

## A new word for '*condescending geezer*' reveals a lot about hierarchy in South Korea

Kkondae is a modern word of uncertain origin — perhaps an adaptation of the English word “condescend”. It means an older person, usually a man, who expects unquestioning *obedience* from people who are junior. South Koreans apply the word to everyone from *narcissistic* bosses to *overbearing* uncles and *corrupt* politicians.

condescending 优越感的

geezer 老头

obedience 顺从

narcissistic 自恋的

overbearing 专横的；傲慢的

corrupt 贪污的

South Korea is notorious for its *suffocating* workplace hierarchies based on age, sex and length of service. Many South Koreans are outraged when younger colleagues or relatives fail to use the correct *honorific* to address them.

suffocating 令人窒息的

honorific 尊敬的；敬语

However, the popularity of kkondae as an *insult* is a sign of change. Open *rebellion* against hierarchical strictures is still rare and frowned upon. But young people are beginning to question authority.

insult 侮辱

rebellion 反抗

Education partly explains this shift. Younger people tend to have more of it than their elders. That gives them greater power to challenge the kkondae, says Moon Seung-sook of Vassar College in America.

South Korea’s evolving political culture has been making an impact, too. Since democracy began to take hold in the country in the late 1980s, belief in universal rights, including people’s right to be treated equally, has become stronger. This has encouraged people to question their *deference* to others.

deference 顺从；尊重

An ancient culture of authority is unlikely to disappear overnight. Young people are becoming more willing to challenge hierarchy, but what will happen as they get older? Some of today's young upstarts will not achieve the success they dream of. They may find themselves yearning for the kind of deference their elders once automatically enjoyed. Today's kkondae critics may grow up to be kkondae themselves. But whether tomorrow's young people will let them get away with that is doubtful.