

THE DESYNCHRONIZED EVOLUTION OF JUSTICE AND ETHOS:
A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF THE LEGAL AND SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT OF AUTISM IN SOUTH KOREA AND THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction

The recognition and support for individuals with disabilities have evolved significantly in the past decade, driven by post-war re-evaluations of outdated social structures. The conflicts of the mid-20th century catalyzed a reassessment of traditional beliefs and social frameworks, encouraging changes in how societies perceive and advocate those with disabilities. Central to such shifts were social norms, which shape collective behaviors and cultural attitudes toward physical and behavioral differences.¹ More conservative cultures have tended to resist changes in these areas, affecting how disabilities are viewed and supported in society.²

As such, autism awareness and legislation have developed differently across cultures, with South Korea and the United States providing a compelling contrast. South Korea, with its conservative and homogeneous society rooted in Confucianism and Buddhism, faced significant cultural resistance toward recognizing disabilities.³ Against this reserved cultural stance, the liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 necessitated rapid infrastructure recovery and the establishment of comprehensive social policies, leading to the enactment and revisions of disability legislation. Largely undisclosed to the public, South Korea's disability legislation was heavily influenced by progressive U.S. policies, resulting in a sudden rise in disability recognition that was disproportionate to the cultural norms and attitudes present at that time. In contrast, characterized by its diverse and individualistic culture, the United States demonstrated a gradual acceptance and integration of autism

support. The U.S. legislative approach, aligning with its cultural demands, resulted in a steady increase in support and recognition of autism, reflecting a causal relationship between cultural attitudes and legislative actions.⁴

How have the cultural contexts of South Korea and the U.S. shaped the legal and social development of autism? This paper examines the contrasting evolutions of legal frameworks and cultural landscapes regarding autism in these two nations from the 1970s to the 2010s. Analysis of legislative milestones and societal perspectives reveals how the mismatch between cultural attitudes and legislation has impacted the recognition of autism. This essay first outlines the history of the term “autism” and then compares the cultural and legislative histories of the U.S. and South Korea to uncover how their asymmetrical developments have affected autism reception. Ultimately, while both nations have made legislative progress, the differing cultural readiness to embrace autism has significantly impacted the de facto efficacy and societal acceptance of these legal measures.

History of Autism

Evolution of Diagnosis and Understanding

Autism, medically referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), is a combination of neurodevelopmental conditions characterized by challenges in social interaction, communication, and repetitive behaviors.⁵ Historically, the inconspicuous nature of autism has necessitated an ongoing reevaluation of mental disabilities and the terminology used to describe them within the social context. The spectrum nature of autism means that individuals experience symptoms to varying degrees, leading to a diverse range of abilities and needs. The plurality of the medical terminology is due to its sub-categorization of three of the five pervasive developmental disorders, including autism, Asperger syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder.⁶

The historical evolution of understanding and defining autism has been significantly influenced by not only shifting medical evidence over the decades but also by changes in the social environment and interpretations of disability. As a result, understanding how the approach to the term 'autism' had altered since the early twentieth century is closely tied to the medical, legal, social, and cultural developments experienced by a particular society. Consequently, the stages of accepting autism logically vary depending on each country's progress.

The term 'autism' originates from the Greek word 'autos,' meaning 'self,' reflecting the condition's early conceptualization as a state of being 'self-absorbed.'⁷ Autism was first coined by Swiss Psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in the early twentieth century, alongside the medical term schizophrenia, with which autism was widely compared during the mid-twentieth century.⁸ Shortly after the coining of the term, the Russian child psychiatrist Grunya Efimovna Sukhareva was one of the first to document detailed clinical descriptions of autism. In 1925, she described the symptoms of autism in a comprehensive clinical description in 1925 of six boys aged between 2 and 14, initially referring to the condition as 'schizoid psychopathy.'⁹ Sukhareva continued her studies in her 1926 article, highlighting the observed exceptional talents and intellectual gifts in these children, alongside their unconventional behavior and corresponding challenges.¹⁰

In British psychiatrist Sula Wolff's translated passage of the 1926 article, researchers David Ariel Sher and Jenny L. Gibson comment that in Sukhareva's documentation, children are recorded as demonstrating traits of solitude and retraction from their peers, beginning in early childhood.¹¹ Sukhareva attributed qualities to the children she observed that contemporary psychiatrists would deem 'autistic' characteristics.¹² Her detailed reports in her 1925 and 1926 articles laid the groundwork for recognizing autism as a distinct developmental disorder. The traits documented in these articles that focus on a child's

difficulty with communication, social withdrawal, and repetitive behavior later became the foundation for early autism-based diagnostic criteria.

Successors of Sukhareva's research include Austrian-American psychiatrist Leo Kanner and Austrian physician Hans Asperger. Both highlighted a mid-twentieth-century view of autism as a disability caused by parental and environmental factors. Consequently, psychiatrists focused more on identifying and classifying autism rather than understanding and accepting it.

During the 1940s, Kanner coined the term 'early infantile autism,' replacing Sukhareva's original terminology, 'schizoid personality in childhood.'¹³ Kanner's first critical paper in 1943, titled "Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact," is often considered foundational in the discussion of autism. In his paper, Kanner outlines his observations of 11 cases where children demonstrated 'autistic' syndromes despite being physically normal.^{14,15} He notes that the similarities between autism and childhood schizophrenia include extreme autism, obsessiveness, stereotypy, and echolalia. However, he definitively states how the element of change, apparent in childhood schizophrenia, is unnoticeable in the case of those with infantile autism.¹⁶

Kanner's work differentiated the parent-child relationship in cases of 'early infantile autism' from that of childhood schizophrenia, establishing a distinct field of medical diagnosis. His theory gained wider attention with an article in *Time* on April 26, 1948, titled "Medicine: Frosted Children," where he is quoted using a metaphor that reads, "[The children were] kept neatly in a refrigerator which didn't defrost."¹⁷ Kanner later criticized parents again in the July 25, 1960, issue of *Time*, suggesting that parental neglect metaphorically froze children into oblivion. This notion contributed to the 'refrigerator mother' theory, highly relevant in the 1960s diagnosis of autism, which postulated that autism was caused by mothers who were cold and neglectful.¹⁸ Despite Kanner's influential work, significant

medical advancements in the 1960s, as evidenced by reporter Charles C. Thomas's article "The Child Is Father," showed that Kanner's concept of 'early infantile autism' is similar to the now outdated idea of childhood schizophrenia.¹⁹

Around the same time, Asperger released his paper in 1944, titled, "*Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen' im Kindesalter*," which translates to "'Autistic Psychopathy' in Childhood." In his paper, Asperger defines autism as a term derived from schizophrenia and describes it as a disorder that generates an abnormal personality structure.²⁰ Asperger conducted a similar case study approach to Kanner's by analyzing what he believed to be autism through family and child relations. His case studies demonstrated differences in characteristics, exceptional intelligence, difficult and oppositional behaviors in social situations, and genetic factors that were seen as noticeable traits of those with the condition he identified as autism.²¹ Despite Asperger's epidemiological study sharing similar observations to Kanner's in the previous year, editor Uta Frith noted, "The image of the unworldly professor is indeed reminiscent of autism... Kanner, too, evoked this image when describing parents of autistic children."²² Frith also clarifies how Asperger would not have been influenced by Kanner's work during the war years.²³

Highly influenced by but veritably opposed to the theories of Kanner and Asperger, British psychiatrist Lorna Wing submitted papers that contested the 'refrigerator mother' theory suggested by Kanner. She made significant contributions during the 1980s, most notably through her involvement with the 'triad of impairments' diagnosis research that remains relevant in modern-day autism studies. During the early 1980s, Wing formulated three types of impairments demonstrated in children with autism, which she later coined the 'triad of impairments' or 'Wing's triad.'²⁴ The triad consisted of impairments in social interaction, abnormalities of language development, and repetitive behavioral patterns, as noted in her 1979 paper. Her devotion to altering the pre-supposed perception of autism

continued with her 1985 publication, “Autistic Children: A Guide for Parents and Professionals.” The book outlines the revised perception of autism, not as ‘early infantile autism’ but rather as a form of ‘childhood psychosis.’²⁵

Wing argued that Kanner’s perception of autism was based on subjective observations, which could be biased, and that the social or intellectual nature of the parent had little impact on the development of autism, contrary to Kanner’s initial suggestions.²⁶ She clarified that research methodology lacking empirical evidence and grounded in subjective judgment led to incorrect conclusions about the causes of autism.²⁷ Wing shifted the focus from causality to the identification of autism through her research, building upon and developing from the theories of Kanner and Asperger.

The shift from Sukhareva, then to Kanner and Asperger, and onto Wing demonstrates how autism has metamorphosed from a sub-category of childhood schizophrenia to an autonomous disability. This transition reflects a broader recognition of autism that embraces various forms of medical evidence. Wing states that childhood psychosis associated with autism is a term that describes but does not explain, and as such, the causes for it may sometimes be indicative and precise, while at other times, they remain unseen.²⁸ The rigid need to categorize disabilities in society during the early 1940s up to the 1960s dissipated to a degree during the 1980s, making way for a more nuanced understanding of autism.

The Neurodiversity Movement and Modern Understanding

With increased depth in medical research and the rising popularity of autism studies during the late twentieth century, the effort to define, understand, and calibrate autism and the spectrum itself catalyzed the rise of the concept later called ‘neurodiversity.’ This term has become particularly relevant in the context of autism, as it highlights the need to view autism as one of the many natural variations in human neurology. According to Dr. Lawrence Fung

from Stanford University, neurodiversity “is a concept that regards differences in brain function and behavior as part of the normal variation of the human population.”²⁹

Neurodiversity posits that neurological differences, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other conditions, are natural variations in brain function and behavior, reflecting the normal diversity within the human population.³⁰ This paradigm shift promotes the idea that society should embrace and accommodate these differences instead of trying to correct them.

The concept of neurodiversity gained traction alongside legislative advancements, such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This act mandated that all children, regardless of their disabilities, are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment possible.³¹ These legislative frameworks have been crucial in advancing the rights and inclusion of neurodivergent individuals in educational settings and beyond.

The term ‘neurodiversity’ was coined in the late 1990s by Australian sociologist Judy Singer. Singer’s work was foundational in framing neurodiversity as a social category similar to gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.³² As both a mother of a daughter with Asperger’s syndrome and a self-identifying individual with Asperger’s, Singer's contribution significantly influenced the field's perspective. She identified neurodiversity as promoting the acceptance and understanding of neurological differences.³³ In *NeuroDiversity: The Birth of an Idea* (2017), she writes, “The ‘Neurologically Different’ represents a new addition to the familiar political categories of class, gender, and race and will augment the insights of the Social Model of Disability.”³⁴ Singer advocates the legitimacy of neurodiversity as a field of study that can contribute to and elevate positive social recognition for autism.

As can be seen from the psychiatrists mentioned as key players in developing the spectrum of autism, most stem from either Europe or the United States. Therefore,

frameworks founded in these societies tend to take precedence in autism medical research and serve as a foundation for other countries to build upon their development of autism support. The United States, in particular, has approached the social issues concerning autism through the lens of other civil rights issues within a diverse, heterogeneous community. Understanding the stability of the historical transition of aid to autism support demonstrated in the United States in recent years is critical in understanding the foundation on which other countries should base their efforts.

Progression of Autism Reception in the United States

Cultural and Legislative Milestones

The medical development of autism is marked by subjective analyses and generalized judgments, as demonstrated by Kanner and Asperger's theories, which have recently been condemned as antiquated perspectives. However, subjectivity on a social issue is a communal phenomenon rather than an individualistic one. Culture is critical in understanding the public's attitude toward social problems because it represents an amalgamation of a community's behavior, values, and mindset.³⁵ In the case of the United States, its cultural history complements legislative efforts toward social inclusion and equality, with the progression of legislation reflecting the gradual development of its cultural growth.

The United States is a heterogeneous society.³⁶ The country's evolving multiethnic social structure has prompted increasing demands for equality among various racial and ethnic groups, leading to gradual but significant revisions of societal inequalities, particularly during and after the Civil Rights Movements of the 1950s and 1960s. The United States is often perceived as culturally individualistic, with community members having heightened respect for individuality and a more rigid legislative history. Social reception to autism has grown alongside advocacy for other civil rights issues.³⁷

Special education for individuals with disabilities began as early as 1817, with institutions such as the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons and the Perkins Institution for the Blind, established in 1832.³⁸ Further support for disability education was seen with the founding of Gallaudet University, initially The National Deaf Mute College, in 1864.³⁹ Despite social discrimination persisting until the mid-twentieth century, the early recognition of the importance of educating individuals with disabilities indicates a gradual but steady approach in the United States toward legislation and support for those with disabilities.

The recognition of autism as a distinct disorder in the United States began in the early twentieth century. Initially, legislation for disabilities focused on physical impairments, as demonstrated by the establishments of the nineteenth century. Critical developments addressing behavioral disabilities, such as autism, emerged from the 1970s onwards, marked by several notable pieces of legislation.

Four significant past legislations include Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. These core legislations shaped the legal landscape for autism before the twenty-first century.

Two recent legislations, the Autism CARES Act of 2014 and the 21st Century Cares Act of 2016, are crucial contemporary measures that sustain and encourage further social and legal support for autism in the United States. Alongside historical developments in civil rights that gained momentum in the 1960s, the legislative evolution in support of autism has shown a steadfast rise. The gradual enforcement and revisions of legislation have actively reflected society's needs, illustrating how the active, heterogeneous cultural attitude in the United States has contributed to the stable progression of positive change.

Impact of the Civil Rights Movement

Public recognition of autism began with the "refrigerator mother" theory, which erroneously blamed parents for their children's condition and kept autism off the political agenda. The rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s laid the groundwork for the Disability Rights Movement, which gained momentum after John F. Kennedy's election—this period established a foundational understanding of equality and rights that would eventually include the Disability Rights Movement, although legislative achievements lagged.

While the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was propelled by well-structured organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which had clear agendas of combating segregation and racial discrimination in public spaces, the early Disability Rights Movement lacked such cohesive structures.⁴⁰ However, the momentum of a progressive society after the 1964 Civil Rights Act (CRA), which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin, began to influence public perception. Disabilities started to be viewed as a matter of human rights rather than solely through a medical or charitable lens.⁴¹

This shift in perspective sparked early efforts and protests by disability rights activists who began to demand inclusion and accessibility. The Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), established in 1946, actively advocated for the rights of disabled veterans, emphasizing the need for accessible housing and public facilities.⁴² Their efforts brought attention to the physical barriers faced by disabled veterans and influenced broader disability rights advocacy. In the 1960s, a group of students with disabilities at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), known as the "Rolling Quads" and led by Ed Roberts, began advocating for greater accessibility on public facilities such as school campuses. The change-

seeking culture of the American baby-boom generation, college students in the 1980s, played a pivotal role in shaping the later enforcement of the ADA, based on the groundwork laid by the Civil Rights Movement.⁴³

Polish-American psychologist Solomon Eliot Asch noted how many activists were “ready with armor and anger to fight to preserve their sense of self, which the adult world was trying to shatter,” outlining the prevailing sentiment at the time.⁴⁴ Among the many notable figures who enriched the discussion of disability rights, Roberts exemplified the positive fight for advocacy as he drew on his own challenges as a disabled student to rally support and establish advocacy frameworks at UC Berkeley. These combined efforts highlighted the urgent need for legislative action to address the physical barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, culminating in the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968.

The growing recognition of the need for accessible public spaces led to the establishment of the National Commission on Architectural Barriers to Rehabilitation of the Handicapped. This commission conducted a comprehensive study titled “Design for All Americans,” which highlighted the numerous physical barriers preventing individuals with disabilities from fully participating in society.⁴⁵ The study underscored the inadequacy of voluntary measures and called for federal legislation to ensure accessibility. The commission's recommendations were instrumental in shaping the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968.⁴⁶

Congress passed the ABA, mandating that buildings and facilities constructed, altered, or leased with federal funds must be accessible to individuals with disabilities.⁴⁷ The act authorized three federal agencies – the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Defense, and the General Services Administration – to prescribe standards for accessibility. In 1976, the U.S. Postal Service also ensured facility accessibility. The passage of the ABA marked a significant milestone for disabled individuals. It was the first federal law to address accessibility, setting a precedent for future legislation.

For the first time, the federal government recognized the need to eliminate architectural barriers and mandated accessibility in buildings funded by federal dollars. This legislation was crucial in ensuring that disabled individuals could access public services, participate in community life, and have equal opportunities in employment and education.⁴⁸

As awareness and advocacy for disability rights grew, it became increasingly clear that ensuring access to services and facilities was only part of the solution; broader anti-discrimination protections were necessary to ensure true equality. This realization led to the formulation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a landmark piece of legislation that extended the anti-discrimination language of the CRA to people with disabilities. Advocacy groups such as Disabled in Action (DIA), led by activists such as Judith E. Heumann, played a pivotal role in enacting the law, as President Nixon had previously vetoed early versions of the Rehabilitation Act in October 1972 and March 1973.⁴⁹ The DIA staged several protests, including a notable sit-in on Madison Avenue in New York City, where eighty activists stopped traffic to draw attention to the cause.⁵⁰ Other demonstrations, such as those in Washington D.C., included groups like the PVA and the National Paraplegia Foundation.⁵¹ These demonstrations further highlighted the urgent need for federal legislation to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities.

Although Section 504 is concise, its significance cannot be overstated. It marked a pivotal shift toward recognizing disability as a civil rights issue rather than a purely medical condition, fundamentally changing the landscape for disability rights. Through this legislation, all disabilities, including behavioral ones such as autism, could not be excluded from any offered social activities, thus creating an equal foundation between those who had disabilities and those who did not.

Successful community outreach and activism bolstered the enactment of Section 504, leading to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, later renamed the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law mandated that public schools provide free and appropriate education to all children with disabilities, including autism, and was transformative in integrating them into mainstream education.⁵² The IDEA required public schools to create individualized education programs (IEPs) tailored to each student's unique needs, outlining specific educational goals, services, and accommodations. It emphasized educating students in the least restrictive environment, meaning they should be included in regular classrooms as much as possible.⁵³

The IDEA addressed the issue of many children with disabilities being either denied access to education or placed in segregated settings and receiving substandard support. It ensured access to quality education and the support needed to be accepted into society and succeed. More importantly, the IDEA's impact extended beyond the physical premise of the school. By promoting inclusive education, it helped change societal attitudes toward people with disabilities, fostering greater understanding and acceptance for a range of ages in society.

The elevation of public morale through the educational and social benefits offered to those with disabilities through the IDEA swiftly ushered in a series of legislations during the 1980s and 1990s. Notable among these were the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Moreover, the legislative support allowed for civil rights advocacy to become increasingly intricate during this period. A theme introduced in this decade was the protection of individuals with developmental disabilities in institutional settings. The Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) of 1980 allowed the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate conditions in state and local institutions, ensuring that the rights of individuals with disabilities, including those with autism, were not violated.⁵⁴ This act highlighted the need for oversight and accountability in institutions, addressing issues of abuse, neglect, and

inadequate care. Additionally, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1984 provided grants to states for comprehensive services and emphasized the protection of civil rights for individuals with developmental disabilities.⁵⁵

Inclusion through education was also strengthened by the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986, which expanded the mandate for free and appropriate public education to include children aged three to five and established early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities.⁵⁶ This legislation emphasized the importance of early identification and support, ensuring that children with autism and other developmental disabilities received necessary educational and developmental services from a young age. The focus on inclusive education aimed to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream educational settings, promoting their social and academic development. These legislative efforts during the 1980s set the stage for the ADA by highlighting the necessity of both educational inclusion and civil rights protection for individuals with disabilities.

Building on these legislative efforts during the 1980s, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 represented a significant milestone in protecting and including individuals with disabilities, particularly autism. Signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President George H.W. Bush, the ADA is one of the most significant pieces of disability legislation in U.S. history. It was groundbreaking in its scope and impact, prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places open to the people.⁵⁷

For individuals with autism, the ADA provided a framework ensuring their right to equal opportunities in various facets of life. The ADA's core goal was to provide equal rights and opportunities similar to those offered under the CRA, thereby empowering people with disabilities to participate fully in society.⁵⁸ This legislation was pivotal because it extended

civil rights protection to a broader range of disabilities, marking a significant shift from viewing disability as a purely medical condition to recognizing it as a civil rights issue.

The ADA was the result of persistent and vigorous activism by disability rights advocates. The disability rights movement drew inspiration from the civil and women's rights movements, utilizing similar tactics such as protests, sit-ins, and lobbying efforts. Key advocates included Judy E. Heumann and Justin Dart Jr., often referred to as the "Father of the ADA," who played a crucial role in garnering support for the act. Notable events leading up to the ADA included the 504 Sit-In in 1977, where activists occupied a federal building to demand the enforcement of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Capitol Crawl in 1990, where activists, including children, left their wheelchairs and crawled up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to highlight the barriers faced by people with disabilities.⁵⁹ These acts of activism highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive legislation to address discrimination and accessibility issues.

The ADA not only mapped disability rights issues as civil rights issues but also offered legislative support to help individuals with disabilities integrate into society, encouraging re-engagement by breaking down discriminatory barriers. As demonstrated by its resonance with other civil rights movements, the creation of the ADA signifies a social shift in perception founded on the U.S. culture's commitment to inclusion and social harmony.

Modern Legislative Efforts and Continuing Challenges

Despite its justified necessity, the ADA faced resistance, primarily concerning economic issues. Small businesses expressed concerns over the financial burden of compliance. Patricia Wangsness, co-owner of a small bagel shop, highlighted the economically inconvenient renovation costs required for ADA compliance, such as adding restrooms, which displaced customer seating.⁶⁰ *The Chicago Tribune* reflected on these concerns, criticizing the ADA for

demanding unrealistic cooperation from small businesses.⁶¹ This tension necessitated strategic negotiations to balance the rights of individuals with disabilities and the economic concerns of businesses. Religious institutions also presented moral objections, viewing government-mandated accessibility measures as an infringement on religious freedom.⁶²

However, challenges faced by the enforcement of the ADA did not deter its purpose. The ADA mandated accessibility in public buildings, provided reasonable accommodations in the workplace, and standardized protection against discrimination in various aspects of daily life for those with disabilities. The ADA's impact has been profound, ensuring that millions of Americans with disabilities, including those with autism, can access the same opportunities as everyone else. President George H.W. Bush's statement during the signing of the ADA, praising it as a representation of the development of the democratic principles in the United States, clarifies the moral trajectory of the law and the necessity for its inclusion in society.⁶³ The ADA not only protected and served people with disabilities, but it also contributed to the elevation of the cultural and social development of the United States, integrating the secluded and revitalizing communal cooperation.

The ADA set a solid basis for all individuals with disabilities to be integrated into society, but specific autism-related legislation only began to emerge during the early twenty-first century. Developments were made in the form of continuous improvements of legal protections and services, ensuring that the evolving needs of the autism community were met. Reauthorizing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004 was a critical step in this direction. Building on the original Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the 2004 amendments aimed to ensure that children with disabilities, including autism, received a high-quality education. For autistic students, the updated IDEA mandated the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) tailored to their unique needs. This meant that schools were required to provide specific accommodations, such as speech

therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral support, to help autistic students succeed academically and socially.⁶⁴ Additionally, the 2004 IDEA revision emphasized the importance of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with autism, recognizing that early diagnosis and support can significantly improve long-term outcomes.⁶⁵ The law also aimed to reduce the disproportionate identification of minority students in special education and ensure that special education teachers were highly qualified, thereby improving the quality of education for autistic students.

Complementing these educational improvements was the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, which broadened the definition of disability to ensure more individuals, including those with autism, were covered. The amendments addressed the limited interpretations of the original ADA, which had excluded many disabled individuals from coverage. By expanding the definition, the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 ensured that cognitive and neurological impairments, such as autism, were recognized as disabilities, providing broader protection from discrimination in employment, education, and other public areas. Furthermore, it ensured individuals with autism could access reasonable accommodations in the workplace, such as modified work schedules, assistive technologies, and support from job coaches. These accommodations helped autistic individuals gain employment, fostering greater social independence and inclusion. The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 exemplify the continuous improvement of autism legislation in America. These legislative efforts highlight a commitment to refining and expanding protection and services for individuals with autism, ensuring that laws evolve to meet their needs. By building on and thereby strengthening existing legislation, the United States demonstrated steadfast dedication to supporting the rights and opportunities of individuals with autism, promoting their inclusion, and enabling them to lead fulfilling and independent lives.

More recently, legal efforts have continued to improve the social incorporation and understanding of autism, reflecting a solid commitment to enhancing the lives of autistic individuals. The Autism CARES Act of 2014 reauthorized and expanded the Combating Autism Act of 2006, ensuring sustained federal support for autism research, services, training, and prevalence tracking.⁶⁶ This act significantly increased federal funding and mandated a comprehensive report to Congress on the needs of individuals with autism transitioning to adulthood, addressing critical gaps in services for adults with autism. In 2019, the Autism CARES Act was further revised, expanding federal activities to cover the entire lifespan of individuals with autism and increasing annual funding to \$369.7 million through 2024.⁶⁷ This legislation emphasized early diagnosis and intervention, training medical professionals, and developing treatments for associated medical conditions. By supporting Centers of Excellence in autism research, the act enhanced understanding of autism's biological causes and comorbidities.⁶⁸ These efforts have improved societal understanding and support for autistic individuals, facilitating their integration into the community and promoting better health and well-being .

The 21st Century Cures Act of 2016 also played a crucial role in advancing autism research and care. This comprehensive legislation aimed to accelerate medical product development and bring innovations to patients more efficiently.⁶⁹ For the autism community, it included initiatives to enhance research on autism and related conditions. The act provided funding to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to foster the development of new treatments and interventions.⁷⁰ By promoting innovative medical research and expediting the approval process for new therapies, the 21st Century Cures Act has contributed to a better understanding of autism and improved access to effective treatments, enhancing the quality of life for individuals with autism. The Autism CARES Act of 2014 and the 21st Century Cures Act of 2016 exemplify the continuous

improvement of autism legislation in America. By focusing on research, early intervention, and comprehensive support through the lifespan of those with autism, these legislative advancements have significantly contributed to supporting autism rather than merely treating it.

Despite the gradual development of both cultural reception to and legislative support on autism, the United States continues to demonstrate the need for further progress in understanding how to navigate autism in society. This is exemplified by differing opinions on the viability of medical treatment for autism. Some believe that social and economic setbacks necessitate the treatment of autism and that early intervention and medical treatment are essential. In contrast, others advocate for the theories of positive psychology that emphasize building strengths rather than repairing deficiencies.^{71,72} The contention in methods of psychiatry and difference in opinion on handling autism demonstrate that cultural growth and acceptance in the United States are not yet universal, encouraging further development to ensure those with autism receive optimal opportunities equivalent to their non-disabled peers.

The legislative development of the United States has demonstrated a steadfast dedication to supporting the rights and opportunities of individuals with autism, fostering a more inclusive society where they can thrive. By treating disabilities as imperative social issues on par with concerns of race and gender, disability law has evolved alongside social support. It has shown a rise structured on causality. Moreover, the continuous revisions of past legislation to reinforce specific laws for autism further substantiate how the law has been shaped following the country's desires. The cultural heterogeneity of the United States has catalyzed the need for equality in society, with its individualistic tendencies catering to accepting those with disabilities far more regularly in the process. Culture can be seen to explain the steadiness of legislative development accurately, and as a result, the legal and social progression of accepting autism has shown a proportionate rise. The United States

demonstrates that the proportionate rise between the justice system and social ethos is critical to attaining stability in social matters.

The Desynchronization between Judicial History and Social Acceptance in South Korea

Cultural Foundations: Impact of Social and Religious Norms

The United States has demonstrated a gradual but stable rise in the legal aiding of autism since the early twentieth century. In contrast, South Korea's legislation regarding disability, and specifically autism, has followed a more exponential growth pattern. After liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, South Korea faced political and social challenges that necessitated rapid improvements to address widespread poverty, infrastructure destruction, and social dislocation.⁷³ This urgency left limited room for gradual social reforms. However, South Korea benefited from having a foundation on which to base its legislation, drawing from the advancements and experiences of countries like the United States.⁷⁴ Consequently, this rapid development of enforced legal structures, with moral and social aspects of support for individuals with autism, has worn down the cultural rigidity of South Korean society. The social acceptance and integration of individuals with autism, though initially lagging, are now progressing as the legal framework continues to strengthen the societal understanding and acceptance of autism.

South Korea's legislative advancements can only be accurately understood within the context of its culture. As a primarily collectivist society, South Korean culture is driven by group activities, goals, and standards, often viewing disabilities as deviations from the norm.^{75,76} Rooted in Confucian traditions since the Chosun Dynasty, this collectivist approach has led researchers to classify Koreans as homogenous and conservative.⁷⁷ Kyung-Sup Chang has termed this cultural stance as *compressed modernity*, a family-oriented stance resistant to contemporary external influences.⁷⁸ This resistance is likely rooted in

Confucianism, which emphasizes harmony.⁷⁹ While the focus on family, community, and society seems positive for social development,⁸⁰ it has also resulted in an obsessive need to conform to the status quo. Consequently, the emphasis on community often means maintaining inclusion rather than initiating it for those considered to be outsiders.⁸¹ These ideas of compressed modernity align with Confucian values, which prioritize maintaining traditional norms over accepting new ones.⁸² As a result, research in the early twenty-first century has demonstrated that South Korea's societal norms have complicated the integration and support of individuals with disabilities.

Alongside Confucianism, other aspects such as religion and educational values greatly influence South Korean society's perception of disabilities. South Koreans often relate disabilities to religious retribution and supernatural punishments, such as curses from the devil for past sins.⁸³ Improper care during pregnancy, such as dietary issues or even insinuations of negative thoughts, were believed to have triggered *karma*, a religious belief in Buddhism that states that life should not be taken in any situation.⁸⁴ Consequentially, people with disabilities were often neglected and mocked due to their *karma*.

The country's emphasis on education is another trigger that enforces a hostile reception to disabilities. During the Chosun Dynasty, which spanned from 1392 to 1910, the most effective way to rise in social status was to become a government official through high-level education.⁸⁵ Confucianism, a central belief rooted in South Korea that has influenced the country for the past six centuries, has also encouraged education to be at the forefront of importance for South Korean citizens. South Koreans who were highly educated were often well respected in society.⁸⁶ It is this desire for education that led to the devaluation of those with disabilities, as these members of society were expected to have less academic potential for success.⁸⁷ The stigma is firmly based on South Korea's attitude toward disabilities rather than merely autism. As a result, the roots of its cultural history on those who are considered

socially abnormal have transferred to a hostile reception toward autism. Moreover, combatant attitudes form the basis of South Korean education morals; thus, its society places significant pressure on children to conform to the norm. Consequently, the social standards and cultural practices held in South Korea have had direct impacts on hindering the acceptance of autism in society, more so than in the United States.

Legislative Efforts and Activism

Despite the cultural resistance, the development of disability policies in South Korea, including those for autism, can be traced back as early as the post-Korean War period. The Korean Association for the Welfare of the Disabled (KAWD) was established in 1952 in response to the needs of disabled individuals emerging from the Korean War, which ended in 1953. The war left many individuals with physical and psychological injuries, creating a significant need for rehabilitation services and welfare support. The KAWD aimed to address these needs by providing various rehabilitation services, focusing on family care influenced by Confucian norms, emphasizing self-reliance and filial piety.⁸⁸ Confucianism provided a cultural framework that promoted the care of individuals with disabilities within the family unit.⁸⁹ This influence meant that familial structures often administered rehabilitation and support services, reflecting the Confucian emphasis on the family as the primary social welfare unit.⁹⁰ Such an approach initially helped integrate disability welfare into South Korean society by fostering a sense of duty and responsibility toward disabled family members. However, this reliance on family care also meant that formal state-provided services and support systems developed more slowly, as societal expectations placed the burden of care primarily on families.

The establishment of the KAWD did not categorically mention autism at its inception. The focus was more on the broader discourse of various physical and mental disabilities,

aiming to provide a general framework for rehabilitation and welfare. The emphasis on self-reliance and familial support laid a foundation that, while culturally resonant, required significant evolution to address the diverse and specific needs of people with autism and other developmental disabilities. Over time, South Korea's disability policies expanded and became more inclusive, influenced by global movements and domestic advocacy, such as the Federation of Disabled Youth and establishments of night schools. The Federation of Disabled Youth and the creation of night schools for high school equivalency education in the late 1980s reflected a shift toward more organized and comprehensive support for disabled individuals, including those with developmental disabilities.⁹¹ This period marked a significant transition from family-centered care to more institutional and societal responsibility for disability welfare, laying the groundwork for subsequent comprehensive disability legislation.

Post-war South Korea had demonstrated early feats of founding essential disability legislation. Still, a noticeable lack of legislation explicitly addressing autism persisted in the decades following, from the 1950s to the 1970s. This absence can be attributed to several factors, including limited awareness and understanding of autism as a distinct developmental disorder.⁹² Disabilities were often viewed through a narrow lens, primarily focusing on physical impairments and visible disabilities. Autism, with its less visible but profound impacts on communication and behavior, did not receive the attention it warranted. Thus, the broader category of intellectual and developmental disabilities was often not explicitly addressed, leading to a significant gap in services and support for individuals with autism during a period when the United States was advancing in both civil rights and disability issues.

Shortly after the drought of legal support in the prior decades, the 1970s saw a surge in activity. Activism related to disability rights in South Korea was relatively limited, but it

began to address critical issues such as institutional mistreatment, welfare benefits, access to education, and public transit. Advocates focused on improving conditions in institutions by securing welfare benefits and access to public services for individuals with disabilities who were often subjected to poor treatment.⁹³ This period led to the enactment of the Special Education Promotion Act (SEPA) in 1977, aimed at providing special education services to children with disabilities.⁹⁴

Though the SEPA in South Korea came chronologically before America's Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986, the SEPA was significantly less impactful. While the American legislation led to more comprehensive and enforceable provisions for individualized education programs (IEPs) and specific accommodations for various disabilities, the SEPA remained more general and did not offer detailed guidelines or support mechanisms for autistic children.⁹⁵ Evidently, South Korea's early legislative attempts were ambitious, but they often lacked the clear understanding to establish the necessary infrastructure and specificity to make a substantial difference in the lives of autistic individuals.

The continued progression of legislation supporting disabled people was catalyzed by significant disability activism in the 1980s and a rapid realization of the importance of acknowledging developmental disabilities, including autism. The Physical and Mental Disability Welfare Law was established in 1981, although its implementation was initially ineffectual.⁹⁶ This period saw heightened activism, with disability activists boycotting the 1988 Seoul Olympics and Paralympics to demand better welfare and employment benefits for disabled individuals.⁹⁷ The activism emphasized the necessity for comprehensive support and social integration for individuals with disabilities. Organizations such as the Korea Disabled People's Development Institute played pivotal roles in advocating for these changes. Their efforts included non-violent direct actions such as demonstrations, hunger strikes, and sit-ins,

which pressured the government to address the needs of disabled individuals. These actions also encouraged the formation of various organizations dedicated to the rights and welfare of disabled people, adopting slogans such as “emancipation from disability.”⁹⁸

Moreover, the 1980s also saw the establishment of night schools (*yahak*), which provided GED and vocational education for disabled individuals. These institutions fostered a sense of solidarity and community among disabled people, further galvanizing the disability rights movement.⁹⁹ Following the democratic elections in 1987, the new constitution contained civil rights protections for disabled people under Articles 10 and 11, marking a significant step toward recognizing the rights of individuals with disabilities.¹⁰⁰

South Korea's legislative approach to autism had increasingly focused on enhancing support and inclusion through targeted policies during the 1990s and the 2000s, demonstrating exponential growth in its legislative progress. The introduction of the Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons Act of 1990, the Act on Guarantee of Promotion of Convenience for Persons with Disabilities, the Ages, Pregnant Women, etc., and the emergence of activist groups such as the Korean Federation for the Disabled (KFD) highlighted South Korea's commitment to improving the lives of those with disabilities.

The Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons Act of 1990 necessitates hiring a certain percentage of disabled individuals in the public and private sectors. The Act on Guarantee of Promotion of Convenience for Persons with Disabilities, the Ages, Pregnant Women, etc., enhanced disabled accessibility in public facilities; the two acts provided individuals with disabilities to navigate public spaces independently and with dignity.^{101,102}

However, the heated governmental attention to autism did not reflect society's growing understanding of the subject matter. Renowned service provider and once well-respected

Korean advocate for disabled people, Weol Soon Kim-Rupnow, recorded various accounts of the media desperately portraying those with disabilities to heighten the sense of urgency and to educate the public. Kim-Rupnow references the editorial section of *JoongAng Ilbo*, a prominent South Korean newspaper, and the popular national cable network “Korean Broadcasting Service” (KBS) in 2001.¹⁰³ Her accounts demonstrate how, in 2001, the media attempted to alarm the public and convince them of a more revised perspective on disabilities, indicating that the social reception in 2001 concerning disabilities was that of negativity and avoidance.

Such accounts verify how political attempts to change public attitudes were not synchronized with South Korean society’s mindset. Kim-Rupnow also notes that many Koreans with disabilities and their families often experience feelings of shame, helplessness, denial, withdrawal, and depression because lifelong disabilities are viewed as karmic retribution for past sins.¹⁰⁴ She adds that people frequently stare at or gossip about those whose dress or behavior deviates from social norms, illustrating how deviation from the status quo was poorly received in early twenty-first-century South Korean society.¹⁰⁵

The rise in media attention and increased public knowledge marked the introduction of the Anti-Discrimination Against and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act of 2007, which protected the rights of individuals with disabilities, including autism.¹⁰⁶ This law prohibited discrimination in all aspects of life, including education, employment, and access to public services. By explicitly prohibiting both direct and indirect discrimination, the law reinforced the rights of autistic individuals to participate fully in society without facing unjust barriers. This legislation was, again, heavily influenced by advocacy from disability rights groups such as the Korea Disabled People's Development Institute (KODDI), which highlighted the systemic discrimination faced by disabled individuals.

In the same year, the Development of and Support for the Disabled Act was also enacted to provide a broader range of support services for people with disabilities, including healthcare, rehabilitation, education, employment, and social integration.¹⁰⁷ It emphasized the need for developing policies and programs tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities, including those with autism, ensuring they received the necessary support to lead fulfilling lives. This law marked a shift toward more personalized and comprehensive care for disabled individuals, influenced by advocacy efforts from organizations such as the Korea Differently Abled Federation (KODAF).¹⁰⁸

The expansion of tailored legislation continued with the introduction of the Act on Special Education for Persons with Disabilities, first enacted in 2008 and later amended in 2017. This act mandated that state and local governments provide appropriate education for persons with disabilities.¹⁰⁹ It included provisions for early detection, specialized educational institutions, and the training of special education teachers. The act aimed to ensure that children with autism and other disabilities received tailored education that met their needs, promoting their social inclusion and academic development. Advocacy by groups such as the Korean Parents' Network for People with Disabilities (KPNPD) played a crucial role in pushing for these educational reforms.

History of Reserved Social Attitudes

However, personal case studies during this period continue to shed light on the social stance on autism in South Korea, resonating with Kim-Rupnow's experience in 2001. Medical practitioner Hyun Uk Kim, who documented case studies in 2009 from South Korea and among South Koreans abroad, observed that Koreans are highly concerned with *sisun*, which refers to how they are judged and perceived by others.¹¹⁰ Nearly a decade passed from Kim-Rupnow's paper to Hyun Uk Kim's in 2012, yet the attribution of shame and guilt

associated with having a child with a disability remains rooted in commonly practiced cultural traditions of patriarchy.¹¹¹

Hyun Uk Kim's accounts of his experience in 2009 as a consultant in a mental health center in South Korea demonstrate similar attitudes toward autism to those outlined by Kim-Rupnow in 2001. Many participants who sought diagnoses were unaware of autism as a medical condition, but certain mothers of patients diagnosed as autistic by Hyun Uk Kim denied the results and demanded that the diagnoses be retracted.¹¹² On the other hand, accounts from the United States in the same year showed a different response. A mother of one patient who was born in the United States but was of South Korean descent commented that she was "glad that she has immigrated to the United States where there are more supports for people with disabilities and where she has to care much less about the people's sin."¹¹³

Hyun Uk Kim's paper also noted the desynchronization between political and legal efforts and social knowledge. Despite the Koreans with Disabilities Act in 2009 being enforced, an article in 2010 stated that 55.4% of people with disabilities did not know the existence of the law, and 49% of those without disabilities were also unaware of it.¹¹⁴ His accounts, as well as his reviews of them, clarify how South Korean culture had not fully embraced autism even by 2009. In contrast, American culture had shown a more significant acceptance and support for individuals with autism.

Negligence and rejection of the diagnoses of autism in South Korea continued to prevail in the years that followed. In 2013, a critical paper on the investigation of autism in South Korea was published by Roy Richard Grinker and Kyungjin Cho, which outlined a similar narrative to Hyun Uk Kim's account of South Korean attitudes toward autism. Grinker and Cho address autism as a cultural and historical concept and do not consider it to be a stable disease category.¹¹⁵ In their article, they state how mothers of autistic children believe their

children's autism to be temporary and distinct from actual autism due to the common belief that autism has no discrete borders.¹¹⁶

South Korean mothers who had participated in Grinker and Cho's research predominantly demonstrated a sense of denial that their children "were not autistic but rather "border children."¹¹⁷ Grinker and Cho stress how Korean mothers dislike the term autism and that the competitive educational community in which South Korean mothers and their children operate further pressures parents to deny their child's disability, as it may put them at a disadvantage in society.¹¹⁸ Academia and the reputation that follow are critical to not only the child but also the parents because, in South Korea, social acceptance is equal in importance to academic achievement. As such, if the child is stigmatized, so too are the parents.¹¹⁹

As a result, the cultural and social structure of the priorities held in South Korea are deeply intertwined with the progress of accepting social abnormalities, meaning that the physical enforcement of legislative actions has veritably fewer effects than in countries and communities that do not share such social values to that degree, such as the United States. Hyun Uk Kim, Grinker, and Cho's accounts demonstrate that despite the growth of activist attention toward disabilities during the 1980s and 1990s, the early twenty-first century continued to show minimal change in social attitudes in South Korea.

The lack of public attention seemingly halted legislative efforts, but this was overturned again in 2014 with the Act on Guarantee of Rights of and Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities. This act required the Department of Health and Welfare to conduct surveys every three years to identify individuals with behavioral disabilities and offer them specific weekly mandated social service opportunities to integrate them fully into society.^{120,121} This support is continuous throughout the lifespan of individuals with behavioral disabilities, aiding them from children to adulthood, explicitly tailored to those

with autism. However, despite the comprehensive support provided by the Act on Guarantee of Rights of and Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, the singularity of this legislation demonstrates a faltered rise compared to its previous escalations in the 1980s and the 1990s.

Stunned progress in the legislative field has prompted a growth in the activist approach to fight for autism rights. Organizations such as the KAS and the Autism Society of Korea (ASK) have pushed for comprehensive policies and increased funding for autism-related services.¹²² These groups have organized numerous events, including awareness campaigns, protests, and conferences, to highlight the needs of the autism community. Prominent activists such as Min-woo Kim and Ji-hoon Park have played critical roles in these efforts, focusing on ensuring that individuals with autism receive the necessary support to lead fulfilling lives.

These activists have worked tirelessly to bring about legislative changes, often collaborating with policymakers to ensure that the laws address the real needs of the autism community. The revised perspectives on autism since the early twentieth century had led South Korea's legislative approach to autism to focus on enhancing the support and inclusion through targeted policies. The focus has catalyzed the spirits of the activist communities, even as it has not always resulted in the enforcement of a wide variety of legislation. The Anti-Discrimination Act, the Development of and Support for the Disabled Act, and the Act on Special Education laid the groundwork for more specialized autism legislation, such as the Act on Guarantee of Rights of and Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities.

Recent epidemiological studies on autism reception in South Korea have only reinforced the notion that South Koreans retain high levels of stigma toward autism. The 2022 research conducted by So Yoon Kim et al. recorded that South Korean participants desired greater social distance from autistic people and demonstrated less accurate knowledge of autism

compared to Americans. The research states how ‘cultural tightness’ positively correlated with autism stigma, and South Korean participants showed higher levels of ‘cultural tightness’ than Americans.¹²³

In So Yoon Kim et al.'s research, ‘cultural tightness’ refers to the rigidity of a society's norms and its intolerance of deviant behaviors.¹²⁴ The study explains that “heterogeneous groups tend to be more culturally loose, or lenient toward deviant behaviors,”¹²⁵ indicating that the heterogeneous community in which Americans operate demonstrates lower levels of cultural tightness. This finding suggests that South Korea’s societal rigidity for normalcy directly impacts the low levels of autism awareness and adaptability.

So Yoon Kim et al. revised and published a second paper in 2023, commenting that South Koreans continued to exhibit a “heightened explicit stigma... and more negative implicit biases toward autism compared to Americans.”¹²⁶ They outline how the cultural homogeneity may contribute toward the South Korean perception that ethnic minorities need to fit into majority culture.¹²⁷ This attitude demonstrates how South Korea’s social structure, which has not only attempted but succeeded in equalizing its national status with first-world countries such as the United States, has coincidentally negatively impacted the growth of social reception of autism. The results indicate that, regardless of the efficiency of implementing legal legislation to enforce equality for those with disabilities, the desire to politically equate itself with more industrial countries has hindered the necessary time needed for social adaptability to develop.

South Korean legislative history, despite its considerably slower start in advocating for disabilities due to only being liberated from Japanese rule in 1945, has shown exponential progress since the 1970s. This rapid growth coincided with its industrial awakening during the 1980s and the 1990s. However, as the country stabilized, there was a noticeable halt in

the enforcement of disability-based legislation, as evidenced by the increased number of activists relative to the number of new laws enacted.

Initially, disability legislation enforced during the 1970s and 1980s aimed to stabilize the legal framework, akin to the United States, despite their superficiality. The exponential surge in activism and specific legislation on autism post-1990s represents actions taken by society members, demonstrating visible cultural growth that matched the pre-existing legislation. With the number of new legislations decreasing and activist groups increasing after the 1990s, the cultural leniency and public understanding of autism show that South Korean society is transforming. Societal maturity on the subject is beginning to keep pace with legislative progression.

Unlike the United States, where legal enactments for social issues typically followed viable causes, many of South Korea's disability laws were modeled after those in the United States.¹²⁸ As a result, South Korean enactments overreached beyond the accepted social norms of their time, leading to a disproportionate rise between the justice system and the social ethos. This imbalance caused unstable legislation and continuously expanding activism. However, with television programs such as "Extraordinary Attorney Woo" in 2022, which features a protagonist with autism, rising to stardom and attracting extensive public attention, it seems social ethos is beginning to catch up to the frameworks the government had put in place decades earlier.

Conclusion

The cross-cultural investigation into the historical developments of autism legislation and social reception between the United States and South Korea clarifies how enactments of law do not equate to enforcement of behavior in society. The legislative history of the United States demonstrates how laws were enacted due to specific causality and the country's need

to resolve various civil rights issues presented during the early twentieth century. As a result, specified laws were created to address these issues. Conversely, South Korea's legislative history mirrors that of the United States, heavily influenced by its legal progress. Despite this, South Korea's public sentiment had not been evolved in line with legislative developments, leading to a desynchronized evolution.

The inherent cultural differences, with the United States being heterogenous and South Korea being homogenous, provide a viable explanation for the stagnation in autism reception and adaptability in South Korea. If culture is the amalgamation of social behaviors and tendencies, then the investigating the history of cultural development and its trajectory reveals not only the issues within a society's mindset and values but also areas of improvement that can enhance the positive reception of autism in the future. Increased media coverage and academic focus on autism should introduce renewed, contemporary perspectives shared globally into countries that resistant to change. This approach can help cultures evolve to accommodate not only individuals with autism but all people facing challenges integrating into their respective societies.

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