim' Suicide Theory

Specifically, Durkheim outlined four different types of suicide: altruistic/egoistic (high/low levels of social integration), and fatalistic/anomic (high/low levels of social regulation).<sup>11</sup> Regulation refers to the

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8 Durkheim, Émile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. J. A. Spaulding and G. Simpson (translators). London: Routledge (2002/1897).

9 Ibid, 239.

10 Ibid, 180-183.

normative or moral demands placed on the individual that come with membership in a group, while integration refers to the extent to which an individual is bound to the moral demands and social relations of a group.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Durkheim developed a typology to categorize such suicides. Extremes of regulation and integration influence suicidality: too much social integration leads to altruistic suicide; too little social integration leads to egoistic suicide; too little social regulation leads to anomic suicide; and lastly, too much social regulation leads to fatalistic suicide. Durkheim suggested that maintaining an equilibrium, or ‘healthy’ levels of regulation and social integration, is what protects the individual and society against suicide.

Anomic suicide is meant to represent suicides by those who cannot be regulated by society. Anomie is often associated with how people may feel after suffering sudden economic losses,<sup>13</sup> an example that Durkheim referenced himself when developing the concept. In 21st century South Korea, Ben Park contends that South Koreans of all ages experience anomie due to the uncertainty and tension that is caused by the lessening influence of traditional collective values in society, in favor of individualism.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, fatalistic suicides are suicides by those who suffer from excessive regulation and discipline.<sup>15</sup> Van Bergen et al. write that the lack of autonomy given to South Asian women through

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11 Ibid.

12 Bearman, Peter. “The Social Structure of Suicide”. *Sociological Forum* 6, no. 3 (1991): 503.

13 Hodwitz, Omi. & Frey, Kathleen. “Anomic suicide: A Durkheimian analysis of European normlessness”. *Sociological Spectrum* 36, no. 4 (2016): 238; Puffer, Phyllis. “Durkheim Did Not Say “Normlessness”: The Concept of Anomic Suicide for Introductory Sociology Courses”. *Southern Rural Sociology* 24, no. 1 (2009): 205.

14 Park, Ben B. C. “Political suicide among Korean youth”. *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 16, no. 1-2 (1994): 66-82.

15 Durkheim, Émile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. J. A. Spaulding and G. Simpson (translators). London: Routledge (2002/1897): 239.

cultural expectations of womanhood denote fatalism.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Christie Davies and Mark Neal find that young Chinese women experience moral subordination to husbands, consisting of a pitiless future, constituting fatalism.<sup>17</sup>

On the spectrum of social integration, egoistic suicides refer to those who experience high level of individualism, being in-turn isolated away from the binding ties of society. Kevin Breault and Karen Barkey argue that suicide rates are higher among those with lower levels of religious, family, and political integration.<sup>18</sup> Timothy Kang contends for the presence of egoism in Korea specifically, arguing that the rise of Western individualism and culture has resulted in generations moving away from traditional, collective values in society.<sup>19</sup> Durkheim's other proposed extreme of integration, altruistic suicides, constitutes high integration into society to the point at which one sacrifices themselves for the greater good. Durkheim himself mentions *seppuku*, a Japanese custom where individuals would restore honor to their name of family by disemboweling themselves and dying by suicide due to a perceived failure. In Korean's history, suicide protests have often been labelled as altruistic given that individuals self-immolate and die on behalf of a greater cause.<sup>20</sup>

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16 Van Bergen, Diana., Smit, Johannes H., Van Balkom, Anton. J. L. M., & Saharso, Sawitri.

"Suicidal behaviour of young immigrant women in the Netherlands. Can we use Durkheim's concept of 'fatalistic suicide' to explain their high incidence of attempted suicide?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 2 (2009): 317.

17 Davies, Christie., Neal, Mark. "Durkheim's Altruistic and Fatalistic Suicide". In *Durkheim's Suicide: A Century of Research and Debate*, edited by W. S. F. Pickering and Geoffrey Walford, (36-52). New York: Routledge (2000): 44.

18 Breault, K. D. & Barkey, Karen. "A Comparative Analysis of Durkheim's Theory of Egoistic Suicide". *Sociological Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (1982): 326.

19 Kang, Timothy. "Suicide in South Korea: Revisiting Durkheim's Suicide". *Journal for Social Thought* 2, no. 1 (2014).

20 Ji, Minsun. "Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour Disempowerment". *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 239-253; Stack,

Notably, fatalistic suicide was not significantly written about by Durkheim in contrast to the other three types, nor has it been used in contemporary academia relative to his other types. Durkheim's short explanation (its definition only existed within a footnote)<sup>21</sup> coupled with its subsequent absence in later studies is telling of how he viewed the importance of the concept; Durkheim himself admitted that "examples are so hard to find aside from the cases just mentioned (his examples were 'very young husbands, the married woman who is childless') that it seems useless to dwell upon it."<sup>22</sup> Durkheim made this claim in his book published in 1897 and so his perceived relevance of fatalistic suicide was close to the time of the suicides that I am investigating in this article.

Moreover, Durkheim's suicide types were supposed to be seen as distinct concepts. While Durkheim acknowledged that the types might overlap in the form of having "kindred ties," he was adamant that types were independent of each other.<sup>23</sup> Stephen Marson similarly argues that it is possible for someone to exist in an environment where they experience both differing extremes of regulation and integration.<sup>24</sup> However, it is still overwhelmingly argued that one cannot exist on two opposite ends of the spectrums at once (i.e., fatalism-anomie, egoism-altruism).<sup>25</sup> This goes for literature on Durkheim in Korea specifi-

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Steven. "Émile Durkheim and Altruistic Suicide". *Archives of Suicide Research* 8, no.1 (2004): 9-22; Park, Ben B. C. "Sociopolitical contexts of self-immolations in Vietnam and South Korea". *Archives of Suicide Research* 8, no. 1 (2004): 81-97.

21 Durkheim, Émile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. J. A. Spaulding and G. Simpson (translators). London: Routledge (2002/1897): 239.

22 Ibid, 239.

23 Ibid, 219.

24 Marson, Stephen M. *Elder Suicide: Durkheim's Vision*. Washington: NASW Press (2019).

25 Ibid, 11; Marson, Stephen M. & Powell, Rasby M. "Suicide Among Elders: A Durkheimian proposal". *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life: IJAL*

cally, as the rise in western individualism in 21st century South Korea is thought to be either egoistic<sup>26</sup> or anomic,<sup>27</sup> but not both. However, as I will demonstrate below by juxtaposing Durkheim's suicide-types with the outlined causes of suicide in this article, I believe that there is much more overlap between types. Furthermore, I intend to elevate fatalistic suicide beyond its perceived irrelevancy.

### Colonial Changes

In 1905, the Ŭlssa treaty was signed, depriving Korea of its diplomatic sovereignty and making it a protectorate of Imperial Japan. This document was signed without the consent of the Korean Emperor at the time, Kojong, as the treaty was signed by pro-Japanese Korean government officials without Kojong's knowledge. Five years later, Korea was officially annexed by Japan, and renamed Chosŏn, which lasted until 1945.

Pro-Japanese Korean officials and the Japanese government alike were under the impression that allowing Japan to rule Korea was necessary for the development of a modern, civilized Korea. However, because of this perceived necessity to change society for the best, consequences associated with these societal changes were deemed as acceptable collateral. Beginning in the early years of Japanese occupation of Korea, the Korean press started to report on a new "epidemic of suicides", with increases of recorded suicides from 474 in 1910 to 1,065 in 1920, and to 1,536 in 1925.<sup>28</sup> The new "modern" life that Japan was

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6, no. 1 (2011): 64.

26 Kang, Timothy. "Suicide in South Korea: Revisiting Durkheim's Suicide". *Journal for Social Thought* 2, no. 1 (2014).

27 Park, Ben B. C. "Cultural Ambivalence and Suicide Rates in South Korea". In *Suicide and Culture: Understanding the Context*, edited by Eriminia Colucci and David Lester, (237-262). Massachusetts: Hogrefe (2013).

28 Yoo, Theodore. J. "The Suicidal Person: The Medicalization and Gendering of

trying to install in Korean society consequently brought along many new changes, such as internal migration, rapid industrialization and urbanization, the end of a rigid class system, moral decadence, and other social stressors that were thought by the Korean press to be causing the plethora of suicides.<sup>29</sup>

The Korean press reported on triggers from modern society that would perhaps be related this increase suicides, such as rapid industrialization, which had triggered an outmigration of people from the countryside to the urban centers. People faced isolation and anxiety with the breakdown of traditional social structures and class expectations, which often resulted from a lack of normlessness and social regulation; a sense of anomie where unemployed intellectuals drifted around urban centers without a sense of belonging or community.<sup>30</sup> However, alongside this anomie, the argument could also be made that those people without a sense of belonging due to the changing conditions around them would be isolated from the society that they were used to, and thus Durkheim's egoistic suicide would be also applicable. Indeed, these suicides may be difficult to classify as either anomic or egoistic in Durkheimian terms.

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- Suicide in Colonial South Korea". In *Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern South Korea*, edited by Sonia M. Kim and Robert J. S. Ku, (93-114). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2021): 97.
- 29 Yoo, Theodore. J. "The Suicidal Person: The Medicalization and Gendering of Suicide in Colonial South Korea". In *Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern South Korea*, edited by Sonia M. Kim and Robert J. S. Ku, (93-114). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2021); Yuh, Leighanne., & Soddu, Claudia. "The Nationalist Critique of Female Double Suicide in Colonial Korea". *International Journal of Korean History* 27, no. 2 (2022): 1-30; Yum, Jennifer. "'Yankee-Style Trauma': The Korean War and the Americanization of Psychiatry in the Republic of Korea". In *Traumatic Pasts in Asia: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma from the 1930s to the Present*, edited by Mark S. Micale and Hans Pols, (96-127). New York; Oxford: Berghahn (2021).
- 30 Yoo, Theodore. J. "The Suicidal Person: The Medicalization and Gendering of Suicide in Colonial South Korea". In *Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern South Korea*, edited by Sonia M. Kim and Robert J. S. Ku, (93-114). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2021): 100.

Japanese occupation brought changes to the schooling system in Korea, introducing high expectations to achieve high studies at top universities.<sup>31</sup> Theodore Yoo further details that Japanese occupation saw the rise of the university entrance exam, as thus suicides among students were related to, according to the press high expectations and desire to gain admission to a top high school or university, failing the entrance examination, getting caught cheating, doing poorly in school, or feeling pressure to drop out because of financial problems at home.<sup>32</sup>

The Korean press considered that Japanese occupation was particularly hard on the lower classes in relation to suicide. Theodore Yoo argues that the gap between the rich and poor widened, which saw an increased stigma and embarrassment for the poor in Korean society, and also put many in the lower class in worse financial situations due to the stripping of tenancy rights and the installation of Japanese landlords.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, the Korean Press and the Japanese Government General (in charge of overseeing the Korean occupation) had radically different opinions about suicides in Korea. In the 1920s a popular notion emerged in the Korean press and in public opinion that there was an epidemic of suicides related to the associated changes brought to Korean society by the colonizer.<sup>34</sup> As noted above, the Korean press very much problematized the epidemic of suicides, as it was abnormal and a cause

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31 Yuh, Leighanne., & Soddu, Claudia. "The Nationalist Critique of Female Double Suicide in Colonial Korea". *International Journal of Korean History* 27, no. 2 (2022): 2.

32 Yoo, Theodore. J. "The Suicidal Person: The Medicalization and Gendering of Suicide in Colonial South Korea". In *Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern South Korea*, edited by Sonia M. Kim and Robert J. S. Ku, (93-114). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2021): 101.

33 Ibid, 101.

34 Ibid, 94; Yum, Jennifer. "'Yankee-Style Trauma': The Korean War and the Americanization of Psychiatry in the Republic of Korea". In *Traumatic Pasts in Asia: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma from the 1930s to the Present*, edited by Mark S. Micale and Hans Pols, (96-127). New York; Oxford: Berghan (2021): 98.

for concern. Suicides were emblematic of the tragic consequences of colonial modernity, affecting all mores of society from changing traditions to increased economic hardships.<sup>35</sup> However, the Japanese colonial government essentially normalized the increase in suicides, as it was an associated cost of modernization. In fact, the Japanese colonial authorities viewed the rise in suicide rates in Korea as an indicator that their project of modernization was working.

Essentially, suicides needed to happen according to the Japanese in order for Korea to undergo the rapid transformation that Japan had in mind for society. Theodore Yoo contends that it is for this reason that Japanese colonial government documents rarely engaged with prevention efforts, or any solutions to reduce the suicides.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, during the epidemic of suicides (1920s-1930s), the Japanese government could not allocate funds to new types of public health care due to rising costs of the war/colonial project,<sup>37</sup> including suicide prevention. To summarize, prevention was not Japan's concern, and instead Japan focused on the idea that suicide was a natural social phenomenon and that rates were inevitably going to increase as Korea developed into a more modern civilization. As Theodore Yoo notes, for the colonial authorities, increased suicides in Korea meant that their project of uprooting Koreans

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35 Yoo, Theodore. J. "The Suicidal Person: The Medicalization and Gendering of Suicide in Colonial South Korea". In *Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern South Korea*, edited by Sonia M. Kim and Robert J. S. Ku, (93-114). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2021); Yuh, Leighanne., & Soddu, Claudia. "The Nationalist Critique of Female Double Suicide in Colonial Korea". *International Journal of Korean History* 27, no. 2 (2022): 1-30.

36 Yoo, Theodore. J. "The Suicidal Person: The Medicalization and Gendering of Suicide in Colonial South Korea". In *Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern South Korea*, edited by Sonia M. Kim and Robert J. S. Ku, (93-114). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2021): 94.

37 Yum, Jennifer. "'Yankee-Style Trauma': The Korean War and the Americanization of Psychiatry in the Republic of Korea". In *Traumatic Pasts in Asia: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma from the 1930s to the Present*, edited by Mark S. Micale and Hans Pols, (96-127). New York; Oxford: Berghan (2021): 98.

from their passive, traditional ways was indeed on the road to success.<sup>38</sup> These Korean traditions, such as early/arranged marriage, infidelity, abusive mothers-in-law, violent relationships, the buying and selling of wives, profligate husbands squandering family fortunes, and divorce, were targeted by the press as compelling women in particular to take their own lives, so extinguishing these traditions through colonialism was seen as beneficial for the benefactor despite the new suicides.

### Chaste Suicide and Women's Suicide

Another type of suicide prevalent in the Chosŏn era and during the Japanese occupation of Korea was chaste suicide. There are many accounts from the Chosŏn era of women taking their own lives to follow their recently deceased husbands into death.<sup>39</sup> This practice was strongly based on Confucian virtues of the ideal wife of chaste wife (*yŏlbu*). Beginning early in the Chosŏn era, widows would not remarry but instead commit themselves to lifelong service to her deceased husband's family. Moreover, a deepening Confucianization from the seventeenth century rendered the ideal of chaste women more prominent and instrumental, and the concept of women's fidelity became gradually enmeshed with the idea of bodily self sacrifice, serving as the ultimate proof of chaste widowhood and criterion for wifely virtue.

Interestingly, the practice of chaste suicide is based on conflicting

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38 Yoo, Theodore. J. "The Suicidal Person: The Medicalization and Gendering of Suicide in Colonial South Korea". In *Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern South Korea*, edited by Sonia M. Kim and Robert J. S. Ku, (93-114). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2021); 94.

39 Kim, Jungwon. "'You Must Avenge on My Behalf': Widow Chastity and Honour in Nineteenth-Century Korea". *Gender & History* 26, no. 1 (2014): 128- 146; Yuh, Leighanne., & Soddu, Claudia. "The Nationalist Critique of Female Double Suicide in Colonial Korea". *International Journal of Korean History* 27, no. 2 (2022): 1-30.

Confucian values of the aforementioned ideal wife and filial piety, the latter of which would be violated if one were to take their own life and thus render oneself unable to care for parents.<sup>40</sup> As Jungwon Kim explains, a wife's loyalty to her husband was deemed to be equivalent to a man's loyalty to the king, and both were considered essential for social order.<sup>41</sup> Although some Confucian scholars spoke against valuing widow suicide over staying alive to serve the surviving family, most literati esteemed it as the highest expression of wifely duty.<sup>42</sup> Chaste suicide was then conceptualized as a product of a calm and unemotional resolve to follow proper practice, not as an expression of grand emotion. In other words, Confucian elites at the time largely avoided portraying widow suicide as a selfish, and thus it did not defy Confucian filial piety.

The reluctance to classify women's suicides as selfish, or egoistic for that matter, is significant, as the conception of the "New woman" was beginning to emerge in the 1920s.<sup>43</sup> Korean elites at the time saw the increasing social status of women as being representative of the advancement of society, and thus new discourse began to emerge about women's freedom, selfhood, and individual personality.<sup>44</sup> However, de-

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40 Kim, Jungwon. "'You Must Avenge on My Behalf': Widow Chastity and Honour in Nineteenth-Century Korea". *Gender & History* 26, no. 1 (2014): 131.

41 Ibid, 130.

42 Ibid, 142; Yuh, Leighanne., & Soddu, Claudia. "The Nationalist Critique of Female Double Suicide in Colonial Korea". *International Journal of Korean History* 27, no. 2 (2022): 3, 13.

43 Yuh, Leighanne., & Soddu, Claudia. "The Nationalist Critique of Female Double Suicide in Colonial Korea". *International Journal of Korean History* 27, no. 2 (2022): 2; Yum, Jennifer. "Suicide, 'New Women,' and Media Sensation in Colonial Korea". In *Transgression in Korea: Beyond Resistance and Control*, edited by Juhn Y. Ahn, (105-122). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press (2018): 105.

44 Yuh, Leighanne., & Soddu, Claudia. "The Nationalist Critique of Female Double Suicide in Colonial Korea". *International Journal of Korean History* 27, no. 2 (2022): 1-30; Yum, Jennifer. "Suicide, 'New Women,' and Media Sensation in

spite advances, even the women with the most freedom were still limited in Korean society under Japanese rule. Jennifer Yum writes “It is often said that discourse is not an accurate representation of social reality.”<sup>45</sup> In this case, I refer to the double suicide between Hong Ok-Im and Kim Yong-Ju. Despite her exceptional status, both economically and intellectually, even Kim was forced into an arranged marriage at the age of seventeen.<sup>46</sup> Something akin to a glass ceiling seems to have taken hold in the 1920s in colonial Korea, something that Ben Park directly associated with anomic suicide for 21st century South Korean women.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, the transitional phase of Korean society under Japanese occupation painted freedom for women but did not literally offer it, constituting a tension and uneasiness for women. On one hand, women could access more education than ever before; on the other, traditional Confucian practices that restricted women’s freedom and social mobility remained.

Women had newfound expectations from being more educated but did not receive the freedom necessary to fulfill those expectations. Thus, novel expectations were created but had yet to be manifested in everyday life.<sup>48</sup> In other words, women in colonial Korea, having been

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Colonial Korea”. In *Transgression in Korea: Beyond Resistance and Control*, edited by Juhn Y. Ahn, (105-122). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press (2018).

45 Yum, Jennifer. “Suicide, ‘New Women,’ and Media Sensation in Colonial Korea”. In *Transgression in Korea: Beyond Resistance and Control*, edited by Juhn Y. Ahn, (105-122). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press (2018): 116.

46 Ibid, 116.

47 Park, Ben B. C. “Cultural Ambivalence and Suicide Rates in South Korea”. In *Suicide and Culture: Understanding the Context*, edited by Eriminia Colucci and David Lester, (237-262). Massachusetts: Hogrefe (2013): 255.

48 Yuh, Leighanne., & Soddu, Claudia. “The Nationalist Critique of Female Double Suicide in Colonial Korea”. *International Journal of Korean History* 27, no. 2 (2022): 18-20; Yum, Jennifer. “Suicide, ‘New Women,’ and Media Sensation in Colonial Korea”. In *Transgression in Korea: Beyond Resistance and Control*,

socially subordinated doubly on both a gender hierarchy and as colonial subjects, chafed against the social limitations of their society.

### South Korean Suicide Protest

Japanese occupation ended in 1945 and Korea split into two countries shortly after. As the two Koreas went on radically different paths post-split, new practices of suicide emerged in South Korea. As South Korea underwent a rapid economic and societal transformation post Korean war (1950-1953), South Korean factory workers and labourers soon became infamous for suicide. Mainly, suicide among South Korean workers was known to be often used as a protest, dating in the modern era to the self-immolation of garment worker Chun Tae-Il, whose 1970 dying plea to remember the labour law helped provoke decades of labour resistance.<sup>49</sup> In fact, more than one hundred workers have committed labour-action-related suicide between 1980 and 2012 in South Korea.<sup>50</sup> Also, as Minsun Ji notes, during this time South Korea ranked fourth highest in the world for self-immolations (individuals lighting themselves on fire to commit suicide).<sup>51</sup>

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edited by Juhn Y. Ahn, (105-122). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press (2018): 116.

49 Doucette, Jamie. "Minjung Tactics in a Post-Minjung Era? The Survival of Self Immolation and Traumatic Forms of Labour Protest in South Korea". In *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, edited by Gregor Gall, (212-232). London: Palgrave MacMillan (2013); Ji, Minsun. "Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour Disempowerment". *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 239-253; Kim, Sun-Chul. "The Trajectory of Protest Suicide in South Korea, 1970-2015". *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51, no. 1 (2021): 38-63.

50 Ji, Minsun. "Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour Disempowerment". *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 240; Kim, Sun-Chul. "The Trajectory of Protest Suicide in South Korea, 1970-2015". *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51, no. 1 (2021): 44.

51 Ji, Minsun. "Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour

Worker suicide has typically been viewed in South Korean society as a righteous act, with the person dying by suicide being conceptualized as a martyr, or a *yŏlssa* (*yeolsa*), whose act of suicide demonstrated resistance for coworkers or towards the ‘cause.’ The *yŏlssa* is known to be a person who sacrifices their life without violent resistance in the name of an important social cause.<sup>52</sup> Minsun Ji notes that worker suicide in South Korea has remained relatively sizable in the 2000s.<sup>53</sup>

Workers have typically committed suicide in South Korea to resist labor exploitation.<sup>54</sup> The infamous case of Chun Tae-II demonstrates this. A labor movement leader, Chun was focused on improving working for low-wage clothes-makers. When Chun’s many appeals to the labor department went unsuccessful in terms of improving conditions, he set himself on fire in the streets of Seoul in 1970, writing in his diary about the meaning of his suicide:

I come to an absolute decision to be alongside my poor brothers and sisters. I will throw myself away. I will die for you so as not to leave you... I am struggling to be the dew for countless withering innocent lives.<sup>55</sup>

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Disempowerment”. *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 240.

52 Doucette, Jamie. “Minjung Tactics in a Post-Minjung Era? The Survival of Self Immolation and Traumatic Forms of Labour Protest in South Korea”. In *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, edited by Gregor Gall, (212-232). London: Palgrave MacMillan (2013): 215.

53 Ji, Minsun. “Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour Disempowerment”. *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 240.

54 Doucette, Jamie. “Minjung Tactics in a Post-Minjung Era? The Survival of Self Immolation and Traumatic Forms of Labour Protest in South Korea”. In *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, edited by Gregor Gall, (212-232). London: Palgrave MacMillan (2013); Kim, Hyojoung. “Micromobilization and Suicide Protest in South Korea, 1970-2004”. *Social Research* 75, no. 2 (2008): 543-578; Kim, Sun-Chul. “The Trajectory of Protest Suicide in South Korea, 1970-2015”. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51, no. 1 (2021): 38-63.

55 Ji, Minsun. “Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour

Chun's protest suicide mobilized thousands of workers and university students into subsequent collective actions and led to the great democratic movement of 1987 of student activists and workers alike.<sup>56</sup> Chun's self-immolation has also led worker suicide to be seen by South Koreans as not an isolated act of a desperate and ill-individual, but as an action of strong resistance by brave people against injustice.<sup>57</sup>

The martyrdom expressed by these suicides is related to the Korean concept *minjung*, meaning the people or masses.<sup>58</sup> Minjung represents those who are politically oppressed and alienated economically from the benefits of economic growth in the rapidly changing South Korean nation.<sup>59</sup> Minjung was an effective concept for mobilizing people, students and workers alike, to fight towards the goal of improving labor conditions and democracy respectively. As Minsun Ji writes, this resistance is also an effort to release a deeply felt grief (*han*),<sup>60</sup> as well

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Disempowerment". *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 240.

- 56 Doucette, Jamie. "Minjung Tactics in a Post-Minjung Era? The Survival of Self Immolation and Traumatic Forms of Labour Protest in South Korea". In *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, edited by Gregor Gall, (212-232). London: Palgrave MacMillan (2013); Ji, Minsun. "Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour Disempowerment". *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 239-253; Kim, Sun-Chul. "The Trajectory of Protest Suicide in South Korea, 1970-2015". *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51, no. 1 (2021): 38-63.
- 57 Jang, Sang-Hwan. "Continuing Suicide Among Laborers in Korea". *Labor History* 45, no. 3 (2004): 271-297.
- 58 Doucette, Jamie. "Minjung Tactics in a Post-Minjung Era? The Survival of Self Immolation and Traumatic Forms of Labour Protest in South Korea". In *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, edited by Gregor Gall, (212-232). London: Palgrave MacMillan (2013): 214; Ji, Minsun. "Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour Disempowerment". *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 241; Kim, Sun-Chul. "The Trajectory of Protest Suicide in South Korea, 1970-2015". *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51, no. 1 (2021): 45.
- 59 Doucette, Jamie. "Minjung Tactics in a Post-Minjung Era? The Survival of Self Immolation and Traumatic Forms of Labour Protest in South Korea". In *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, edited by Gregor Gall, (212-232). London: Palgrave MacMillan (2013): 214.

as to transform one's individualistic suffering into collective liberation of the people through self-sacrifice.<sup>61</sup> Worker suicide in this case constitutes a meaningful moral force, representing the collective suffering of the people, the moral dignity of the unbending worker, to both challenge the government morally but also to shake up the public consciousness in an attempt to empower the weak.<sup>62</sup>

Individuals were keenly aware that their acts of suicide would be in support of the collective. Their collective action was goal-oriented in disrupting the labor system and inspiring activism among their peers.<sup>63</sup> For example, Hyojoung Kim writes that the suicide notes left by suicide protesters explicitly reveal that they committed suicide protest in order to "inspire movement activism among half-hearted activists and apathetic bystanders."<sup>64</sup> Kim further discusses the various strategies used by protestors in their notes to inspire action, such as portraying the current political and economic system as unjust and illegitimate, directly blaming their target audience as responsible for the injustices, and emphasizing a wake-up call that would urge their peers to join the

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60 Ji, Minsun. "Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour Disempowerment". *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 241

61 Doucette, Jamie. "Minjung Tactics in a Post-Minjung Era? The Survival of Self Immolation and Traumatic Forms of Labour Protest in South Korea". In *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, edited by Gregor Gall, (212-232). London: Palgrave MacMillan (2013): 214-217; Kim, Hyojoung. "Micromobilization and Suicide Protest in South Korea, 1970-2004". *Social Research* 75, no. 2 (2008): 572.

62 Kim, Hyojoung. "Micromobilization and Suicide Protest in South Korea, 1970-2004". *Social Research* 75, no. 2 (2008): 543-578; Park, Ben B. C. "Political suicide among Korean youth". *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 16, no. 1-2 (1994): 66-82.

63 Kim, Hyojoung. "Micromobilization and Suicide Protest in South Korea, 1970-2004". *Social Research* 75, no. 2 (2008): 543-578; Kim, Sun-Chul. "The Trajectory of Protest Suicide in South Korea, 1970-2015". *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51, no. 1 (2021): 38-63.

64 Kim, Hyojoung. "Micromobilization and Suicide Protest in South Korea, 1970-2004". *Social Research* 75, no. 2 (2008): 573.

movement. In the case of suicide protests in South Korea, the suicide were not only then a protest but used as a means to mobilize the hearts and minds of the exploited masses.<sup>65</sup>

In South Korea, it is estimated that nearly one-hundred laborers and student activists committed self-immolations during the last three decades of the twentieth century in their struggle to organize trade unions and/or to struggle against the dictatorial military governments.<sup>66</sup> Ben Park explains that through South Korea's repeated acts of resistance in its history (e.g., against Japanese occupation), Buddhists were often at the forefront of resistance efforts, and so the act of self-immolation became prevalent in South Korea for its history of being used to fight oppression.<sup>67</sup> Viewing self-immolation as a sacrifice is tied to the notion that it was intended to result in a profound benefit to others. However, suicide through self-immolation is not necessarily condoned by Buddhist followers, despite their aim, because they involve a rejection of group norms since "self-destruction is one of the most serious transgressions of the precepts" of Buddhism.<sup>68</sup> Buddhist leaders have historically tried to prevent self-immolation, pointing out how it stood in tension with the principles of Buddhism. However, acts of self-immolation have not necessarily always been condemned by Buddhist leaders either, as many have been seen as "an act of love."<sup>69</sup> Thus, worker suicides in South Korea have a complicated relationship with moral standings and interpretations.

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65 Ibid, 543-578; Kim, Sun-Chul. "The Trajectory of Protest Suicide in South Korea, 1970-2015". *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51, no. 1 (2021): 38-63.

66 Park, Ben B. C. "Sociopolitical contexts of self-immolations in Vietnam and South Korea". *Archives of Suicide Research* 8, no. 1 (2004): 82.

67 Ibid.

68 Thích, Nhat Hanh. "Love in Action". In *Writings on Nonviolent Social Change*, (39-48). Berkeley: Parallax Press (1993): 45.

69 Ibid, 44-45.

### Discussion: Durkheim's Suicide Theory

The above review has selected cases of suicides in Korea/Chosŏn's past dating back to Japanese occupation. Suicide has been present in different forms depending on the time in history, as something like chaste suicide has not been written about as something happening in 1980s South Korea, nor (to my knowledge) has worker self-immolation been recorded during Japanese occupation. Therefore, it can be said that suicide has changed through time; however, as Durkheim's suicide typology of interest here, I ask at each point in this article if the theory is of use, or what the examined explanations about suicide tell us about the typology.

It is evident that chaste suicides and worker suicides, the former on behalf of a deceased husband and the latter on behalf of a greater good, could be in some way classified as altruistic à la Durkheim. These suicides are conceptualized as being important to the functioning of society, and the maintenance of social order.<sup>70</sup> For the widows and workers alike, their suicides were obligatory based on higher social orders that shaped their actions. Moreover, suicide among the "new women"<sup>71</sup> who were becoming more individualistic in a changing society could be interpreted in a couple of different ways. One way would be to associate a rise in individualism with a disconnect from traditional collective values, something that could be classified as a rise in egoism or egoistic suicide. Another way would be to associate a changing social environment with anomie, as many Koreans surely had their lives, goals, and identities uprooted in the many societal changes that came with Japanese occupation. This could be classified as anomic suicides.

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70 Kim, Jungwon. "'You Must Avenge on My Behalf': Widow Chastity and Honour in Nineteenth-Century Korea". *Gender & History* 26, no. 1 (2014): 128- 146.

71 Yum, Jennifer. "Suicide, 'New Women,' and Media Sensation in Colonial Korea". In *Transgression in Korea: Beyond Resistance and Control*, edited by Juhn Y. Ahn, (105-122). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press (2018).

In each of these examples, one suicide type can be said to best classify the social conditions that existed. An altruistic sacrifice, a rise in egoistic individualism, or a changing environment leading to anomie can be used to describe these circumstances. However, I contend that in each of these outlined examples, the theme of fatalism is also present. For example, the Korean woman whose husband has died young due to unforeseen circumstances is bound to a highly regulated life in which she is expected to kill herself. She is very much disciplined by society and cannot escape this as her circumstances cannot change, with suicide being her only escape. Her expected sacrifice is certainly altruistic in one sense, as it is said to be for the betterment and functioning of society. However, she is yet bound to her circumstances with no escape. She has no options; the moment her husband died, her life course was determined, her future blocked and her actions ruled by discipline. Much like Diana van Bergen et al. and Christie Davies and Mark Neal find about the cultural expectations on South Asian<sup>72</sup> and Chinese<sup>73</sup> women respectively, cultural expectations of womanhood can often denote fatalism. A pitiless future is created for women by the forced adherence to cultural expectations and their moral and social subordination if they choose to go against said expectations. Therefore, the chaste women have no choice but to abide by cultural expectations at risk of being ostracized or violating norms, constituting fatalism as much as it is altruism.

In addition, the generations of workers who are doomed to working in exploitative circumstances believe that their suicides are the only way to inspire change. Dying by suicide was the only way to both escape

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72 van Bergen, Diana., Smit, Johannes H., Van Balkom, Anton. J. L. M., & Saharso, Sawitri. "Suicidal behaviour of young immigrant women in the Netherlands. Can we use Durkheim's concept of 'fatalistic suicide' to explain their high incidence of attempted suicide?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 2 (2009): 317.

73 Davies, Christie., Neal, Mark. "Durkheim's Altruistic and Fatalistic Suicide". In *Durkheim's Suicide: A Century of Research and Debate*, edited by W. S. F. Pickering and Geoffrey Walford, (36-52). New York: Routledge (2000): 44.

from their exploitative working conditions, but also to achieve their goals of convincing change. Their suicides were altruistic, again on behalf of the collective. But they had no choice, and saw no future due to their working conditions. Like the chaste wives, the workers were bound to their circumstances, doomed to commit suicide in order to inspire change, with no other foreseeable options. Their peers expected them to follow suit and commit suicide to inspire further change. This is fatalism.

For Jennifer Yum's "new women,"<sup>74</sup> or women who are increasingly in society becoming more egoistic and individualistic, they are bound to their circumstances. Yum claims that these women feel an ambivalence in society with traditional values such as Confucian collectivism and the perception that they are not understood or that society is working against them. For example, the classic case of Hong Ok-Im and Kim-Yong-Ju shows that the two women felt an emptiness in their lives in that they were isolated from everything except for each other.<sup>75</sup> If suicide is the only way out of an isolated life, these individuals were regulated by a changing Korean society from which suicide was the only escape.

These women were bound to living among social changes happening in a colonized society, something at the root of Durkheim's conception of anomie. These women and others who lived under Japanese rule in Korea suffered from a society that rejected many traditional beliefs in favor of modernization.<sup>76</sup> Upon studying suicide notes from this time

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74 Yum, Jennifer. "Suicide, 'New Women,' and Media Sensation in Colonial Korea". In *Transgression in Korea: Beyond Resistance and Control*, edited by Juhn Y. Ahn, (105-122). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press (2018).

75 Jeon, Bong-Kwon. 홍옥임·김용주 동성애 정사(情死) 사건, (Hong Ok-im and Kim Yong-ju Homosexuality Incident). Shindonga, (August 2007 Issue); Yum, Jennifer. Suicide Notes in Colonial Korea. Unpublished iMovie (2006).

76 Yoo, Theodore. J. "The Suicidal Person: The Medicalization and Gendering of Suicide in Colonial South Korea". In *Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern South Korea*, edited by Sonia M. Kim and Robert J. S.

period in Korea, Jennifer Yum created a short iMovie and narrated it with her own voice in order to try to represent the psychological state of Korean women during this time:

I still remember the summer day in 1926 when I returned to Seoul for the first time in years after leaving for my studies in Japan. Quickly I was taken by the changes of my surroundings. New shops, cafes, newsstands, dancehalls, light the narrow streets. I heard the sounds of trains and taxis, rushing from one location to the next. But I woke up the next morning to find that the atmosphere was somehow different. Subdued in an air of shock, I waited for my train at Myeongdong station and saw young women huddled around a newspaper. “Did you hear?” they said, Yun Sin-Dok is dead. Chills ran down my spine, as I heard *사의 찬미*, or the beauty of death, for the first time. This was the song that Yun, the most famous singer in Korea, had recorded just moments before her double love suicide with noted writer and father of two, Kim Woo-Jin. Many considered this song to be a suicide note; ‘Oh, lonely world, desolate world, what is it you are after? Laughing flowers, and singing birds? Your fates are all doomed. Oh forsaken, and wretched life’....<sup>77</sup>

In this example, the narrator was shocked by the changing society around her, and then immediately associated it with suicide. In all the societal changes around her, she was unable to grasp life as it was before. However, I again question if it could be separated from fatalism. It is true that the two concepts are opposites, straddling opposing sides of social regulation. But the Korean woman who lives in a changing society under colonialism is bound to her life, and she is highly regu-

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Ku, (93-114). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2021).

77 Yum, Jennifer. Suicide Notes in Colonial Korea. Unpublished iMovie (2006): 0:00-1:33.

lated as she does not control these changes. In Durkheimian terms on fatalism, her future is blocked by the oppressive discipline of colonialism. Even her own passions that may have been defined in a precolonial Korean society have changed due to the overwhelming influence on society that the Japanese occupier brought.

Moreover, the Korean elderly who suffered suicide due to being displaced and alienated during colonial changes could be classified in several Durkheimian ways. Like the population at large, many elderly in colonial Korea would not adapt to the changing society around them<sup>78</sup>, and thus anomic suicide seems like a theoretical fit. However, through a changing Confucian influence at the time, coupled with economic and social changes, children became less filial and thus did not care for their aging parents in the same way that previous generations did.<sup>79</sup> The lessening support from children for the elderly put many in anomic conditions where society could not regulate them. However, it may be just as theoretically applicable to say that, like many elderly in South Korea who have suffered similar circumstances due to unfavorable changing pension systems,<sup>80</sup> that elderly committed suicide to avoid becoming a burden to their children.<sup>81</sup> The increasing social isolation that elderly feel due to social and economic changes, and the lessening influence of Confucian filial piety made many feel like suicide could be done to avoid placing this burden, perhaps making their suicide altruistic. In this case, their suicide would be obligatory for the betterment of society, akin to chaste suicides. But what of fatalistic suicide? These elderly were also bound to their socially isolating circumstances

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78 Yoo, Theodore. J. "The Suicidal Person: The Medicalization and Gendering of Suicide in Colonial South Korea". In *Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern South Korea*, edited by Sonia M. Kim and Robert J. S. Ku, (93-114). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2021): 102.

79 Ibid, 102.

80 Moon, Hyungpyo. *The Korean pension system: Current State and Tasks Ahead*, Korea Development. OECD (2001).

81 Mauduy, Veronique. *South Korea: Suicide Nation*. Al Jazeera, 25 minutes (2015).

with increasingly blocked futures. Moreover, social isolation and the weakening of traditional values through social changes are remarkably similar to Durkheim's egoistic suicide. It suffices to say that there is more than one interpretation of these suicides in Durkheim's terms here.

Similarly, there may be a fluidity of suicide among one group in which people move between Durkheim's suicide types. Minsun Ji proposes that worker suicide in South Korea have changed in terms of Durkheim's suicide-typology.<sup>82</sup> Traditionally, suicide among workers has been viewed in South Korean society as being a noble act of sacrifice, with the committers being characterized as martyrs on behalf of other workers. Their deaths were in the name of resisting the unconditional control of employers on the worker collective, as well as to protest social issues such as calling for democracy in South Korea. However, since the democratization of South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s, worker suicide, while not decreasing in its frequency, has stopped evoking the same level of perceived martyrdom in today's era of neo-liberal economics.<sup>83</sup> Instead of being perceived as martyrs, more contemporary worker suicides in South Korea have been associated by society as being in protest to individual workplace conditions and dissatisfaction. Righteous suicides, which Durkheim likely would have classified as altruistic, have changed to anomic as these suicides have shown increasingly anomic characteristics, such as suicides being associated with the unfolding of a neo-liberal South Korean political-economic order characterized by the rise of contingent and exploitive jobs.<sup>84</sup>

Through many of these examples, one Durkheimian type comes to mind when considering suicide. For the chaste woman or the labor protestor, their suicides were immediately altruistic, obligatory for serving a larger cause or a higher power. For the new women who were

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82 Ji, Minsun. "Korean Suicide Protest as Anomic Response to Labour Disempowerment". *Global Labour Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 239-253.

83 Ibid, 240.

84 Ibid, 250.

grasping their own agency under Confucian rule and static gender hierarchies, it may have been egoism according to some who classified their increasing individualism as a cause for suicide, or even a new-found anomie that hit women when they faced the social limitations of their society, restricting their agency and social mobility. Durkheim's suicide typology as it was proved to be accurate in classifying many of these suicides, and describing characteristics about the circumstances that led to them. That being said, the presence of fatalism in all of these cases, or specifically how people were bound to their own circumstances with blocked futures and choked passions, seems to call to question the exclusivity of suicide types as constructed. If anything, examining suicide historically in Korea demonstrates the necessity of a nuanced political contextualization of the phenomenon.

### **Conclusion**

One of the associated goals of this article is to rethink Durkheim's suicide typology, and more specifically how Durkheim conceptualized suicide. In the above discussion, I have proposed that there may be more overlap than originally conceptualized between Durkheim's suicide types. On overlap specifically, Durkheim wrote that:

Certainly, (anomic) and egoistic suicide have kindred ties. Both spring from society's insufficient presence in individuals. But the sphere of its absence is not the same in both cases. In egoistic suicide it is deficient in truly collective activity, thus depriving the latter of object and meaning. In anomic suicide, society's influence is lacking in the basically individual passions, thus leaving them without a check-rein. In spite of their relationship, therefore, the two types are independent of each other. We may offer society everything social in us, and still be unable to control our desires; one may live in an anomic state without being

egoistic, and vice versa. These two sorts of suicide therefore do not draw their chief recruits from the same social environments; one has its principal field among intellectual careers, the world of thought—the other, the industrial or commercial world.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, the suicide-types, as per Durkheim, are independent of each other, and a given suicide can be anomic without being egoistic, and vice versa. This argument, however, is referring to an individual at a particular point in time. It may be true, for example, that someone could be egoistic without being anomic at one time, but could they move between the two? This is rather unclear. Moreover, whether these types can mix with, say, fatalism, is not argued by Durkheim.

Through the above argument, I have demonstrated one way of applying Durkheimian theory to the case of Korea. That is, we see *multiple* Durkheimian themes and interpretations present when considering motivations for suicide in selected cases of the phenomenon in Korean history. This is a new direction for suicide studies not just on the region but also in general, adding to an underdeveloped body of literature that argues for the overlap between suicide types. This should be continued to be developed in the future by more focus on how Durkheim's argument of the independence of suicide-types holds up when considering individual suicides. For example, how does the exclusivity of these concepts hold up when considering what people currently say about suicide, obviously not after the fact of suicide? The latter is not answered in Durkheim's work, as he made his inferences about suicides that already happened. However, I place importance in juxtaposing conceptualizations of suicide among South Koreans with Durkheim's suicide types to see if this exclusivity between types exists in people's own explanations. For example, will people's conceptualizations about suicide fit narrowly into one typology, or will they straddle mul-

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85 Durkheim, Émile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. J. A. Spaulding and G. Simpson (translators). London: Routledge (2002/1897): 219.

multiple types? And what would this say about the concept of suicide, both in relation to Durkheim's typology and the mechanical processes that go on in someone's head when considering suicide? Seth Abrutyn and Anna Mueller propose that there is merit in combining Durkheim's suicide types, as individuals may experience social conditions that straddle multiple suicide types.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, other studies demonstrate that individual suicide types are often insufficient on their own when considering individual cases of suicides, as people experience multiple competing forces that influence their suicidal behavior.<sup>87</sup> In other words, one of Durkheim's suicide types alone may be not enough to capture the complexity of the phenomenon.

There are many questions to be answered about Durkheim's typology when considering suicide and its complicated history in Korea. I believe that this article contributes to highlighting such complications, but there is much work to be done to further an understanding of suicide, something that exists as a social issue in contemporary South Korea.<sup>88</sup> Seeing suicide through Durkheim's lens provides salient ways of viewing the social conditions behind the phenomenon. Being able to characterize the social environment that an individual exists in may, for example, help to identify how psychiatric diagnoses can emerge

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86 Abrutyn, Seth. & Mueller, Anna. S. "The Socioemotional Foundations of Suicide: A Microsociological View of Durkheim's Suicide". *Sociological Theory* 32, no. 4 (2014): 339-340.

87 Chandler, Charles. R. & Tsai, Yung-Mei. "Suicide in Japan and in the West: Evidence for Durkheim's Theory". *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 34, no. 3-4 (1993): 244-259; Hamlin, Cynthia. L. & Brym, Robert. J. "The Return of the Native: A Cultural and Social Psychological Critique of Durkheim's "Suicide" Based on the Guarani-Kaiowá of SouthWestern Brazil". *Sociological Theory* 24, no. 1 (2006): 42-57.

88 Kang, Timothy. "Suicide in South Korea: Revisiting Durkheim's Suicide". *Journal for Social Thought* 2, no. 1 (2014); Park, Ben B. C. "Cultural Ambivalence and Suicide Rates in South Korea". In *Suicide and Culture: Understanding the Context*, edited by Eriminia Colucci and David Lester, (237-262). Massachusetts: Hogrefe (2013).

from given conditions; if suicidal impulse is located in the social environment, focus can be placed on changing this environment to reduce emotional distress.<sup>89</sup> However, these social conditions as originally postulated by Durkheim need to be nuanced to the South Korean case in order to gain a more contextual view of suicide. From the discussion here, select cases of suicide prevalent throughout Korean history challenge the exclusivity of Durkheim's suicide types. Thus, I find it necessary to further explore Durkheim's suicide in Korea, specifically South Korea, and juxtapose his suicide-types with people's own conceptualizations of the phenomenon today. In this way, I can compare more case and ideas about suicide to Durkheim's original formulation to suggest ways that the original theory can be reformulated. That is, the theory can be rethought in a way that captures the contextual essence of suicide in Korea, making for a nuanced understanding that can potentially add to understandings of the phenomenon, including but not limited to aiding prevention efforts.

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〈Abstract〉

## **Expected Sacrifices and Inescapable Oppressions: A Durkheimian Lens in Analyzing Historical Cases of Suicide in Korea**

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Suicide in Korea has a long history dating back to Japanese occupied Chosŏn/Korea (1910-1945) and beyond. Émile Durkheim's influential social study of suicide has provided utility in classifying suicides across various contexts, and I contend here that his suicide typology can be used to understand suicides during this time period in Korea. Through analyzing secondary sources, this historical analysis will provide a basic foundation of how suicide has been understood and practiced during this selected time period in Korean history, with specific focus on how the uprooting of traditional society and culture under colonialism has shown a multiplicity of Durkheim's suicide types. For this very reason, this paper further discusses the theoretical implications in arguing the fluidity of Durkheim's suicide types.

**Keywords:** Suicide, Durkheim, Fatalism, Anomie, Altruism, Egoism, Sacrifice

〈국문초록〉

## 예상된 희생과 피할 수 없는 억압: 한국의 역사적 자살 사례 분석에서의 뒤르켐의 관점

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한국에서의 자살은 일본이 조선(한국)을 합병한 시기(1910-1945)와 그 이전까지 거슬러 올라가는 역사를 가지고 있다. 에밀 뒤르켐의 영향력이 지대한 자살 관련 사회학 연구는 자살을 다양한 유형으로 분류하는 용도로 사용되었으며, 저자 또한 본 연구에서 이 시기 한국의 자살을 이해하는 데에 그의 유형론을 활용할 수 있을 것으로 주장한다. 2차 사료의 분석을 통한 이 역사적 분석은 한국의 역사에서 해당 기간 자살이 어떻게 이해되었으며 실행되었는지에 대한 연구의 기본적인 토대를 제공할 것이며, 특히 식민주의 치하 전통 사회와 문화의 근절이 뒤르켐의 자살의 유형들을 어떻게 보여주었는지에 초점을 맞추었다. 그리고 이러한 이유로 본 논문은 이에 더 나아가 뒤르켐의 자살 유형의 유용성을 주장하는 것이 가진 이론적 함의를 논의할 것이다.

주제어: 자살, 뒤르켐, 숙명론적 자살, 아노미적 자살, 이타적 자살, 이기적 자살, 희생