

# **'Becoming Ecological Citizens'**

: The Women Peasants' Alternative Agriculture Movement  
struggles with the Climate Crisis in South Korea

---

Hyojeong KIM

Deputy Director, Ecofeminism Research Center  
By Korean Women's Environmental Network

# Climate Crisis, Gender, Agriculture



# Research Objectives

- This study urgently **calls for a new feminist citizenship discussion** in response to the reality of women peasants who are directly affected by **the current climate crisis and ecological disasters.**
- To elucidate the process of **“Becoming Ecological Citizens”** about how women peasants, who have been positioned as important agents of the subsistence economy against the global agricultural food system and patriarchal unequal structure, transform into a driving force for establishing a **new ecological and citizenly experiential world, and propelling social changes in the current climate crisis and ecological disaster.**

# Research Objectives

- This research focuses on **women peasants' alternative agricultural movements based on the ecology of land in South Korea** which develop, give impetus to, and strengthen their new power.
- The study seeks to clarify how such power can be extended to the women peasants' citizenly practices in response to the rapidly changing current ecological problems and what **new concepts of citizenship may emerge through the discussion of becoming ecological citizens.**

# Becoming Ecological Citizens

- This study proposes **a new concept of “Becoming Ecological Citizens”** on how a manifestation of a new feminist citizenship based on the intertwined interspecies relationship between humans and the more-than-human world may be possible.
- In the case of women peasants, becoming ecological citizens through the political process of practicing the alternative agriculture movement is also **a process of becoming new subjects by reorganizing the ways they build relationships** with existing ecological environment, market, and nation as they challenge them.



# Becoming Ecological Citizens

---

A political process in which human relationship with ecology changes through the embodiment and internal workings of matters as ecology, and this transformed relationship expand in layers (Hyojeong Kim, 2022).



Reference: Hyojeong Kim(2022), “A study on ‘Becoming Ecological Citizen’ reflected on Alternative Agricultural Movement by Women Peasants in Indonesia and South Korea”, Ewha Womans University

# Women Peasants' Alternative Agriculture Movement in South Korea

- A feminist qualitative research method: participatory observation and depth interview
- A case study : The alternative agricultural movements of women peasants as the food sovereignty and agroecology movement since 2010s by the Korean Women Peasants Association(KWPA).
- The KWPA was established in 1989 as the social peasants' movement and joined a member of La Via Campesina in ealry 2000s.



## A Case Study:

# **Sangju Women Peasants' Organization Y**

- The Korean case Y is an alternative agricultural movement led by women peasants in the Sangju region and a producer cooperative based in village B. Y is a member of KWPA.
- In 2009, a nationwide women peasants' organization launched a seasonal food box program. Y came to form a community of seasonal food box producers centered around village B.
- In Village B, women peasants were able to exercise their production sovereignty and economic rights to their income for the first time through Y's activities since 2009, as they planned farming in their own vegetable gardens themselves, supplied agricultural products under their own names, and earned income through their own bank accounts.
- As of 2021, there are 16 women peasant producers from Y, most of whom live in village B. Their ages range from their 40s to 80s.
- The women peasants of Y send out around 200 packages including organic, seasonal and indigenous food to consumers every week(1 package is 23 US dollar).

# Y's Activities



## ***Ecological Expansion of Women Peasants' Movements***

- “This is not simply a matter of whether to use pesticides or not, but **a way of understanding nature**. The way we live life. That's what I thought. For example, I can't do organic farming and then live a toxic mess of a life myself. You come to think that you should also live an equally humble, simple and connected life... That's why women peasants need to move to the ecological way through communal projects. It's not just an individual earning some economic profit... It does more, **it is changing the community**. (Joo Young, Member of Y)”
- The women peasants of Y were able to strengthen the organization's alternative agricultural movement and simultaneously aspire further to becoming ecological farmers through **La Via Campesina's education on and practice of agroecology movement**.
- The women peasants become **more sensitive in responding to the ecological environment such as land, seeds, and crops**, as both direct participants of the **women peasants' movement** and the practicing **agent of ecological farming**.
- They were becoming the subjects of **advocating ecological value system working with their hands and capturing with their eyes the demands of ecology**.

# Becoming Ecological Citizens

- *Transformation of Women Peasants' Movement in Sangju*

“We can't just say this is environmental agriculture when we just use disposable goods whenever we want and do whatever is convenient for us... That's how I think. **My life needs to go ecological.** (Kyungsook. Member of Y)”

- They form a **new relationship with ecology through alternative agriculture**, saving land and preserving seeds; **expanded their ecological relationships** within their families, villages, and region, and prompted **ecological and citizenly practices of “becoming ecological citizens”**; become new farmer-subjects and citizen-subjects beyond existing class divisions of small peasants or family farmers.
- They become new subjects, was transforming individuals, communities, villages, and the region by **rebuilding the ecological and practical experiential world** of the women peasants with the women peasants' struggle against ideologies of patriarchy and neoliberalism, and the rights-centered movements including their fight for farmers' rights and food sovereignty.

# Possibility of Forming and Expanding Feminist Ecological Citizenship

- This study attempted to raise the issue of the paradigm shift in which the current feminist citizenship and alternative discourses are located, and to investigate the discussion of radical feminism that is **newly arrayed in its relationship with ecology as a process of new transition.**
- The current social and national systems do not recognize the world beyond the human world as an agent of action, and still mobilizes it as resources, means, and tools for development.
- Climate crises and ecological disasters that are nature's counterattack calls for the search for a new coexistent relationship between humans and the ecology as an actor.

## Possibility of Forming and Expanding Feminist Ecological Citizenship

- The process of becoming ecological citizens, this approach seeks the direction of change toward the ways in which women can have their position as regional and national transformers centered on the ecology beyond being environmental victims or passive subjects, maternal caregivers, agricultural producers, and a political resistant.
- It demonstrates significance in its feminist approach by addressing the possibility of forming and expanding feminist ecological citizenship. It reveals that **the core power to expand the extension of women peasants' alternative agriculture movement and to drive changes in the regions' gender politics and gender power relations starts from the ecology.**

## Possibility of Forming and Expanding Feminist Ecological Citizenship

- The women's process of becoming ecological citizens was sometimes **conflicting and competing with the regions' structure of inequality**. It indicates that they still face limitations in which the regional and national **social systems do not consider the ecology as an actor**.
- Thus, an **ecological paradigm shift in the regional and national systems** is urgently required.



# Thank you!

---

Hyojeong KIM

[sheenkimm@gmail.com](mailto:sheenkimm@gmail.com)