



Gendered Markets: *Female Merchants and Their Commercial Spaces in the Joseon Era*

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Abstract

The gendered market of the Joseon dynasty reflected the profound influence of Confucian gender norms on commercial spaces. However, practical economic needs and livelihood pressures continually challenged this order, leading to frequent breaches in practice. Women from various social strata—including the yangban (elite class), commoners, and even the mean people—entered the market by leveraging household production skills. Centered on goods such as vegetables, fermented sauces, and other food and beverages, they drove the market-oriented transformation of the kitchen economy. At the ideological level of Confucianism, the participation of women's shops was consistently stigmatized and restricted. Yet, at the practical economic level, as long as it met livelihood demands and generated profit, gender segregation policies often had to yield or were even temporarily suspended. The commercial activities of women across Joseon's social classes not only facilitated the circulation of goods but also undermined the "men outside, women inside" gender order, continually reshaping gender identities within commercial spaces. This phenomenon highlights the structural tension between economic rationality and Confucian gender norms during Joseon's transition from a subsistence agricultural society to one characterized by commodity circulation. While the court and the yangban class endeavored to uphold Confucian gender norms, women's economic practices persistently disrupted this order, fostering a new dynamic equilibrium between tradition and transformation in Joseon society.

Keywords: Female merchants, women's shops, gender order, commercial spaces

Introduction

As early as the Silla (57 BC–AD 935) and Goryeo (918–1392) periods, women on the Korean Peninsula were active in the commercial sphere. The *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (*New History of Tang*) records that in Silla, “women dominate the marketplace as traders.”¹ In 1103, Song envoy Sun Mu 孫穆 observed the prominent role of female traders in the markets of Goryeo.² This trend persisted even into the Joseon period (1392–1910), with Seong Hae-eung 成海應 (1760–1839) noting that “nowadays in common marketplaces, pawnbroking and peddling are predominantly handled by women.”³ In the early 20th century, scholar Yi Neunghwa observed: “In our Korean regions, women often trade in the marketplaces, which we call ‘market viewing’ (觀市). They carry baskets on their heads, selling as they walk” (N. Yi 1927a, 267). From this, it is evident that women’s participation in commercial activities has been a consistent part of life on the Korean Peninsula for over a millennium.

Due to the relative scarcity of historical sources from the Silla and Goryeo periods, the study of women’s commercial activities during these eras remains limited and challenging. By contrast, the Joseon period offers a wealth of documentary evidence providing valuable insights into women’s participation in commerce. However, existing scholarship has largely concentrated on specific themes, such as elite *yangban* women engaging in commercial practices to augment family wealth (Han 2007), or depictions of women’s economic roles in literary texts (S. Kim 2015). While some studies acknowledge the economic participation of lower-class rural women (Pettid 2011), few have undertaken in-depth analysis of independent female merchants operating within “women’s shops” (*yeoinjeon* 女人廛) in Hanyang, or the nature and scope of their commercial activities.⁴

1. *Xin Tang shu*, vol. 20, 6202 (Ouyang and Song 1975).

2. Sun Mu, *Jilin leishi*, 29.

3. Seong Hae-eung, *Yeongyeongjae jeonjip*, 472.

4. Previously, scholars generally believed that the 18th-century Jeju courtesan Kim Man-deok (1739–1812) grew wealthy by hosting merchants as a guest host. However, Yang Jeongpil of Jeju University has pointed out that her accumulation of wealth did not come from

Historical scholarship on women in the Joseon dynasty has predominantly focused on socially and culturally defined categories such as courtesans, chaste women, talented women, female medical practitioners, and women taken captive during military conflicts.⁵ In recent years, growing interest in women's legal and economic agency has brought increased attention to topics such as property ownership and gender roles within judicial contexts (Park 2004; J. Kim 2015a, 2015b). Yet, to fully comprehend the ways in which women redefined and negotiated their gendered identities through economic practice, the study of Joseon female merchants warrants closer examination. The activities of such female merchants illuminate not only women's economic roles but also broader patterns of social mobility, urban development, and cultural change during the Joseon period. This article investigates three interrelated questions: First, what forms of commercial enterprise did women in Joseon participate in, and how did they function as active agents within an emerging commodity economy? Second, how did women navigate and expand social spaces within the marketplace, and in what ways did prevailing cultural norms and legal structures shape their participation? Third, through the lens of *gendered markets*, how can we trace both the agency of female merchants and the structural constraints they faced, revealing how commercial spaces such as official markets (*sijeon* 市廛) and periodical marketplaces (*jangsi* 場市) were not simply venues of economic exchange, but dynamic arenas where gender relations, social hierarchies, and cultural values intersected?

commerce but rather from the prostitution enterprise. See Yang (2017).

5. For representative works on this topic, see N. Yi 1927b; Myeong-gwan Kang 2009; Zuo 2015; Y. Huang 2020; Quan 2002. For the relationship between women and Confucianism during the Joseon dynasty, see Kim and Pettid 2011.

The Failure of Segregation Policies: Spatial Breakthroughs in Female Commercial Activities (15th–Mid-17th Century)

At the founding of the Joseon dynasty, the state established Neo-Confucianism as its ideological foundation and strictly adhered to the principle of distinction between men and women. Efforts were made to implement this gender norm across all levels of society, including market transactions. In 1410, the Office of the Inspector General (Saheonbu 司憲府) reported: “Since the capital’s relocation, men and women mingle in the streets of Unjong, [where] merchants are mixed.”⁶ Unlike the situation in Gaeseong (the former capital), Unjong Street in Hanyang (modern-day Jongno in Seoul) lacked official markets, leading to unregulated interactions between men and women in commercial spaces. Consequently, King Taejong (r. 1400–1418) ordered the establishment of formal markets. Indeed, King Taejong’s original intention was to replace the chaotic and unregulated transactions of Unjong with officially licensed shops, thereby establishing a well-ordered commercial space that aligned with Confucian gender norms. However, even after the creation of these formal market spaces, women’s participation persisted without effective segregation. In 1419, the Ministry of Rites (Yejo 禮曹) noted: “In the previous dynasty’s national funerals and in the funeral of our founding king, *japsaengnyeo* 雜色女 from the marketplace were hired to wail and follow the procession; they were called ‘wailing maids’ (*tonggokbi* 痛哭婢). This practice is indeed inappropriate.”⁷ *Japsaengnyeo* refers to lower-class women who performed miscellaneous labor in the markets, while *tonggokbi* belonged to the “mean roles” (賤役) of society. Two years later, the Ministry reiterated its concerns: “The national funeral and the funerals of high-ranking ministers were accompanied by wailing women at the front, who were hired from the marketplace.”⁸ They proposed that such roles instead be filled by women

6. *Taejong sillok*, gwon 19, 28th day of the 1st lunar month, 1410.

7. *Sejong sillok*, gwon 6, 21st day of the 12th lunar month, 1419.

8. *Sejong sillok*, gwon 11, 12th day of the 2nd lunar month, 1421.

from the deceased officials' households.⁹ The Office of the Inspector General, tasked with rectifying social mores, persisted in efforts to enforce gendered divisions in commerce. In 1423, it petitioned that "men and women should use different paths and not share markets."¹⁰ King Sejong (r. 1418–1450) rejected this proposal, though records do not specify his reasoning. The emphasis by the Office of the Inspector General on gender segregation in the marketplace can also be interpreted as an official stance—a performative expression of ideology or state power. Commercial activities involved broad segments of society, affecting yangban, commoners, and the mean people. Implementing strict segregation—such as separate roads and markets—would have been not only costly but also difficult to enforce, likely provoking public discontent. This pragmatic challenge may explain Sejong's refusal.

The establishment of markets failed to achieve the intended gender segregation. Women from the lower classes actively participated in these spaces as miscellaneous laborers or so-called wailing maids and were mobilized to take part in public rituals. This indicates that the application of Confucian gender norms varied in effectiveness across different social strata. Among the yangban elite, gender segregation was more easily enforced through ritual systems and family institutions. By contrast, among commoners and the mean people, economic necessities and institutional arrangements of servitude compelled women to remain active in markets and public rituals. The presence of women in markets not only reveals how lower-class women breached spatial segregation to engage in the public sphere as merchants and laborers but also reflects the influence of economic rationality on gender order. For the female merchants, this form of rationality often manifested as participating flexibly in market activities without openly violating government regulations, thereby seeking as much room for survival as possible. King Sejong's rejection of the suggestions proposed by the Office of the Inspector General further exposed the compromises made to gender order in the face of livelihood demands. In short, the existence of market women demonstrates that the implementation

9. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 11, 12th day of the 2nd lunar month, 1421.

10. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 22, 5th day of the 10th lunar month, 1423.

of gender norms in Joseon society exhibited a degree of flexibility across classes, forming a buffer between the Confucian ideal state and the realities of governance.

The rise of rural markets provided new spaces for commoner women to break through Confucian gender segregation policies. By the mid-15th century, periodic markets emerged in rural Joseon, enabling women to sell agricultural goods and foodstuffs. Kim Jeong-guk 金正國 (1485–1541) vividly described one such scene: “There was a woman selling fermented bean paste. She wore a bucket of bean paste on her head, walked along the edge of the field, and called out: ‘Sir, buy some paste! Buy some paste!’”¹¹ In 1520, Bak Su-mun 朴守紋 (?–?) criticized the commercialization of rural markets: “On market days, men and women often prepare liquor and meat to trade for profit. The harm of neglecting fundamental [agricultural] duties for trivial [trade] is most severe in this case.”¹² However, due to their convenience for the public, these markets eventually gained the king’s tacit approval and gradually became important venues for commoner women to engage in commercial activities. This illustrates that the Confucian norm of separating men and women was difficult to strictly enforce in commoner society, while economic rationality emerged as a stronger driving force. These markets not only expanded the scope of economic participation for rural commoner women, enabling them to gain control over certain economic resources, but also promoted a gradual transformation of rural society from purely self-sufficient agriculture toward commodity exchange.

The Imjin War (1592–1598) devastated Hanyang’s markets and infrastructure, disrupting the commercial system. Female survivors of war turned to commerce to sustain their livelihoods, a resurgence that also reignited concerns over gender segregation. In 1602, King Seonjo (r. 1567–1608) declared: “Recently, I have seen women in the capital mingling with men and Chinese in markets, which is unacceptable. During the Ming envoy’s stay, segregate men and women to prevent any mingling.”¹³ It can be

11. Kim Jeong-guk, *Sajae jip*, 71.

12. *Jungjong sillok*, *gwon* 38, 21st day of the 3rd lunar month, 1520.

13. *Seonjo sillok*, *gwon* 147, 6th day of the 2nd intercalary lunar month, 1602.

inferred from this that these women living in the capital had limited economic means and relied on street trading for their meager livelihoods, suggesting that they likely belonged to the commoner or even the mean class. But this order proved ineffective. By 1606, Seonjo lamented: “The cohabitation of men and women is by no means a proper or righteous act; it is something to be utterly ashamed of.” He questioned his ministers: “In our capital, women are all participating in the marketplace, but in the Central Plains [Ming China], where can you find women engaging in market activities?” Chief State Councillor Ryu Yeong-gyeong 柳永慶 (1550–1608) replied, “There are no women in the Central Plains who take part in market affairs,” while Royal Secretariat Yun Bang 尹昉 (1563–1640) proposed: “When the Ming envoys stay in the capital, it is usually for no more than ten days. Within these ten days, all women in the market streets should be completely banned.”¹⁴ These assertions reflected a striking misconception. By the late Ming period, women’s commercial activity was widespread—Hangzhou, for instance, had women who “dress in extravagant attire and trade with people” (Chen 2023, 572). Why, then, did Joseon officials hold such misunderstandings? This was closely linked to the development of Korea’s ideological construction of the *Little China* (*sojunghwa*). The concept of Little China, based on the Neo-Confucian Sinocentric order, emerged in the early Joseon period and spread rapidly during the 16th century. In the minds of Joseon monarchs and scholars, Ming China represented the *Great China*, while Korea viewed itself as the nation most resembling China (Kye 2014, 135–142). The Joseon court’s emphasis that no women were engaging in commerce in the Central Plains (China) reflected both a misinterpretation of Ming reality and a deliberate cultural strategy. The Joseon monarch and his officials actively imagined the Ming dynasty as the embodiment of Confucian order—the Great Central Civilization—thereby granting cultural legitimacy to Joseon’s efforts to emulate Ming institutions and implement reforms. Nevertheless, Joseon officials were aware that completely banning commoner women from commercial activities was impractical. As a compromise, they proposed regulating the commercial activities of

14. *Seonjo sillok*, gwon 195, 23rd day of the 1st lunar month, 1606.

commoner women only when Ming envoys were stationed in Hanyang, striving to maintain Korea's dignity as the Little China within the view of the Ming envoys. This measure illustrates how gender control was closely tied to cultural prestige, indicating that commoner women's commercial activities in Joseon were not merely an economic issue but were also embedded in the logic of political and cultural identity.

Although the Joseon court established the Confucian gender norm of distinction between men and women, its implementation varied significantly across social classes. Women from the yangban class, with their material resources and cultural capital, were more easily integrated into the discipline of Confucian rites. By contrast, for women from the commoner and mean class who lacked land and stable livelihoods, strict gender discipline and spatial segregation were nearly impossible to enforce. Since the 15th century, with the development of the shop district system in Hanyang and the expansion of local markets, commoner and *cheonmin* 賤民 (mean classes) women gradually entered the market economy by leveraging household sidelines and daily labor skills, becoming indispensable participants in both urban and rural economies. Despite the court's attempts to maintain the ideal order of separate markets for men and women through bans and regulations, practical livelihood pressures and the essential need for commodity circulation repeatedly undermined these segregation policies. This phenomenon not only reveals the differential enforcement of Confucian gender norms across social strata but also highlights the impact of economic rationality on reshaping gender order.

Contest between Inside and Outside: Hanyang's Women's Shops and Gendered Consumer Markets

In the mid-17th century, Joseon witnessed the expansion of foreign trade, the circulation of metallic currency, and a marked increase in its commercial population (Man-gil Kang 2018, 206). Improvements in agricultural and artisanal productivity contributed to a significant rise in the volume and diversity of goods available in the markets of Hanyang. As commercial

activity intensified, the existing market infrastructure proved insufficient to sustain the city's economic demands, resulting in the rapid proliferation of the unauthorized market (nanjeon 亂塵)—unregulated private commerce outside the official market framework (Go 2007, 427). Traditionally, market merchants were registered under the supervision of the Office of Market Administration (Pyeongseoseo 平市署), fulfilling state obligations in exchange for monopolistic rights over certain goods and official protection from competition posed by informal markets (Go 2007, 167). However, the growing prevalence of unauthorized markets began to undermine the economic interests of licensed merchants, prompting resistance and opposition from within the sanctioned commercial sector.

In the late 17th century, commoner women became increasingly entangled in the conflicts between officially licensed market merchants and unregistered private traders. A 1684 report by Training General Sin Yeo-cheol 申汝哲 (1634–1701) noted:

The *yangtae* market has existed for over 20 years, and abolishing it now is difficult. The so-called “*yangtae*” are produced by widowed women and the wives of artillerymen residing outside the city, who sell food to earn a livelihood. These women cannot be formally registered in market records nor are they able to fulfill official market obligations. Prohibiting their trade would deprive them of their only means of subsistence—a matter of grave compassion. Hence, even when they are found engaging in illegal market activities, they are not harshly punished.¹⁵

The *yangtae* 涼太 referred to here was a material used in hat-making. Licensed merchants expressed growing dissatisfaction with the proliferation of unregulated *yangtae* markets, which operated without official registration or the payment of duties. Complaints to the Office of Market Administration triggered retaliation by military authorities. Widows and “wives of artillerymen,” forced into the market due to widowhood or inadequate military pay, engaged in trade not for capital accumulation or economic

15. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, *chaek* 304, 23rd day of the 6th lunar month, 1684.

expansion, but as a means of securing bare subsistence. This indicates that the unauthorized market activity of women from the lower classes was often characterized by a strong *survival economy* nature. Excluded from the formal, male-dominated commercial arenas of licensed markets, these women operated instead in informal spaces typically regarded as disorderly markets.

Commoner women's participation in illegal markets also contributed to the emergence of new commercial zones, most notably the development of the Outer Gate Fish Market (Munoe eojeon 門外魚廛). In 1691, city-based fish merchants petitioned for its abolition, arguing that the market had originated during the severe famine of 1670–1671, when the state had temporarily loosened restrictions on unlicensed commerce to alleviate widespread hunger. According to their complaints, “outside the small West Gate, at the crossroads, a few women traded side dishes, and over time, their practices became entrenched, eventually establishing a fish market where goods were sold without regulation.”¹⁶ These initial informal trading activities by several commoner women near the small West Gate (known as Souimun gate 昭義門) laid the foundation for the formation of the Outer Gate Fish Market. Although authorities subsequently issued orders to dismantle the market, such efforts proved largely ineffective. Situated at the intersection of urban and rural spaces, Souimun gate offered a dual advantage: the looser administrative oversight typical of areas outside the city, and the strategic connectivity of a crossroads. This unique geographic positioning allowed commoner women to evade the formal constraints of the city's regulated market system and carve out a relatively autonomous commercial space. What began as an informal gathering of vendors ultimately evolved into a thriving trade hub. By the late 18th century, Souimun gate was recognized as one of Seoul's principal marketplaces. Eventually, the state acknowledged the legitimacy of the Outer Gate Fish Market, granting it shared rights with the inner market over fish distribution, provided both fulfilled official obligations such as tax payments and regulatory compliance (Go 2013, 279). In establishing the Outer Gate

16. *Gakjeon gisa*, *Simin deungnok*, 54–55.

Fish Market, commoner women's commercial activities entered the public economic sphere, laying the groundwork for the emergence of "women's shops" (*yeoinjeon* 女人廛).

By the 18th century, an estimated 80 to 90 percent of Hanyang's population engaged in commercial pursuits.¹⁷ Within this evolving economic landscape, formally recognized women's shops began to emerge in historical records. In 1728, Kim Dong-pil 金東弼 (1678–1737), the Governor of Hanseong, reported: "Since the establishment of the Interrogation Office (Gukcheong 鞠廳), many goods supplied by merchants have been taken arbitrarily without payment. For instance, women from the vegetable market blocked carts and cried out in grievance. Prices should be set fairly based on actual value, and any extortion of bribes in between must be strictly prohibited. How about we order all relevant offices and the State Tribunal (Uigeumbu 義禁府) to enforce this?" King Yeongjo (r. 1724–1776) approved this.¹⁸ In 1747, Kim Sang-ro 金尙魯 (1702–1766), the minister of military affairs, reported:

If the licensed merchants had not suffered extreme injustice and pain, they would not have crowded the streets and protested so persistently as recently observed. The exploitation they endure includes not only forced pricing and compulsory purchases but also frequent seizures without any payment. How can the merchants sustain their livelihoods under such conditions? The so-called Mojeon is in fact a market run by women. They gathered in the streets crying out their grievances, even wailing to heaven—a scene distressing enough to disturb the natural harmony.

Kim Sang-ro further stated: "The people are overwhelmed by exploitation and can no longer endure. The situation is deteriorating, and the root cause lies in the absence of discipline and order." King Yeongjo agreed with Kim's analysis and ordered the Hanseong governor and the Ministry of Justice (Hyeongjo 刑曹) to strengthen law enforcement, declaring: "Any official who

17. *Jeongjo sillok*, *gwon* 12, 1st day of the 11th lunar month, 1781.

18. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, *chaek* 658, 18th day of the 3rd lunar month, 1728.

exploits the people, regardless of whether they be royal relatives or hold high civil or military ranks, shall be strictly punished upon report. This is essential to uphold discipline and enforce state law.”¹⁹ The Mojeon 毛塵, also known as the Corner Shop (Ujeon 隅塵), was a licensed fruit market operated by women, and thus a women’s shop (*yeoinjeon*). The female merchants who openly ran vegetable and fruit shops were likely commoners. Through collective actions such as blocking carts and crying out their grievances in the street, they protested official exploitation and fought for their economic rights. Although King Yeongjo ordered strict punishment of extortionate practices from the perspective of upholding discipline and implementing benevolent governance—seemingly affirming the women’s appeals—his fundamental motive was to alleviate social tensions and maintain ruling order. In other words, the court’s tolerance and intervention reflect the Joseon government’s need to acknowledge the reality of commoner women’s commercial activities during this period. The state needed to balance and adapt between idealized gender norms and the practical demands of governance.

By 1784, the *Bibyeonsa deungnok* 備邊司謄錄 (Records of the Border Defense Council) listed 12 such gendered spaces: Upper Corner Market (Sangujeon 上隅塵), Lower Corner Market (Haujeon 下隅塵), Pawnshop Corner Market (Jeonujeon 典隅塵), Pine Hill Corner Market (Songhyeonujeon 松峴隅塵), Jeongneung Tomb Corner Market (Jeongneungujeon 貞陵隅塵), Outer Gate Corner Market (Munoeujeon 門外隅塵), Inner Powder Market (Naebunjeon 內粉塵), Outer Powder Market (Oebunjeon 外粉塵), Needle Market (Chimjajeon 針子塵), Jewelry Market (Jokdorijeon 簪道裏塵), White Taffy Market (Baekdangjeon 白糖塵), and Vegetable Market (Chaesojeon 菜蔬塵).²⁰ Many of these markets—such as the cosmetic powder, needle, and jewelry markets—catered specifically to female consumers, while others, including the white taffy, vegetable, and condiment markets, served broader demographics but were frequented primarily by women. King Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800) observed that by the late 18th century,

19. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, *chaek* 1013, 17th day of the 2nd lunar month, 1747.

20. *Bibyeonsa deungnok*, *chaek* 166, 21st day of the 3rd lunar month, 1784.

Hanyang was home to 120 registered markets, among which 18 were classified as women's shops²¹—comprising approximately 15 percent of the total.

As with all state-licensed merchants, these women were subject to the obligations imposed by the state: paying the *jeon* tax, fulfilling corvée labor duties, and supplying goods for state use (Byeon 2001, 82). *Sipyae* 市弊 (Malpractices in the Market) records petitions from female merchants representing the markets of Six-Corner (Yugujeon 六隅塵), Vegetable, Jewelry, Inner Powder, Inner Gate Side Dishes, and Needle. According to the complaints from the Six Corner Markets, female merchants were required to deliver various fruits to government offices such as the Hanseong Magistracy 漢城府, which often either reduced payment or withheld it entirely. Goods such as wooden boxes, originally the responsibility of artisan associations, and rattan baskets, once handled by the Wickerwork Market (Nyuryongjeon 柎籠塵), had recently been reassigned to the Six Corner Markets—an unfair redistribution of duties. Furthermore, disruptive activities by soldiers and servants of elite households undermined their business, yet the women had no means to restrain them. The court responded with promises of correction and enforcement.²²

The female merchants of the Vegetable Market expressed discontent with the Ministry of Taxation (Hojo 戶曹) for failing to pay promptly for vegetables and for the excessive unofficial gratuities or “sentiment fees” (*jeongchae* 情債) demanded during delivery. If these fees were not paid, goods were often rejected by the offices, placing severe strain on their trade. Combined with the disorder caused by the servants of the powerful households, the merchants found themselves “fulfilling state duties, guarding vacant stalls, yet openly unemployed.” They also pointed to the unfair distribution of corvée duties and demanded parity with other state-licensed associations. The court again pledged to rectify the situation.²³

Both Jewelry and Inner Powder Markets raised concerns over excessive

21. Jeongjo, *Hongjae jeonseu*, gwon 164, 221.

22. *Gongpye*, *Sipyae*, 568–571.

23. *Gongpye*, *Sipyae*, 572–575.

taxation. The Jewelry Market also protested that their profits were being undercut by unauthorized vendors from the miscellaneous goods shops and that they bore an unequal share of state obligations compared to the Blue Cloth Market (Cheongpojeon 靑布廛).²⁴ Inner Gate Side Dishes Market (Munnae jwabanjeon 門內佐飯廛) identified illicit competition as the greatest threat to its operations but claimed it lacked the power to confront it.²⁵ Needle Market, referencing an administrative adjustment made the previous autumn in response to a similar petition from male shops, argued that the female shops too should be taxed at the lower rate granted to their male counterparts.²⁶

Taken together, the petitions reveal three major challenges faced by female-operated *shops*: first, delivering goods to government offices without receiving payment; second, interference from illicit market activity often protected by elite power; and third, the excessive burden of taxation. Although the court issued directives for reform, in practice these had little effect. The economic activities of female merchants were significantly constrained by the intrusion of elite privilege into commercial space, reflecting the broader penetration of social power into the marketplace.

The Joseon court strictly upheld the principle of *men outside, women inside*, which manifested in the commercial sphere as a gendered division of trades. Markets dominated by women, such as the women's shops, were confined to daily consumer goods like fruits, vegetables, cosmetics, and women's accessories, while high-profit sectors involving large-scale transactions—such as the blue cloth shops—were controlled by men. This division reinforced societal definitions of *women's work* versus *men's work*, making the marketplace an important site for maintaining gender norms. Yet, this gendered market structure both constrained and facilitated women's economic participation. On one hand, women were restricted to gendered, domestic sectors, and their commercial space faced multiple pressures from powerful families and unauthorized merchants. On the other hand, the

24. Gongpye, *Sipy*, 576–578.

25. Gongpye, *Sipy*, 580.

26. Gongpye, *Sipy*, 583.

women's shops still provided commoner women with a relatively stable economic platform, enabling them to enter the market as *independent operators* beyond their traditional domestic roles. Thus, in certain ways, the gendered market could also serve as an institutional gap through which women transcended the norm of separated spheres.

During the operation of women's shops, men were also employed. In 1788, King Jeongjo received a report that former employee Kim Seong-bong 金聖鳳 of the Jewelry Market complained because the Jewelry Market and Clothing Market had conflicts over product categories, and the Clothing Market accused the Jewelry Market of illegal activities, leading to the dismissal of male workers engaged in sewing. The Ministry of Justice stated: "The Jewelry Market was originally women's shops, not a man's business, but women employed idle men for errands. Due to the Clothing Market's complaints, men were strictly prohibited from working with women. Now that both markets are stable, their complaints are baseless, and it is proposed that the Ministry of Justice severely punish them separately to prevent further issues." King Jeongjo approved this.²⁷

Female merchants in the Jewelry Market hired men to perform needlework under the guise of "running errands and providing services," a practice that directly challenged the Confucian gender division of labor encapsulated in the ideals of *men plough, women weave* and *men outside, women inside*. Needlework, traditionally regarded in Confucian societies as a quintessentially female domestic task, became a site of subversion when men were employed to perform it—destabilizing the gendered boundaries of labor and confronting the norms upheld by scholar-officials. Secondly, this highlights how economic rationality reshaped gender order. The decision of female merchants to hire male labor was driven not by adherence to traditional gender roles, but by market competition and economic efficiency. This suggests that, within the logic of a commercial economy, gender roles could be redefined and adapted. Men from the lower classes also took part in the commercialization of household production—such as embroidery and related trades. These examples not only illustrate how

27. *Seungjeongwon ilgi, chaek* 1648, 7th day of the 12th lunar month, 1788.

economic rationality reshaped gender order, but also reveal that a strict gender binary may be insufficient to fully explain economic practices in the Joseon period. Moreover, the legal disputes surrounding this practice reveal that gender norms were also weaponized as tools in economic conflicts. For instance, clothing merchants accused the Jewelry Market of “unauthorized commerce,” using appeals to gender order to suppress commercial competitors and protect their own interests.

Although King Jeongjo and the Ministry of Justice ultimately upheld the principle of separate domains for men and women in their rulings, they could not fully negate the substantive impact of these female merchants’ practices on the gender system. For the Joseon court, even while permitting some flexibility for commoner women in economic activities, the visible employment of men in traditionally *female* tasks like needlework risked undermining the ideological legitimacy of gender hierarchy. Thus, the state intervened through bans to reaffirm symbolic boundaries. In essence, the court’s prohibition, while presented as a regulatory measure against hiring practices in women’s shops, was fundamentally a political gesture—an effort to preserve the form of distinct roles for men and women and thereby stabilize the legitimacy of Confucian governance.

At the end of the 18th century, with the growth of private merchants and frequent illegal market activities, the Joseon court began to acknowledge the changes in the commodity circulation system. To ensure the supply of goods and protect the survival rights of small merchants, Joseon implemented policies such as the “Sinhae (1791) Common Market” (Sinhae tonggong 辛亥通共), allowing the free sale of goods other than those managed by the Six Major Markets (Yuguijeon 六矣廛), and abolishing the exclusive rights of licensed market merchants, leading to the disintegration of the existing market system (Byeon 2001, 211–212). In 1803, more than ten markets, including the Six Corner Markets, jointly complained that those of the Sinhae Common Market “have all lost their jobs.” The Border Defense Council deemed that, since the Six Major Markets and other licensed markets had already been permitted to collect fees from street vendors selling similar goods to compensate for their losses, no further

measures were necessary.²⁸

In 1811, the Powder Market and Jewelry Market appealed: “Since the implementation of the Sinhae Common Market, our operations have severely declined. Yet we are still required to make monthly payments to the Office of Market Administration, provide financial support for public duties, fulfill obligations to various government offices, and pay numerous other fees—all too many to list. It has become truly impossible to sustain our businesses.” However, the Border Defense Council merely responded: “Although the specifics of these monthly payments and public duties are unclear, the matter of exemption or reduction should be handled by the Office of Market Administration in an appropriate manner.” No concrete actions were taken to alleviate the excessive state-imposed obligations on the Powder Market and other markets.²⁹ In essence, after the Sinhae Common Market, although licensed markets—including the women’s shops—lost their “right to suppress unauthorized commerce,” the burden of state-imposed duties did not significantly decrease, severely impacting their operations. By the mid-19th century, with the rise of private merchants, the licensed market system could no longer adapt to the changing times. The influence of licensed merchants gradually declined, and the women’s shops, along with other licensed shops, steadily faded away (Byeon 2001, 246). Thereafter, historical records rarely mention the women’s shops.

The women’s shops were not socially marginal; they bore state duties and interacted with the consumption activities of various social classes, making them a visible part of the social order. As a result, the Joseon court regulated them more strictly, as their management was symbolically tied to the maintenance of public order and gender norms. As markets operated exclusively by women, the women’s shops reinforced the Confucian gender norm of distinct roles for men and women by restricting female commercial activities to *feminized* sectors such as fruits, vegetables, and cosmetics. At the same time, they provided commoner women with an institutional pathway to enter the market, enabling them to participate in economic activities as

28. *Seungjeongwon ilgi, chaek* 1864, 13th day of the 2nd lunar month, 1803.

29. *Seungjeongwon ilgi, chaek* 1995, 20th day of the 3rd lunar month, 1811.

independent operators. This duality both reinforced gendered labor divisions and created limited space for women to break through the constraints of *men outside, women inside*. Thus, women's position in the market was not solely determined by their own agency but was deeply shaped by institutional arrangements and economic structures. In other words, the disappearance of the women's shops was not only a result of the collapse of the licensed market system but also a reflection of how women's commercial space was continually reshaped through the interplay between the Confucian gender order and the commodity economy.

The Marketization Transition of the Kitchen Economy: Women's Commercialization of Food

In Joseon society, which was fundamentally agricultural, any deviation from farming was regarded as an irregular livelihood. However, wars and political upheavals forced women across social strata—from the *yangban* elite to commoners—to transform their household brewing skills into a means of market survival. In 1593, Heo Gyun 許筠 (1569–1618), while passing through Gangwon-do province, encountered an elderly woman from Hanyang who had fled there due to the Imjin War and made a living by brewing and selling alcohol. Her husband and son had both died in the war.³⁰ The Lady of Gwangsan (d. 1637), the mother of Queen Inmok 仁穆大妃, was also implicated in political events and exiled to Jeju in the early 17th century, having to make a living by selling alcohol.³¹ Whether elderly commoner women who had lost husbands and sons, or *yangban* women exiled due to political turmoil, selling alcohol became a practical choice for survival under extreme circumstances. Their sale of alcohol appeared to continue the traditional gendered division of labor in which women managed the domestic sphere, yet in practice it broke through the boundary between inside and outside through participation in public markets. It also

30. Heo Gyun, *Seongso bubugo, gwon* 10, 224–225.

31. *Injo sillok*, *gwon* 1, 14th day of the 3rd lunar month, 1624.

marked the early stage of the kitchen economy's market-oriented transformation—an economy centered on the household kitchen and led by women's food production and exchange activities.

Since the late 17th century, the population of Hanyang gradually increased, from about 220,000 in 1669 to about 250,000 in 1720, around 300,000 in 1770, and about 350,000 in 1820 (Go 2007, 125). To supply the consumption of this large population, commodity agriculture rapidly developed on the outskirts of Hanyang. It also provided an opportunity for commoner women to enter the food distribution sector (Go 1998, 33). Yun Gi 尹愷 (1741–1826) observed of early-morning Hanyang: “Vegetable women and fermented fish sauce men rushed to enter the city” (菜媼醢翁競入城).³² In 1781, Yu Han-jun 俞漢雋 (1732–1811) recorded: “Between Soseong 邵城 and Gyeongyang 桂陽, the coastal area produces crabs. In spring and summer, women from the port gather these crabs and bring them to the capital, [with the money they earn] they replace their worn-out clothes.”³³ Sin Heon 申櫟 (1810–1884) depicted a sight in Hanyang of “pitiful Incheon crab-selling girls, with disheveled hair and bamboo baskets leaning sideways.”³⁴ The presence of figures such as “vegetable-selling grannies” and “crab-selling women” recorded in literati writings indicates that the commercial activities of these commoner women had become a common sight on the streets of Hanyang, even entering the cultural awareness of scholar-officials. By bringing agricultural and fishing products from their own households or local regions into the city for sale, they gradually transformed domestic kitchen production into a market-oriented commodity economy. This demonstrates that their selling activities progressively transcended the boundary between the household and the market, entering both the public economic and cultural spheres.

The rapid development of commodity agriculture laid the foundation for the commercialization of side-dish foods. Traditionally, these foods were primarily prepared and consumed within the household, but since the 18th

32. Yun Gi, *Mumyeongja jip*, 54.

33. Yu Han-jun, *Jajeo*, 312.

34. Sin Heon, *Sindaejanggun jip, chaek* 11, 32.

century, commoner women have transformed skills like making meat sauces and *chimchae* (kimchi) into commercial production, driving the marketization transition of the kitchen economy. In 1751, No Cheol 盧潛 (1721–1772) recorded purchasing new fermented fish sauce from female itinerant traders who carried sauce pots on their heads (戴醢女商始至買而賞之).³⁵ In the early 19th century, when Sim No-sung 沈魯崇 (1762–1837) was exiled to Gyeongsang-do province's Gijang county, a local named Jeong gave him food, which he evaluated as: "Dried meat with herbs, meat sauce, meat paste, fish sauce and side dishes are all tasty, like those sold by female merchants in the capital" (如京城女商行賣之物).³⁶ He couldn't get used to the local *chimchae*: "Whenever I think of the women merchants of Wangsim-ri selling *chimchae* (枉尋里女商戴賣菹), my mouth waters without me even realizing it."³⁷ Wangsim-ri had female merchants who relied on the area's abundant vegetable production to make and sell *chimchae*. Because side-dish foods like *chimchae* were "daily necessities in alleys and lanes, as well as a means for the poor to make a living," nearby residents "carried and loaded, selling together with women, placing them in every alley and household, sharing the profits." However, these actions harmed the interests of licensed market merchants, who denounced them as "illegal markets."³⁸ Side dishes such as meat sauces and *chimchae* were originally produced and consumed within the household, representing the labor outcomes of women in the domestic sphere. From the 18th century, commoner women began transforming these kitchen cooking skills into market-oriented commodity production, achieving the spillover and commercialization of domestic labor. This transformation not only expanded the circulation range of food products but also propelled these women into the public economic domain. Using their bodies as intermediaries, through sales modes like carrying sauce pots on their heads, they connected private spaces (kitchens) with public spaces (neighborhoods), turning the female body into a mobile

35. No Cheol, *No Cheol ilgi*, 27th year of King Yeongjo, entry 13.

36. Sim No-sung, *Namcheon illok, sang chaek*, 369.

37. Sim No-sung, *Namcheon illok, jung chaek*, 245.

38. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, *chaek* 628, 6th day of the 12th lunar month, 1726.

commercial space, thereby expanding the market scope of the kitchen economy. This reflects how the kitchen economy gradually shifted from self-sufficiency toward marketization and contributed to the emergence of a new consumer culture.

Some scholar-officials viewed female itinerant merchants as threats. Seong Geun-muk 成近默 (1784–1852) pointed out in his “Family Instructions”: “Regardless of inside or outside, abnormal strangers like female monks, female merchants, and unusual people must be kept at a distance, and never allowed to stay overnight.”³⁹ In his view, female merchants and female monks were both in the category of abnormal strangers, not aligning with Confucian ethical definitions of female roles. Seong regarded female merchants as *deviant figures*. His wariness was not merely a reaction to their commercial activities but stemmed from a deeper anxiety about challenges to the Confucian gender order and patriarchal authority. By moving through neighborhoods and selling door-to-door, these women allowed the logic of the *external* market to penetrate the *internal* domestic space. This practice weakened the male household head’s control over family members, and their identity as independent operators broke through the ethical norm that women should remain in the *inner* sphere. The vigilance of scholar-officials reflects the underlying tension in Joseon society between the development of a commodity economy and the preservation of gender norms. It also reveals the *yangban* class’s rejection and defensiveness toward women’s economic agency in their effort to maintain patriarchal structures.

From the 18th century, the spread of luxury trends further stimulated the public’s enthusiasm for purchasing commercial food products. King Jeongjo once lamented: “Never has the trend of extravagance been as prevalent as in recent times. Even the utterly poor and destitute seek to model their dwellings, attire, and food on fashionable standards.”⁴⁰ At the time, it was said in Hanyang that “pastries come from the north, liquor from the south” (北餅南酒) (An 2022, 31), reflecting how both pastries and liquor

39. Seong Geun-muk, *Gwajae jip*, gwon 5, 523.

40. Jeongjo, *Hongjae jeonseo*, gwon 175, 414.

became key mediums of the luxury craze. Kang I-cheon 姜彝天 (1769–1801) once witnessed an “old gray-haired woman selling pastries” outside Namdaemun.⁴¹ In 1724, Yi Tae-bae 李泰陪 (?–?) presented a memorial to the throne, noting, “Men carry and women bear goods to sell throughout the city, distributing them across the capital region.”⁴² Attracted by the profits of liquor sales, concubines and maidservants from yangban households also entered the trade, including the concubine of Jang Yu 張維 (1587–1638), Lord of Sinpung Prefecture,⁴³ and an out-residing maidservant of Kim Gwang-su 金光遂 (?–?), senior assistant director of the Ministry of Justice 刑曹正郎.⁴⁴ Some widows even amassed wealth by selling liquor in their neighborhoods, prompting Kim Chwi-ro 金取魯 (1682–1740), Minister of Rites, to “covet their wealth and enter into illicit relations with them.”⁴⁵ In 1803, King Sunjo (r. 1800–1834) mentioned that a cityscape painting of Hanyang depicted “seven people selling liquor, 12 buying and drinking liquor,” along with “27 women seated at market stalls, and 48 women walking about buying food.”⁴⁶ Amid this transformation, women acted both as operators of food production and sales and as consumers in the food market. Yi Deok-mu 李德懋 (1741–1793) observed that women “indulge in pastries and buy them to eat—an omen of family ruin.”⁴⁷ Women’s consumption of commercial food blurred the spatial boundary between the inner (kitchen) and the outer (market), as the market intruded into the domestic realm. This shift aroused concerns among the literati, who feared that the temptations of the food market might lead women to abandon their familial duties. They viewed women’s shops activities as a threat to domestic ethics and the gender order. This illustrates that the marketization of the kitchen economy was not merely an economic change but also, since the late 16th century, reflected a deeper tension between

41. Kang I-cheon, *Jungamgo*, *chaek* 1, 420.

42. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, *chaek* 601, 24th day of the 9th lunar month, 1724.

43. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, *chaek* 666, 29th day of the 7th lunar month, 1728.

44. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, *chaek* 1149, 17th day of the 10th lunar month, 1757.

45. *Yeongjo sillok*, *gwon* 45, 20th day of the 9th lunar month, 1737.

46. Sunjo, *Sunjaego*, *gwon* 6, 40.

47. Yi Deok-mu, *Cheongjanggan jeonso*, *gwon* 30, 516.

gender norms and market logic in Joseon society.

With the development of food commercialization, taverns and food shops also prospered, attracting women to enter these industries. In 1792, Kim Eung-du 金應斗 (?-?) reported: “Now, among those managing taverns, five or six out of ten are women.”⁴⁸ “Women managing taverns” may have appeared to perpetuate the gender role of “women managing domestic,” but in reality, they entered the public economic sphere as independent operators. Sim No-sung recorded names like “Seven Women’s Noodles” and “Five Sisters’ Soup” among the famous food shops of Hanyang.⁴⁹ Judging from the names, these shops’ operations were closely tied to commoner women. Women were not only a labor force but were also transformed into market symbols, with their images and labor jointly embedded in consumer culture. The rise of eateries and taverns signified the extension of the domestic kitchen from the private space of the “inside” into the public marketplace of the “outside.” This transformation propelled the food economy from an individual survival strategy toward an urban commercial model, marking a stage in which the kitchen economy became more institutionalized and public.

Due to the considerable profits from producing and selling food, some yangban women even became the main breadwinners of their families. In 1803, Yi In-haeng 李仁行 (1758–1833) saw a scholar named Kim Yang-won 金養源 in Jangyeon county, Hwanghae-do province, whose livelihood depended on “his wife selling alcohol.”⁵⁰ Yi Deok-mu acknowledged the necessity for the wives of scholars to engage in commercial activities under family survival pressures but believed this would affect the realization of women’s virtuous roles,⁵¹ even leading to a situation where “many assertive women have talent and can manage business. Their husbands live off them, so the women control them, and the husbands submit. Isn’t this pitiful?”⁵² This suggests that yangban women, empowered by economic means, could

48. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, *chaek* 1709, 1st day of the 9th lunar month, 1792.

49. Sim No-sung, *Hyojeon sango*, *chaek* 1, 243.

50. Yi In-haeng, *Sinyajip*, *gwon* 13, 683.

51. Yi Deok-mu, *Cheongjanggwon jeonseo*, *gwon* 30, 527.

52. Yi Deok-mu, *Cheongjanggwon jeonseo*, *gwon* 30, 527.

potentially disrupt the established gender division of “men in the public sphere,” thereby challenging the patriarchal household order. This suggests that the marketization of the kitchen economy had transcended mere subsistence, permeating into the yangban elite and initiating a reconfiguration of the economic structure of the traditional household. Yi Deok-mu associated yangban women’s commercial capabilities with moral deficiencies—characterizing them as “overbearing and assertive”—in an attempt to impose ethical stigma as a means of counterbalancing their economic agency and preserving male authority within the family. This reveals the ambivalent attitude of yangban men toward women’s economic agency: compelled to acknowledge its necessity, yet seeking to neutralize its subversive potential through moral critique.

In Joseon Korea, commoner women participated in commercial activities at another distinctive trading site: the Japanese House (Dongnae waegwan 東萊倭館), located in the southeastern region and designated for trade with Japan. In 1710, Kwon I-jin 權以鎭 (1668–1734), the governor of Dongnae, reported on the trading dynamics at the Waegwan’s morning market: “When our men and women mix, the goods held by men, though superior, do not sell, but what women hold, even if inferior, always sells. Therefore, those going to the morning market are all women.” Kwon interpreted this phenomenon as a threat to social order, cautioning local villagers that “this is not about selling fish and vegetables, but about selling your wives and daughters.”⁵³ He sought to regulate such activity on the grounds that “men and women mingling for trade is highly inappropriate.”⁵⁴ Nonetheless, by 1714, records indicate that “village women and *haenyeo* (sea women) continued to bring fish and vegetables each morning to set up stalls outside the Waegwan.” In response, secret inspector Yi Byeong-sang 李秉常 (1676–1748) proposed building “two forts southwest of Choryang, extending to the coast, in order to relocate the market outside the city and restrict mingling between different groups.”⁵⁵ In 1787, Yi Gyeong-il 李敬一

53. *Sukjong sillok*, *gwon* 48, 12th day of the 4th lunar month, 1710.

54. Kwon I-jin, *Yuhodang jip*, *gwon* 5, 259–260.

55. *Sukjong sillok*, *gwon* 55, 3rd day of the 8th lunar month, 1714.

(1734–1820), then governor of Dongnae, expressed concern that Koreans entering the restricted zone near the Waegwan and interacting with the Japanese created a troubling mixture of “civilized” and “barbaric” elements (華夷相混).⁵⁶ In the transactions at the Waegwan morning market, commoner women in Joseon mostly sold everyday foodstuffs such as fish and vegetables, which meant that household ingredients were being directly pushed onto a cross-border trading platform. Yet their vending activities were also regarded by Joseon authorities as a potential threat to gender order and cultural boundaries. Identifying itself as *Little China*, Joseon bound notions of gender and civilization together within this cultural mindset. Officials associated commoner women’s sale of foodstuffs with moral deviance and with the mixing of civilized and barbaric, and sought to enforce controls in order to uphold the gender norm of men outside, women inside as well as the civilizational hierarchy of Little China. In this way, regulating commoner women’s transactions with Japanese traders was, for the Joseon state, not merely a matter of economic and social control, but also a practice of civilizational politics.

By the late 19th century, historical sources show that Korean women remained visibly active in the sale of commercial food products. During his 1883 journey through Goseong county in Gangwon-do province, Yi Do-chu 李道樞 (1848–1921) observed “many village women coming to sell alcohol and noodles.”⁵⁷ Similarly, in 1889, Jang Bok-chu 張福樞 (1815–1900) noted in Seonsan, Gyeongsang-do province, “a woman surnamed Choe, impoverished and without other means of livelihood, selling alcohol to earn her daily sustenance.”⁵⁸ During the 1907 National Debt Repayment Movement, female merchants and rural women selling vegetables, alcohol, and pastries in the Daegu market also contributed—donating sums ranging from 50 or 60 coins to one or two *won*.⁵⁹ While merchants such as Baek Seon-haeng 白善行 (1848–1933) of Pyongyang, who gained wealth through the sale of

56. *Byeollyejibyo, chaek ha*, 653.

57. Yi Do-chu, *Dongyu gihaeng*, 49.

58. Jang Bok-chu, *Samiheon jip, gwon* 6, 411.

59. *Daehan maeil sinbo*, March 1, 1907.

saucers, weaving, and sewing (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 2005, 195), illustrate the economic potential of women's commercial activities, such cases remained exceptional. From impoverished village women to market vendors, Joseon women transformed domestic cooking skills into economic means of survival, not only promoting the marketization of household food production but also securing sustained visibility in public spaces. They actively participated in the production and distribution of everyday foods such as alcoholic beverages, noodles, vegetables, and rice cakes, forming the grassroots production-sales network underpinning the marketization of the kitchen economy. However, this market transition remained constrained by gendered divisions of labor, with women largely concentrated in low-profit sectors perceived as *feminized*. Few could achieve wealth like Baek Seon-haeng, who amassed a fortune through such ventures as fermented sauce production and textile weaving. Thus, while the marketization of the kitchen economy provided opportunities for women to engage in the public economy, it also highlighted the structural limitations imposed by gender norms on their developmental prospects.

Overall, starting from the late 16th century, amidst warfare and economic pressures, household food production in Joseon society gradually moved beyond the domestic sphere and transformed into essential market commodities for livelihood sustenance. Joseon women—including widows and yangban women forced to sell alcohol due to war or exile, village women selling vegetables and crabs on the streets of Hanyang, and female peddlers trading side dishes such as chimchae and fermented sauces—built a capillary-like food distribution network by converting their kitchen skills into market-oriented means. This process extended the household kitchen to the streets, markets, and even the Waegwan at the border, accelerating Korea's transition from a self-sufficient agricultural economy to a commodity-based circulation society.

New commercial spaces such as taverns and eateries gave women the role of shopkeepers, allowing them to enter the public economic domain while maintaining the appearance of women managing the domestic sphere. In some yangban households, they even became the economic pillars. However, their economic agency was perceived as a threat by yangban men.

Women participating in trade at the Waegwan market were interpreted by Joseon officials as “selling your wives and daughters,” indicating that the spillover of the kitchen economy to the cross-border level not only disrupted gender divisions but also challenged Korea’s self-proclaimed civilizational hierarchy as the Little China. The marketization of the kitchen economy, on one hand, granted Joseon women economic autonomy and public presence, driving the development of a commodity economy. On the other hand, it also created tensions in terms of gender norms and cultural identity.

Conclusion

The Joseon dynasty established Neo-Confucianism as its ideological foundation and strictly adhered to the gender order of men dominating the public sphere and women managing the domestic sphere, institutionalizing this principle into the management of commercial activities. This created a market system with distinct gender characteristics. Through the principle of “separate markets for men and women” (男女不同市), the establishment of exclusive spaces such as women’s shops, and the categorization of goods women were permitted to sell, the Joseon court attempted to align market transactions with Confucian gender ethics. However, from the establishment of markets and the formation of commercial spaces in the 15th century to postwar reconstruction in the late 16th century and the accelerated commercialization of the kitchen economy from the late 17th century onward, this gendered market order repeatedly proved ineffective and required adjustments.

Women from various social strata, including the yangban aristocracy, commoners, and even the mean underclass, found a foothold between domestic duties and the public economy through market activities. They leveraged household-extended goods such as vegetables, fermented sauces, and alcoholic beverages as entry points, transforming their food production skills into marketable economic capital, thereby driving the marketization of the kitchen economy. At the level of Confucian ideology, women’s shops participation was consistently stigmatized and restricted. However, in the

practical economic realm, as long as it met livelihood needs and generated profits, gender segregation policies often had to yield or even be temporarily suspended. The commercial practices of Joseon women not only facilitated the circulation of goods but also shook the gender order of men dominating the public sphere and women managing the domestic sphere, continually reshaping gender identities within commercial spaces.

In summary, the *gendered market* of the Joseon era was both a product of the institutionalization of Confucian gender norms and a platform for women to break through constraints under the pressures of survival and socioeconomic changes. The presence of female merchants and their trading practices demonstrated that commerce was not only a domain of economic exchange but also a space where gender norms were challenged, negotiated, and reconfigured. This historical phenomenon highlights the structural tension between economic rationality and Confucian gender norms during Korea's transition from a self-sufficient agricultural society to one characterized by commodity circulation. On one hand, the court and the yangban class endeavored to uphold Confucian gender norms; on the other, women's economic practices continuously challenged these norms, driving Joseon society toward a new dynamic balance between tradition and transformation.

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