

## **Abstract**

Studies on the position of women in society disagree concerning the type of social system most conducive to the emancipation of women. The socialist system of North Korea and the capitalist system of South Korea are ideal laboratories in which to examine the Western liberal modernization perspective and the Marxist perspective in an empirical context. This paper analyzes how different patterns of social change have affected Korean women's position by comparing the status of women in North and South Korea.

Neither the socialist revolution in North Korea nor the rapid modernization in South Korea by themselves served to liberate women, although state interference in North Korea in favor of women, especially, in the economic arena, greatly contributed to enhancing women's position in that society. Both North and South Korean women occupy inferior social positions in patriarchal social systems and are subject to many discriminatory measures in the economic arena. They are also excluded from the policy-making process. Major hurdles to overcome are ideological in North Korea and institutional and structural in South Korea.

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# **Women and Social Change in South and North Korea: Marxist and Liberal Perspectives**

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## WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN SOUTH AND NORTH KOREA: MARXIST AND LIBERAL PERSPECTIVES

Studies on the position of women in society disagree concerning the type of social system most conducive to the emancipation of women. The Western perspective of modernization predicts that industrialization will remove traditional constraints on women and change the traditional sexual division of labor, thereby fostering the liberation of women. This view regards the widespread subordination or marginalization of women in capitalist societies as a deviation from proclaimed Western social norms of equality, freedom, and justice. Such deviation from Western norms is explained through historical analyses which assert that the fruits of modernization have primarily benefitted men because only men worked in the public sphere while women were confined to the domestic sphere. The problem of sexual inequality is thereby presumed to be solvable within the capitalist system through legal reforms and attitudinal changes. This view further assumes that women can be liberated by being integrated into the process of modernization and the public sphere of capitalist structures.

In contrast, the Marxist perspective views the roots of sexual inequality, like other forms of social inequality including class hierarchy, as lying in the institution of private property. Private property is dependent upon the family institution in order to preserve wealth through inheritance in the paternal line. In the bourgeois family, a woman is the property of her husband. Her responsibilities include unpaid domestic production and reproduction. Hence, according to this perspective, wives are the proletariat exploited by their bourgeois husbands. Accordingly, the oppression of women is a structural problem that cannot be solved within capitalism. The subordination of women can only be ended by a socialist revolution which will eventually free women from unpaid domestic labor and integrate them into social production.

The socialist system of North Korea and the capitalist system of South Korea are ideal laboratories in which to examine the two perspectives in an empirical context. This paper analyzes how different patterns of social change have affected Korean women's position by comparing the status of women in North and South Korea. A number of issues will be addressed, including the status of women in traditional society, women's roles in, and their contributions to, the revolutionary changes in their respective societies, the relationship between the socialist revolution and women's status in post-revolutionary North Korea, and the relationship between capitalist economic development and women's status in South Korea.

North Korea is an extremely closed system and a dearth of data severely limits any study of that country. Few earlier studies touched on the subject of women. Of those that did, most were short accounts of fact-finding trips to North Korea. As one scholar notes, information on North Korean women is "conspicuous by

its absence in most studies on women in post-revolutionary societies" (Halliday 1985:50). The present study is based mainly on North Korean sources, including a women's magazine, the speeches of President Kim Il Sung, newspapers, and other government publications. South Korean government sources were also consulted.

### Korean Women before 1945

In traditional Korean society, women lived under a social system where kinship and patriarchal orders dictated their daily lives. Before the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910) when Neo-Confucianism was adopted as the official ideological basis of social organizations, women appear to have had more freedom and legal rights and to have enjoyed a higher status (Kim 1976:37), although this does not mean that women were treated as equals to men.<sup>1</sup> During the Shilla period (4th century-918) three queens ascended to the throne, and all Shilla women had the right to be heads of families. During the Koryo period (918-1392), equal property inheritance between men and women was a common practice and women's remarriage was socially acceptable.

Confucian ideology, however, which was firmly entrenched in the Yi Dynasty which followed the Shilla and Koryo periods, severely restricted women's freedom. Men and women were segregated from the age of seven. Men stayed in the outer part of the house (sarangchae) while women stayed in the inner part (anchae). Adhering to a rigid social hierarchical order based on age, sex, and class, the society encouraged women to follow Confucian ideals and to attain Confucian virtues. A virtuous woman obeyed men throughout her life: in youth, she obeyed her father; when married, she obeyed her husband; if her husband died, she was subject to her son. Confucius's teachings also set forth the "seven evils" (chilgo Chiak) justifying the expulsion of a wife from the household: disobeying parents-in-law, bearing no son, committing adultery, jealousy, carrying a hereditary disease, garrulousness, and larceny (Kim 1976:52).

A woman had no voice in marriage. For example, her marriage was arranged by her parents, and at marriage, she became part of her husband's family and an outsider to her own. Women did not even have names, under this new ideology, but were instead identified by their position relative to men. They could not carry on the family line because the family registry (hojeok) was based on male lineage. A woman was not allowed to own property or to work outside the home, and she was required to cover her face in public. Moreover, widows were not allowed to remarry, but were expected to commit suicide to show loyalty to their husbands (Kim 1976:85-86, 99). These rules were more strictly imposed on upper-class women because commoner women had to participate in various economic activities outside the house. Still, women of all classes consistently lagged behind men in an elaborate social hierarchy

imposed during the Yi dynasty. With the introduction of Confucian ideology, women became powerless and dependent on men, and suffered from patriarchal oppression.

During the 19th century, however, various movements influenced changes in this social system. New schools of thought, such as Silhak (Practical Learning) and Tonghak (Eastern Learning), coupled with Western influence through Christianity, attached their primary concern to human rights and the equality of people regardless of social class or gender.<sup>2</sup> They advocated the improvement of women's status and universal education for both men and women. Toward the end of the Yi Dynasty, missionaries encouraged education for women, and the first modern school for women, Ewha Haktang, was established in 1886. Ironically, during this time, Western-educated men were more likely to emphasize the need for women's education than were women (Kim 1976:247). Intellectual male reformers, such as So Chae Pil and Yun Chi Ho, advocated women's liberation through the activities of their organization, the Independence Club, and the first non-governmental newspaper, Tongnip Shinmun.

Encouraged by these reform movements, the first Korean women's rights organization, Chanyang-hoe, was organized in 1898, and issued the first declaration of women's rights in Korea (Yu 1987:20):

Why should our women live on what their husbands earn as if fools, confining themselves to their deep chambers all their lives and subjecting themselves to regulations imposed by their husbands? In enlightened countries, both men and women are equal. Women's skills and principles are equal to those possessed by their husbands . . . We are going to establish a girl's school with the aim of making women equal to men.

Led by upper-class widows, Chanyang-hoe promoted women's education. The government responded, although slowly, establishing the first public girls' school, Hansong Girls' High School, in 1908. In 1899, another women's rights group, Yo-u-hoe (The Association of Women Friends), was organized. It staged the first sit-in demonstration by women to protest customs such as concubinage. During the early 20th century numerous women's organizations were formed. They were soon suppressed by the Japanese after the annexation of Korea in 1910 because women activists were also politically active in independence movements. Since then, until the liberation of Korea in 1945, the women's movement was primarily devoted to gaining the nation's independence rather than to feminist concerns.

During the Japanese rule, several underground patriotic women's organizations were formed, including the Yosong Aeguk Tongji-hoe (Patriotic Women's League) and the Taehan Aeguk Buinhoe

(Korean Patriotic Women's Society). These organizations collected funds for resistance campaigns and inspired anti-Japanese sentiment among their members. At the same time, many women actively participated in organizing and staging the March First Movement in 1919. Many of the leaders were arrested and imprisoned. Several young female students were martyred, among them Yu Kwan-Sun, a secondary Ewha Haktang student, who was tortured to death by the Japanese at the age of sixteen.

Although women's political activities were directed primarily by patriotic women and founded on the independence movement, some religious and civic organizations<sup>3</sup> engaged in feminist activities, in order to improve women's social and economic position. They included organizations established by socialist women who advocated women's emancipation over economic independence under a socialist system. The Kyungsung Yoja Chongnyon Dongmaeng in particular advocated revolutionary class struggle to achieve women's liberation through an organization of women proletariat. The founders of these groups included wives of the leaders of the Korean communist movement (Kim and Kim 1986:153-156).

Although the women's movement made women conscious of their subordination, their participation in the independence movement did not affect their status in post-liberation societies. There were independence heroines and martyrs but, except for some communist women, they did not do any actual fighting.<sup>4</sup> Hence, women did not gain control of the means of coercion, which, according to Janet Salaff and Judith Merkle (1970:182), would have guaranteed their power. No specific information is available on communist women's army units during the independence movement. However, in a speech of May 1946 to the Women's Union, President Kim Il Sung of North Korea maintained that female guerrilla army members "fought arms in hand, for the freedom and independence of their country, the emancipation of Korean women and sex equality."<sup>5</sup> He added that in the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, "the women were completely on an equal footing with men; they all received revolutionary assignments suited to their abilities and aptitudes and carried them out" (Kim Il Sung Works 1980:185). In a later speech, he praised women's struggle for liberation by stating that they dedicated "the bloom of their youth to the struggle . . . shedding their blood in the alien mountains and wilderness of Manchuria."<sup>6</sup> These statements indicate that some communist women did actually fight.

In an interview with Western scholars, officials of the [North] Korean Democratic Women's Union emphasized that women contributed greatly to the anti-Japanese movement by participating "in armed struggle like men" (Halliday 1985:55). North Korea today hails Kim Jong Suk (President Kim's deceased wife and mother of heir-designate, Kim Jong Il) as a revolutionary fighter and a communist leader for women's liberation. She is believed to have fought during the revolutionary period.<sup>7</sup> In her birth place, Hoeryong, the "Hoeryong Revolutionary Site" was developed where the

gun that she used to fight against the Japanese is displayed. Since the late 1960s, North Korea has commemorated her birthday. Her achievements during the revolutionary period have been praised in newspapers, publications by the Democratic Women's Union, commentaries by the Central Broadcasting Station, poems, songs, and slogans such as "Learn from Comrade Kim Jong Suk." The women's magazine, Choson Yosong (Korean Women), has also published numerous articles praising her: the June issue of 1987 contained a 26-page special report, marking her 70th birthday, and articles on her appeared again in the October and December 1989 issues and the December issue of 1990.

Although the degree of communist women's participation in the independence movement, especially in actual armed struggle, may not have been significant enough to affect their status following independence, their participation has been clearly recognized and praised in North Korea. On the other hand, there is no indication of non-communist women's engagement in actual fighting.

## Status of Women in South and North Korea

### The Economic Arena

#### South Korea

The major strategy of South Korea's economic development has been labor-intensive, export-oriented industrialization. South Korea's exports surged from \$41 million in 1961 to \$65 billion in 1990, mostly from manufacturing industries. South Korea's comparative advantage in the world trade system lies in its abundance of cheap labor: the country has effectively mobilized large quantities of low-wage and unskilled labor, mainly young people and women. This enabled South Korea to specialize in exporting labor-intensive products. Manufacturing industries account for 83 percent of South Korea's exports, about 25 percent of its GNP, and between five and ten percent of its annual growth (Jacobs 1985:159). The rapid growth of manufacturing industries is well reflected in the shift in the labor force structure: between 1960 and 1990, the labor force in the primary sector dropped from 81 percent to 18 percent, while the distribution for the secondary and tertiary sectors jumped from 5 to 28 percent and from 14 to 54 percent, respectively (EPB 1961 and 1990).

South Korea's development strategy changed women's participation in the national economy. Between 1963 and 1990, the number of women workers increased 14 times. The economically active female population 14 years of age or older increased from 2 million in 1960 to 6 million in 1985, an average rate of increase faster than that for male workers (EPB 1960 and 1985)<sup>8</sup>, and continued to increase to 7.5 million in 1990 (EPB 1990). The female labor force participation rate further rose from 28 percent

to 47 percent between 1960 and 1989 while the male rate decreased over that period (EPB 1989).

A more careful examination of the structure of the labor force suggests that women's participation was crucial in the success of manufacturing industry, the "engine" of South Korea's economic development. As can be seen in Table 1, the proportions of women employed in the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors in 1963 were 69, 7, and 24 percent, respectively. Over the years, a dramatic shift has occurred in this structure to change the ratios to 20, 28, and 52 percent in 1990. The highest increase was in the secondary sector: the number of employed women increased 11 times, from 186,000 to 2,058,000.

The rapid increase in the number of women industrial workers has expanded the "female manufacturing industries," where women account for more than half of all workers. These include textile and clothing manufacturing, rubber and plastic, electronic goods, shoes, and china and pottery manufacturing (Cho 1985:84). These "female manufacturing industries" were responsible for 70 percent of total national export earnings in 1975: about 80 percent of the women in the manufacturing sector produced export-oriented products in the 1970s (Cho 1985:84). Throughout the 1980s, over 70 percent of women industrial waged workers were employed in the manufacturing sector, and they accounted for about 40 percent of the work force in the manufacturing industry (MOL 1980-1989). These statistics show the extent to which women took a leading role in the "industrial frontier" and became a crucial force for industrial development.

South Korean women also assumed an increasingly important role in agriculture. Between 1965 and 1990, the percentage of female agricultural workers increased from 30 to 46 (EPB 1965 and 1990). As most young and economically active men and women left villages for jobs in the rapidly growing urban industrial sector, farming was left to the older people, mostly women, who stayed in rural areas. In 1990, married women constituted 99 percent of the female work force in agriculture and fishery, while young single women accounted for only one percent (EPB 1990). At the same time, between 1963 and 1985, the percentage of economically active women in the farm household grew from 57 to 76, more rapidly than in the non-farm household, which showed an increase from 47 to 58 (EPB 1985). It is therefore clear that South Korean women play a significant role in the national economy. Their contribution is well reflected in the sharp increase of women workers in the agricultural sector and the dramatic surge of women's participation in the secondary and tertiary industries.

Despite women's extensive participation in economic development, their status in the economic arena appears to be far from satisfactory. In fact, a great discrepancy exists between women's economic contributions and their economic rewards. This



discrepancy is reflected in women's low wages, long working-hours, and a persistent sexual division of labor.

Even a cursory examination suggests that women receive less than half the pay of their male counterparts. Until 1987, the average women's wage was always less than half the wage for male workers. It was only in 1988 that women began to receive half the average male wage. Between 1980 and 1988, South Korea recorded the highest wage difference between men and women among the 21 countries for which data were available (ILO 1990). According to a South Korean Ministry of Labor report on wage levels in industry, the manufacturing industry, where the majority of women are employed, has maintained the lowest wage level among industries, and the only one whose wages have always been below the average (MOL 1975-1989). Data released by the International Labor Office (1990) for 1988 show that the average wage of women as a percentage of the average male wage in manufacturing was 67 for Costa Rica, 89 for Paraguay, 59 for Cyprus, 68 for Czechoslovakia, 89 for Sri Lanka, 58 for Singapore, and 74 for Hong Kong. Even compared to many Third World countries, South Korea, at 51 percent, shows a large wage differential.

Salary discrepancies occur not only in the wages of men and women industrial workers who have low levels of education and skills, but also in those of workers who have higher levels of education. In 1989, the gender differential in wages for college-educated workers was 100 to 68 in favor of men (MOL 1989b). In addition, wage discrepancy becomes greater as years of employment are accumulated. In 1989, the initial wage difference between men and women was only 100 to 78. This wage difference increases as is indicated by the fact that the average wage for all women workers is about half the wage for men. Increasing wage difference according to years of employment is clearly shown in the case of the manufacturing industry. In 1989, the wage difference between men and women who were employed for less than a year was 100 to 65. The ratio for women steadily decreased to 61, 57, 53, and 51 as the years of their employment increased to between one and two years, between three and four years, between five and nine years, and between 10 and 14 years, respectively (MOL 1989b). Thus, the wage gap is likely to widen as work experience is accumulated.

In South Korea, women work more hours than men. In 1983, among the 17 countries for which data were available, South Korea was the only nation where women worked longer hours than men. The average working hours for women was 53.7 per week while men averaged 51.7 (ILO 1984). Moreover, between 1975 and 1983, men's working hours increased 6.1 percent, while women's jumped by 9.6 percent (ILO 1984). Women's working hours were not only longer than men's but also increased at a more rapid rate. In 1988, South Korea was still the only nation where women's working hours were longer than men's among the 15 countries that released data for the International Labor Office. In the area of manufacturing, women

worked for an average of 245 hours per month in 1984, 4 hours more than men workers (MOL 1984b). Women worked for an average of 9.7 hours a day, which exceeds the legal 8-hour day, compared to 9 hours for men. Although the discrepancy decreased in 1989, the same pattern continued (MOL 1989b).

Another aspect of women's occupational status lies in sexual job segregation. The pattern of gender differentiation remains unchanged despite the growth in women's labor force participation. For example, in 1989, women comprised only 1.9 percent in the traditionally male-dominated areas such as the administrative and managerial sectors (MOL 1989b). In this case, the male predominance is even more extreme as only 0.2 percent of the total women workers were employed in the area. While women comprised 22 percent in the professional sectors, this reflected only 5.9 percent of the total women workers, and, moreover, about 80 percent of those were teachers and nurses (MOL 1989b). In other professional areas, women occupied only a marginal position. It is clear that administrative and managerial occupations are still male-dominated. On the other hand, clerical work has been a predominantly female occupation. The percentage of women workers in that field has surged from 5.6 percent in 1960 to 36 percent in 1989 (MOL 1989b).

Women's economic equality has therefore yet to be achieved in South Korea. Some even point to sex discrimination as the catalyst of the rapid industrialization of South Korea. Gender discrimination provides industries with cheap labor, and thus, their superior competitive position in the international economic system. It is an irony that discriminatory measures contributed to the country's rapid economic growth, and in turn, growth itself deepened discrimination.

### North Korea

According to classical Marxist theory, particularly the theory of Friedrich Engels, gender equality results from economic liberation, and women's participation in economic production outside the home leads to their full emancipation. Engels argues, "The first requisite for the emancipation of women is that all women participate again in social labor; to achieve this, individual families are required to be no longer the units of the social economy" (Engels quoted in Andors 1975:35). Kim Il Sung embraced this idea when he said, "The women . . . can achieve complete emancipation only if they strive with no less devotion and awareness than men to solve the problems arising on the productive fronts of the factories and countryside . . ." (Kim Il Sung Works 1980:354). Based on this basic tenet of Marxist theory, North Korea initiated the "working-classization" of women to enhance their economic independence.

To build a socialist North Korea, the government initiated a mass mobilization campaign called the Chollima (Flying Horse) movement in the late 1950s. Its aims were to reach a "revolutionary high tide of socialist construction" and realize industrialization through the mobilization of the masses. In this campaign, women's policy focused on Engels's concept of "liberation through labor" on the premise that women's emancipation would be achieved only through loyalty to the regime's task of building a socialist Korea. Women were therefore told to turn their energies to productive work to help build socialist Korea. Kim Il Sung made this point clear in a speech at the National Meeting of Mothers, on November 16, 1961<sup>9</sup>:

An important question in Women's Union activities in the past was to wipe out illiteracy and eliminate the feudalistic ideas that oppressed the women. But this work no longer seems to be of major importance in our society. Today, the Women's Union should actively campaign for women's participation in socialist construction and bend its efforts to provide conditions that will allow them to work well (Kim Il Sung Selected Works 1976:227).

Women were consequently encouraged to play a role "as one wheel of a wagon in the work of nation-building."

To mobilize women outside the family, the regime pushed for the socialization of housework. According to Lenin (1966:63-64 quoted in Andors 1976:23), although participation in labor is a necessary condition for women's emancipation, the real emancipation will begin "only where and when an all-out struggle begins against this petty housekeeping." This echoes Engels who said that true equality comes only when "private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry, [and] the care and education of children becomes a public affair" (quoted in Jaquette 1982:274). In 1946, Kim Il Sung advocated that the state should take steps to rear children under public care in order to encourage women to take part in public life (Kim Il Sung Works 1980:194). In 1970, the Fifth Congress of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) made freeing women from the heavy burden of the household a major goal of the party. This was reflected in Article 62 of the Socialist Constitution of 1972, which provides benefits to ensure that women participate in public life including maternity leave with pay, maternity hospitals, free nurseries and kindergartens, and reduced working hours for mothers of large families. At the same time, the 1976 Law on the Nursing and Upbringing of Children and the 1978 Socialist Labor Law stipulated that women with three or more children under 13 years of age receive 8 hours' pay for 6 hours' work. The point was made clear in legal provisions that it was the responsibility of the state and society to bring up children and to protect working mothers.

With the launching of the Chollima movement, North Korean women's housework began to be socialized through nurseries, kindergartens, laundries, and an efficient food industry. North Korea started with only 12 nurseries and 116 kindergartens in 1949, but by 1961 there were 7,600 nurseries and 45,000 kindergartens which cared for 700,000 children. It was reported in 1976 that almost 100 percent of the 3.5 million children could enter more than 60,000 nurseries and kindergartens (Kim Il Sung 1976). There is also a network of food "take out" services for busy working women. One Women's Union member summarizes the socialization of housework in North Korea (Halliday 1985:53):

Children are brought up at state expense. If there is pressing and ironing [to be done] it goes to the laundries. The foodstuffs industry has been developed, so food can be bought at any time. So what is there left to do in the family?

Although her statement is exaggerated, accounts by defectors from North Korea confirm that various measures for the socialization of housework has begun to be implemented.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, women were urged to participate vigorously in the technical revolution by acquiring at least one technical skill in order to free themselves from their arduous labor.<sup>11</sup>

All these measures and the Chollima mass mobilization campaign greatly expanded women's participation in the labor force. The female labor force, which accounted for only 20 percent of the total in 1956, has steadily increased. Between 1956-1964, the annual growth rate of the female labor force was over 19 percent, and women now constitute about 49 percent of the total labor force. The 1980 data show that women occupied 56 percent of the labor force in the agricultural sector, 45 percent in the industrial sector, 20 percent in mining, 30 percent in forestry, 15 percent in heavy industry, and 70 percent in light industry (Lee 1988:194). In education, women accounted for 80 percent of the elementary school teachers, while the figures for middle and high school, technical school, and college were 35 percent, 30 percent, and 15 percent, respectively. Among professionals and technicians, women accounted for only 14.6 percent in 1963, yet, in 1989, more than 37 percent were women (Kim 1990:189). The number of women professionals and technicians increased 10.6 times between 1963-1989 while that of men increased only 2.5 times. Women play a particularly prominent role in agriculture, light industry, and education.

Recently, North Korea has experienced severe economic difficulty. Its trade volume has dropped from \$5.2 billion in 1988 to \$4.5 billion in 1990. Due to its increasing trade deficit, foreign debt has expanded from \$4.7 billion in 1987 to \$6.7 billion in 1989, and the annual economic growth rate has dropped from 3.3 percent in 1987 to 2.4 percent in 1989. North Korea recorded its

first negative growth rate of minus 3 percent in 1990. Kim Il Sung himself acknowledged that North Korean people are not leading affluent lives.<sup>12</sup>

To raise poor living standards and combat the widespread shortage of food and consumer goods, North Korea declared 1989 as the "year of light industries," and announced a new work-harder campaign, "Speed of the 1990s." As North Korea shifted its emphasis from heavy to light industry some women were mobilized into household production teams designed to promote side-line production. Women's mobilization based on the new emphasis on light industry and the work-harder campaign is expected to increase as public demand for consumer goods is certain to grow.

Nevertheless, North Korean women can hardly be said to have achieved a level of economic status equal to men's. There are indications that the wage structure for men and women is not equitable in North Korea, although no official information is available concerning the pay scale. According to one source, income distribution between a husband and a wife is such that the husband's income is always higher than that of the wife (Kim 1990:194). This indicates that the husband remains the primary source of income in a typical household and the wife is considered a side-income earner. The wage difference also reflects the unequal representation of women in various occupational structures, which indicates a sexual division of labor. Women are concentrated in occupations for which the pay scale is low. For example, the monthly salary of an elementary school teacher ranges from 80-120 won while it is between 100-250 won for a college professor.<sup>13</sup> Women constitute more than 80 percent of the elementary teachers but only 15 percent of the college professors.

Since the late 1980s, women (especially those married to high income earners) have tended to quit their jobs after marriage.<sup>14</sup> Married women's labor force participation has therefore declined, and it is reported that a majority of married women do not work outside the home (Kim 1990:187). Several factors account for this change. One is the decline in the national economy, which reduces economic opportunity, especially for married women who are assumed to be the first ones laid off. In addition, some married women give up their jobs voluntarily because they can generate income by participating in side-line production teams while staying home. This reduces their double burden of housework and economic employment, although it increases their economic dependence. All these suggest that discrimination against women, strongly rooted in Confucian culture, still exists in North Korea despite socialist ideology and legal provisions mandating equality. North Korean women have therefore been unable to achieve economic equality and recent trends are no grounds for optimism in this alleged paradise where women are presumed to have already achieved liberation.

## The Social Arena

### South Korea

Following independence, South Korea's 1948 Constitution introduced legal equality between the sexes. Article 8 guaranteed the equality of all citizens and prohibited any political, economic, and social discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, or social status. Unlike women in the West who had to fight for women's rights, Korean women have been granted constitutional equality. However, although there has been much improvement in women's participation in Korean society (especially in education and economics), this constitutional guarantee has not enhanced women's social status.

A case in point is South Korea's family law which was enacted in 1957 and became effective in 1960. The law contained many provisions in marriage, divorce, and inheritance that benefited men, rather than women. To change this discriminatory law, a coalition of 61 women's organizations formed the Pan-Women's Society for the Revision of Family Law in 1973. The Society proposed a revision of the family law to the National Assembly in 1975. Faced with mounting opposition to the revised bill by the Confucian community, however, the Pan-Women's Society had to accept much less than they had hoped for. For example, the 1977 version of the family law maintained the patrilineal family system which designated the eldest male as head of the family, hoju. The eldest son of a family could not give up his position regardless of his age: even a 2-year-old boy could become a hoju (Yoo 1985:833). It also included other discriminatory practices such as a difference in boundaries defining relationships with the husband's and the wife's families and limits the wife's role in adoption proceedings, parental authority, division of property, and divorce.

Due to such set backs, the struggle to promote women's rights through revisions in the family law continued and finally, in December 1989, the struggle bore fruit. Although the revision (which went into effect in January 1991) did not completely abolish the controversial family-head system, it greatly limited the family head's power, and changed the inheritance of the family headship to a succession system. For example, the new law enabled the eldest son to cede his position as head of the family to another family member. The new law also permits a divorcing woman to claim a share of property according to her contribution in gaining the property, and allows her custody of her children (which was formerly an exclusive right of the husband). If a controversy arises over custody, it is decided by the courts.

The new family law may appear to signify a victory for women, but the nearly three decades of struggle needed to achieve it indicates that a strong cultural legacy of Confucianism remains which prevents the realization of a fully egalitarian social

system. Even the newly amended version of the family law retains clauses that discriminate against women, including the provision that the eldest son is automatically designated the head of household (unless he relinquishes this right).

## North Korea

The communist revolution sought to change the traditional social structure and liberate those oppressed under it. North Korean leaders incorporated this task into the regime formation process. As early as 1946, they launched a series of campaigns and reforms, including family and land reforms and the nationalization of all enterprises that had been owned by Japanese capitalists or Korean collaborators. Concurrently, various laws promoting social change were promulgated by the Provisional People's Committee, such as the Law on Land Reform, the Law on Sex Equality, the Labor Law, and the Law on the Nationalization of Essential Industries.

In March 1946, agrarian reform was instituted with approximately million chongbo of land confiscated for redistribution gratis among about 724,000 poor and landless peasants. Women were granted equal allotments of land as Kim Il Sung noted: "At the time of the agrarian reform women in the countryside received their share of land on a par with men and became the owners of lands like all the rest of the peasants" (Kim Il Sung works 1980:185). The most progressive change in the traditional position of women was the Law on Sex Equality announced on July 30, 1946. Intended to "transform the old feudal relations of the sexes" and to encourage women to "participate fully in cultural, social, and political life," the law emphasized equal rights in all spheres of state, the right to a free marriage and divorce, and equal rights to inherit property and to share property in case of divorce. It ended arranged marriages, polygamy, concubinage, the buying and selling of women, prostitution, and the professional entertainer system. Thus, for the first time in history, women were legally placed on an equal footing with men.

The North Korean Labor Law defined women's rights at work. Articles 14 through 17 stipulated the rights of mothers and pregnant women, including 77 days of maternity leave with full pay,<sup>15</sup> paid baby-feeding breaks during work, a prohibition against overtime or night work for pregnant or nursing women, and the transfer of a pregnant woman to easier work with equal pay. Moreover, the Law on Nationalization of Essential Industries, which began the elimination of private property, weakened the economic power of a patriarch. Later, in the early 1950s, the North Korean leadership accelerated the nationalization of the remaining private industry, trade, and transport and collectivized agriculture through cooperatives. The transformation of the ownership of the means of production became reality by the end of the 1950s. As Engels urged, efforts were made to replace individual families with

collectives as the units of the social economy. The total collectivization of agriculture and industry, which was accompanied by the Chollima movement, greatly contributed to the weakening of patriarchal power: elimination of private property led to the demolition of inheritance, which destroyed the material basis of traditional patriarchy.

In 1946, the mass organization for women, the Democratic Women's Union of North Korea, was established to unite the women's movement under the KWP, and the following year, North Korea abolished the family registry system based on male lineage, replacing it with a new citizen registry system. These sweeping changes had a profound impact on traditional patriarchal systems, especially on the family system: clans eventually disappeared, the family lineage-book system was completely destroyed, and a nuclear family system began to emerge. The policies announced as early as 1946 and 1947 laid a basis for the emancipation of women from the feudalistic patriarchy of the family and social systems. These legal guarantees were reinforced later by the Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of 1949, the Socialist Constitution of 1972, and other statutes of North Korea.

Despite this program, granting equal rights in laws was not enough to liberate women from patriarchy, in part because these rights were given to women from above almost overnight. Given the authoritarian culture of the nation, the concept of equality was alien to both men and women and was strongly resisted. On the eve of North Korea's first democratic election, men openly opposed both women's right to vote and the election of women to the People's Committee; toward this effort, the men mobilized every means available to them, including abstention, to prevent women from being elected. Kim Il Sung consequently responded to the immediate need for awakening and educating the people to his equal rights campaign. He delivered numerous speeches, enlarged the Women's Union, and launched an extensive campaign to wipe out illiteracy among women in order to awaken them to their rights. In a speech at a Pyongyang Celebration of the Democratic Elections on November 1, 1946, he pointed out<sup>16</sup>:

[Some] maintain that women should not be elected to the people's committees and even that they should not be allowed to take part in the elections. This is also wrong thinking. Women account for half of the population. If half of the people do not take part in electing the organ of power or in its work, such power can hardly be called a genuine people's power. Women constitute a great force, a large numbers of them are sharing in the work of rehabilitating our country no less creditably than men. In our country women are guaranteed by law equal rights with men in all fields. The Law on Sex Equality, therefore, should be fully enforced in the



elections, for only then can they be truly democratic elections (Kim Il Sung Works 1980:463).

The emancipation of women from patriarchal family and social systems was strongly emphasized from the start as an integral part of state building by the socialist regime, and impressive institutional mechanisms were created for that purpose. Even so, the male domination firmly entrenched in Korean society, has prevented complete social equality for North Korean women. Women are still expected to follow Confucian virtues by obeying their husbands and sacrificing themselves for men (Cho 1990:162). In the household, a division of labor is still based on gender as reflected in a recent study indicating that almost 80 percent of North Korean men regard housework as a woman's job (Cho 1990:164).

### The Political Arena

#### South Korea

The atmosphere surrounding South Korean women is least favorable in the political arena, the most typically male domain. Throughout history, only a handful of women have managed to achieve political positions of any significance. Under Japanese rule, women's political participation originated in the resistance movement and many women were active in the effort to realize national independence. Thus, women's first experience in politics evolved from the unique political situation of their country. Among the woman leaders of the resistance movement, three became active politicians: Yim Young Shin, Park Soon Chon, and Park Hyun Sook. All had been imprisoned for their participation in the March First Movement, and became eminent on the political scene in the newly established South Korean government.

Soon after liberation, Yim Young Shin formed the first political party for women, Taehan Yoja Kukmin-dang (Korean Women's National Party) in 1945; Park Soon Chon organized Konguk Bunyo Dongmaeng (Women's Alliance for Nation Building) to promote active participation of women in the nation building process. She later led Taehan Buin-hoe (Korean Women's Association), which was formed in 1948. At the same time, Park Hyun Sook organized Ibuk Yosong Tongi-hoe (Northern Women's Fellowship Association). She worked closely with the American Military Government which later appointed her as one of the four women members to the 45-member South Korean Transitional Legislative Assembly (Lee 1989:240).

These women made concerted efforts to involve themselves and other women in the political process of nation building. Their resistance against the Japanese and active involvement in the formation of the first regime of South Korea were politically rewarded. Yim was appointed Minister of Commerce and Industry in 1948, and Park Hyun Sook Minister without Portfolio in 1952 (see

Table 2). Both also served two terms as legislators in the National Assembly. Park Soon Chon, who served five terms in the Assembly, became a leading figure in the opposition after she broke her ties with President Rhee Syngman in 1953. She was the only female political survivor of the short-lived Second Republic (1960-1961). Kim Whal Ran was named Minister of Information in 1950, and was chosen to be one of the delegates representing South Korea to the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 along with Yim and Mo Yun Sook. These women contributed significantly to obtaining the United Nation's recognition of South Korea as the only legitimate regime on the peninsula.

These pioneering woman politicians earned their political positions based on their uncommon personal merits as independence fighters and political activists. Their individual credentials enabled them to move into the political arena which had been a taboo for women for centuries. In this sense, these few individuals might be regarded as isolated cases, rather than typical of women in South Korea.

Unlike President Rhee who included a few women into his administration, in the Third and Fourth Republic under President Park no women were brought into the cabinet, and no women were elected to the National Assembly from his party. During this period, only Park Soon Chon, Kim Ok Son, and Kim Yun Deuk were able to get elected to the National Assembly (as shown in Table 3). Yet, after the introduction of the proportional representation system, several women were appointed to the legislature as functional representatives. During the last four decades, the total number of women in any National Assembly never exceeded 12. The highest percentage of women was only 5.5 in 1973, and the average representation is only 2 percent (see Table 4). The percentage of women has steadily dropped from 5.5 in 1973 to 1.0 in 1992. A total of 64 Assembly seats have been occupied by women, but the majority of them (48) were appointed through the proportional representation system. Only 16 seats were won by women in elections and they were filled by only seven different women during the last four decades. All but one elected member (Park Hyun Sook) were re-elected for at least one term. Among those appointed under the proportional representation system, less than 10 percent were reappointed. The declining trend in female representation in politics is reflected in the number of women candidates in the electoral districts, which decreased from 22 in the First Assembly election to seven in the twelfth (Yoon 1986:39). Although 14 and 19 women ran for the 13th and the 14th assemblies, respectively, none was elected.

The women who have managed to rise in the power hierarchy, especially those appointed under the proportional representation system, have generally been confined to women's issues in their activities. They participated as functional representatives of women rather than as professional politicians. Thus, their

participation was concentrated in an area that is given low priority in legislative activity. As a result, their power has been relatively insignificant.

As shown in Table 2, nine women have served in cabinet positions. However, almost a quarter of a century elapsed between the end of Park Hyun Sook's service in 1954 and the appointment of another women. Half the female ministers served for less than a year. After 1982, no women minister was appointed other than to the office of women's affairs, the Second Ministry of Political Affairs. No woman has ever occupied the highest political office, the presidency. In 1960, Park Soon Chon ran unsuccessfully for the office, receiving only one out of the total 253 votes cast in an indirect election. For the next highest office, vice president, Yim Young Shin ran in 1952 and 1960 as a candidate of the Korean Women's National Party, but she received only 2.6 and 0.9 percent of the vote in these respective elections.

In 1983, more than 21 percent of government bureaucracy was staffed by women, up from 16.8 percent in 1978 (MGA 1984). Women are virtually absent however, in high-level government positions. In 1983, almost 90 percent of women officials held jobs lower than the sixth grade, and half the total were concentrated in the lowest, ninth, grade (MGA 1984). Approximately one percent held offices in the top five grades.

In 1988, the problem of women's unequal representation in public office was still evident. Women accounted for 23 percent of the public officials, but 92 percent of them were lower than the sixth grade, and only one percent was in the top five grades (MGA 1989).<sup>17</sup> Women were represented in only 35 of 364 ministerial committees, and there were only 156 women (2.2 percent) among the total of over 7,000 members (Yoon 1986:43). Almost 80 percent of these were concentrated in the committees of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. All other ministries had less than ten women members on their committees (Yoon 1986:43). The same trend is found in party membership. The membership ratio between men and women has increased from 8:2 in the 1970s to 6:4 in 1983. Women are generally excluded however, from party governing bodies and are seldom nominated for party stronghold districts, so the number of women means little in terms of power. Women are severely excluded from the nation's policy-making process despite the fact that they constitute more than half the nation's electorate. They hold no power in political structures, and accordingly, have no voice in making decisions about allocation of values and resources for the society.

### North Korea

Compared to their proportion of the population, Kim Il Sung (1971 in Kim Il Sung Selected Works 1976) noted that there was a

very small number of women cadres, and that even those few were in areas of secondary importance.<sup>18</sup> Women's participation in public and political affairs was strongly encouraged and, by 1972, women accounted for more than 20 percent of the Supreme People's Assembly (see Table 5). In local assemblies in provinces, cities, and counties, women have occupied between 20 and 26 percent of the seats since 1956. A 1976 report noted that women comprised one-third of all deputies to representative government organizations, ranging from the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) to local people's assemblies (Rodong Shinmun 1976).

Although women occupy about one-third of the representative positions in the lower echelons of power, they remain greatly under-represented in the upper levels, with the exception of the SPA which is not considered a real decision-making center. As one examines the more powerful organizations such as the Central Committee (CC) and the Politbureau (Political Committee) of the KWP and the Administrative Council (the Cabinet), it becomes apparent that very few women have held positions of power. As shown in Table 6, the proportion of women members in the CC has fluctuated between 2.4 percent and 6.9 percent for full members, and from 10 percent to 15.5 percent for candidate members. Up to the Sixth Party Congress, only 16 different women have served as full members on the Central Committee, among whom six were reelected. In the highest decision-making body of the KWP, the Politbureau, only Pak Chong Ae has served. Chong Kyong Hui was appointed alternate member of the Politbureau in the Sixth Congress, and was later joined by Kim Bok Shin. Thus far, only three women have climbed to the highest level of the power structure. In the Administrative Council, women have filled an average of two positions of over 30 in each cabinet (see Table 7). Likewise, North Korean women have not been integrated into the nation's decision-making center although they have been well represented in the lower levels of the power hierarchy.

#### **Comparison of Women's Status in South and North Korea**

South and North Korean women experienced radical changes after independence in 1945. Nevertheless, as examined above, neither the socialist revolution in North Korea nor the rapid modernization in South Korea by themselves served to liberate women. Both North and South Korean women occupy inferior social positions in patriarchal social systems, are subject to many discriminatory measures in the economic arena, and are excluded from the policy-making process. The socialist revolution in North Korea, however, seems to have been more effective than the rapid industrialization of South Korea in improving Korean women's position from that of pre-independence days. North Korean leaders were committed to changing traditional family, economic, and social systems and instituted new legal and social arrangements that promoted equal rights. In 1946, North Korean women were guaranteed equal rights to inherit property and

to divide property in case of divorce. South Korean women fought for these rights for three decades and finally acquired them only in 1989. As early as 1947, North Korea eliminated the family registry system based on male lineage. South Korean women have failed to abolish the system despite their arduous struggle against it for almost three decades. Clearly, the leaders of North Korea were strongly committed to the abolition of the feudal family system. Kim Il Sung addressed the issue in many speeches promoting equal rights. In South Korea, despite a rhetorical commitment to women's equality and the elimination of the traditional family system, the state made no efforts comparable to those made in North Korea to penetrate social and kinship structures. North Korea's policies in favor of women greatly contributed to enhancing women's lot in that society.

The most remarkable improvement for North Korean women was made in the economic arena. The regime's emphasis on liberation through labor and the abolition of private property led to the decline of the economic power of the patriarch. Women could acquire economic independence through paid labor, which enhanced their status in the family. In addition, socialization of housework and childrearing greatly relieved working women of the double burdens of family life and outside employment. Many progressive measures were introduced to encourage women to take part in economic life: five months of maternity leave with full pay, free nurseries and kindergartens, and 8 hours pay for 6 hours work for mothers with three or more children under 13 years of age. Yet no information is available on the extent to which these provisions have been implemented, although various accounts from North Korean defectors indicate that these measures became operative to some degree.

The economic participation of South Korean women has also grown impressively in the past three decades. Women were well-integrated into the modernization process, albeit at the lowest levels. Yet South Korea appears far behind North Korea in freeing women from the heavy burdens of the household. While North Korea admitted almost 100 percent of children into public nurseries and kindergartens in 1976, South Korea did not even pass a law to establish nurseries until 1990. Both North and South Korean men appear to be reluctant to share housework. Almost 80 percent of North Korean men still regard household work as a woman's job as mentioned earlier, and South Korean men's participation in housework is hardly noticeable. It has been estimated that men in South Korea spend one half hour on housework as compared to five and one half hours for women (Korean Women Today 1991). While household labor remains women's work in both Koreas, North Korea's legal provisions and institutional mechanisms for socializing housework and protecting working women are more impressive than those of South Korea.

Political opportunities for North Korean women have been greatly expanded, especially at the lower echelons of power, through affirmative measures such as a quota system which has yet to be introduced in South Korea. Women have comprised at least 20 percent of the representative bodies at local levels and have maintained 20 percent at the SPA since 1972, with the exception of 1982-1986. Their average representation in the Central Committee of the KWP is 4.4 percent (see Table 6). Women's representation in North Korea is prominent compared to South Korea where women's representation in the National Assembly averages only two percent. Moreover, women cabinet members in North Korea serve longer than those in South Korea. While half the South Korean members stayed in office for less than a year, all of the North Korean members served more than a year (see Table 2 and Table 7). In fact, except for Pak Chong Ae, who served only a year, three women (Pak Yong Sin, Yi Ho Hyok, and Yi Yang Suk) served for 6 years and another three (Ho Chong Suk, Yun Gi Jong, and Kim Bok Sin) served over ten years. Except for Pak, all were reappointed while none in the South Korean cabinets was. Furthermore, four of nine female South Korean cabinet members were appointed to the office of women's affairs, the Second Ministry of Political Affairs. After 1982, no women minister was appointed to any other cabinet position. Thus, the socialist revolution in North Korea seems to have had a more profound impact on women than have the capitalist reforms of South Korea.

### Problems and Prospects

In his theory of social inequality, Gerhard Lenski (1966) identified three sources of power influencing inequality in society: the power of property (economic power), the power of position, and the power of force. As discussed above, neither North nor South Korean women have complete power of property, despite major advances in this area, and they are far from having power of position. Furthermore, women's participation in the military, the most significant source of power and leadership in both Koreas, has been virtually nonexistent. When asked the highest rank held by a woman in the military, a representative of North Korea's Women's Union was unable to answer except to say that some women held the rank of colonel as heads of military hospitals (Halliday 1985:54). This failure to provide further comment on women's military rank suggests that there is no prominent women in the North Korean armed forces. North Korean women clearly did not gain control of the means of coercion.

South Korean women also failed to gain the power of force, either during the independence movement or the Korean War. While there were independence heroines and fighters, and there is some indication that organized Women's Independence Royal Troops did unofficially exist (Lee 1989:62-63), they did not do the actual fighting, nor did they gain control of the means of coercion.

Given the fact that military experience was one of the important qualifications for getting into the power structures of all aspects of South Korean society, it is clear why the leadership of the society was monopolized by men. In both Koreas, a handful of women played a part in the political leadership hierarchy. But because women were not organized as women, the result, to use Janet Salaff and Judith Merkle's term, was not the institutionalization of women's power but a "star system." Individual women were promoted as "symbols of the fulfillment of revolutionary promises rather than a substantial commitment to end the oppression of women as a category" (Salaff and Merkle 1970:182).

In North Korea, the problem of organizing women as women stems largely from the deeply ingrained Confucian culture and the basic tenet of Marxist theory that maintains that women will not be fully liberated until communism is fully developed because the "woman question" should be subsumed under the "class question." Therefore, any attempt to organize the masses around women's issues is seen as selfish and divisive. Those who do confine themselves to the "woman question" are considered bourgeois women. Women are told to pursue the equality of men and women together rather than focusing on their status as women. Kim Il Sung made this clear when he labeled women's organizations that claimed emancipation "apart from economic and productive activities and all other social activities" as "rich women's club[s]" (Kim Il Sung Works 1980:354). Accordingly, feminism, which places women's concerns first, is considered evil and counter-revolutionary. Many leftist women as well as men oppose feminism as selfish and bourgeois, and view women's problems as peripheral to the proletarian struggle. This ideological tenet discouraged the women's movement in North Korea, and may help explain why the campaign to liberate women from traditional oppression has been left to the KWP whose goals and strategies have been defined by men.

Women have been marginal members of South Korean society for centuries with no access to property, force, and position. What can possibly account for the marginalization of half the population? For one thing, the Confucian culture cannot be ignored. The tradition of male superiority of Neo-Confucianism is still very much alive in people's belief systems. Koreans have the highest preference for male births in the world, equal to people in India and Taiwan. A nation-wide survey showed that over 90 percent of Korean women still prefer sons (Yu 1987:24). The modernization process has made some changes in people's value systems as shown in a survey indicating that only five percent of men opposed women's employment (Kim 1985:8). Modernity, however, has not replaced tradition. Another study found men in favor of women's working only if they stayed home while their children were young (Cho 1987:60). In South Korea, conflicting modern and traditional values coexist, making women's roles far more complicated and precarious.

These cultural characteristics resulted in many discriminatory practices in the process of recruitment and promotion of working women, and are the basis of women's low level of job consciousness, job security, and company loyalty. Women regard their jobs as temporary because there it is customary to retire at marriage and their income is regarded as supplementary to family income.<sup>19</sup> This perception deepens the dependency of women on men and reinforces the persistence of male-oriented patriarchal culture. Despite rapid industrialization, urbanization, the expansion of educational opportunities, and consciousness raising efforts, die-hard Confucian values are still deeply entrenched in the society.

In addition to the cultural legacy of Confucianism, institutional factors also account for women's backwardness in South Korea. Major institutions in South Korea reinforce or perpetuate the notion of inequality between men and women. Primary socialization agents emphasize different gender roles. For example, school curricula offer business and industrial courses for boys and home management courses for girls. Textbooks describe stereotyped gender roles, and portray the ideal woman as "respectful daughter, good mother, sacrificing sister" (Yu 1987:24). The family institution perpetuated traditional patriarchy through the family registry system based on male lineage. The legal system banned women from certain occupations, while the wage system institutionalized marginal wages for women on the premise that they are supported by male heads of household. Women's wages do not include the family, education, and housing allowances commonly found in wages given to heads of households (Tak 1986:89). Where male superiority is firmly built into the major institutions of society, efforts to break the patriarchy do not bear fruit overnight. The three decades' struggle to eliminate the family-headship system has failed because it was feared that it would "shake the roots of the nation itself" (Yoo 1985:830).

Another problem is the lack of institutional mechanisms for implementing legal commitments to gender equality. The Constitution as well as recent labor legislation clearly recognize the principle of gender equality. But the persistence of discriminatory practices reveals that these guarantees are hardly functioning. For example, the 1989 revisions of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act provide for women's equality in recruitment, training, promotion, and retirement, and mandate maternity protection through a one-year child care leave system and a two-month paid leave for pre- and post-natal care. In order to fully implement the intent of the Act, however, more institutionalized and organized mechanisms of the child care system are needed. A law providing for the establishment of nurseries for working mothers was not passed until December 1990. Ironically, the law was controversial from the beginning. Many women's groups have vigorously protested the law because they feel it does not reflect the interests of poor working mothers. In a recent survey, 57 percent of married women in industrial areas attributed their



unemployment to their child care responsibilities, and 79 percent of women professionals listed childcare as the primary difficulty in their lives (Korean Women Today 1989:4). Yet day care centers did not begin to open until 1988, and by June 1989, only 12 industries in Seoul and Pusan opened day care centers in the workplace (Korean Women Today 1985:4-5). Working women's double burdens necessitate an institutionalized solution even more than an attitudinal change in traditional sex roles.

Finally, the marginal status of women in South Korea is also structural. The success of South Korea's labor intensive, export-oriented economy is predicated on low-wage, unskilled, young female labor. In the world's capitalist economic structure, the center, seeking the cheapest labor for the largest capital accumulation, has turned to the periphery. In South Korea, multinational penetration accelerated rapidly between 1962 and 1974. The number of multinational firms increased more than 12 times during this period from 70 to 879 (Alschuler 1988:137). These multinational corporations (MNCs) accounted for 31.4 percent of Korea's exports through 1974, and their investment between 1962 and 1982 was concentrated on manufacturing, ranging from 68 percent of their total investment to 99 percent.<sup>20</sup> MNCs that have come to the periphery (such as South Korea) profit from existing gender inequalities and exploit the cheap labor of the "periphery of the periphery." One study found that all MNCs "accept traditional attitudes towards women where they justify giving women lower wages . . . and expecting greater deference to authority and conscientiousness in work from [women]" (Lim 1978:41). Women workers who escaped from patriarchal oppression and were "liberated" by being exposed to the modern values of the MNCs and by achieving economic independence are subject to new forms of exploitation in the multinational employment. MNCs in South Korea heavily invested in manufacturing, where over 70 percent of women waged workers are employed. As discussed earlier, it is the manufacturing sector that has maintained the lowest wages among industries and it is the only economic sector with below-average wage in South Korea.

MNCs in South Korea have enjoyed "a virtual extraterritorial privilege" in making various economic decisions "free of Korean legal review and interference" (Jacobs 1985:159). The South Korean government's overriding concern has been to maintain cheap and disciplined labor to facilitate capital accumulation and to comply with the structural requirements of "dependent development." This alliance between the state and MNCs led one United States MNC executive in South Korea to state that "It is in our own selfish interest to have a strong government that controls . . . labor so everything will blossom and we can continue to make profits."<sup>21</sup> South Korea's peripheral position within the world capitalist economic system imposed the structural constraints that necessitated the exploitation of the existing gender inequalities. It is remarkable "how nicely international capitalism collaborated

with the traditional patriarchal system to exploit women workers in peripheral economies as that of Korea."<sup>22</sup> This reflects the premise that both the domestic and international capitalist systems are structured to maximize profit by using the culturally marginal members of a society, thus making them also economically and politically marginal.

In sum, the perceived backwardness of South Korean women stems not only from the traditional cultural characteristics of patriarchy but also from the institutionalization of those traditional elements coupled with a lack of institutional mechanisms for implementing sexual equality, further reinforced by the structural characteristics of capitalism. Thus, "capitalist patriarchy"<sup>23</sup> may be what underlies the marginal status of South Korean women economically, socially, and politically. Conversely, the perceived backwardness of North Korean women stems mainly from North Korea's adherence to the Marxist perspective that opposes feminism as antithetical to the class struggle. In short, major hurdles to women's emancipation seem to be ideological in North Korea and institutional and structural in South Korea.

## Notes

1. For a general discussion on Korean women, see also Kendall and Peterson (1983).
2. Silhak scholars studied in China during the 17th and 18th centuries and were introduced to Western ideas. Tonghak started with Choe Che-u in strong opposition to Sohak (Western Learning), Western influence from Catholicism. Tonghak stressed nationalism and new social values that would replace traditional values.
3. For example, Buddhist Women's Association (1920), YWCA (1922), Choson Yosong Dongwoo-hoe (Korean Women's League) (1924), Kyungsung Yoja Chongnyon Dongmaeng (Kyungsung Women's Youth League) (1925), Yosong Haebang Dongmaeng (Women's Liberation League) (1925), Pro Yosong Dongmaeng (Proletariat Women's League) (1926), and Kunu-hoe (1927).
4. For example, Kim Jong Suk, a deceased wife of President Kim Il Sung, and Kim Whak Sil who was called "The Woman General" of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, participated in actual battles (Choson Yosong, February 1960:13 and June 1987:12-37). In addition, Choson Yosong carried stories on some women members who participated in armed struggles (e.g., Hwang 1960; Lim 1960; Pak 1963).
5. His speech addressed the communist workers of the Women's Union, who were scheduled to attend the First Conference of the Democratic Women's Union of North Korea, "On the Future Tasks of the Women's Union," May 9, 1946, Kim Il Sung Works 1980:185. A Women's detachment consisting of about thirty-two women is mentioned in Suh 1988:42.
6. His speech, "Congratulations on the Founding of the Magazine, Korean Women," September 6, 1946, Kim Il Sung Works 1980:354.
7. She is also said to have saved Kim Il Sung's life in 1939. Suh 1988:51.
8. In 1986, the minimum age for workers was raised from 14 to 15.
9. "The Duty of Mothers in the Education of Children," speech at the National Meeting of Mothers, November 16, 1961, Kim Il Sung Selected Works III 1976:227.
10. However, the variety of food that can be purchased from stores is extremely limited.
11. The technical revolution is one of the programs of the "triple revolution" of technology, culture, and ideology, which began under the slogan, "Let's meet the requirement of Juche (self-

reliance) in ideology, technology, and culture." It is regarded as the prerequisite for successful construction of socialism via the Chollima movement. For a detailed discussion of the triple revolution and Juche ideology, see Park and Park 1990:chapter III.

12. In an interview with Mainichi Shimbun on April 19, 1991. See North Korea News 1991.
13. For monthly salaries, see Lee 1983:45.
14. About 70 percent of women quit their jobs after marriage. See Hankuk Ilbo 1991.
15. It was later increased to 150 days. It is said that some women voluntarily give up their long maternity leave to show their loyalty to the country, but it is not known how widely that practice is being held.
16. "On the Eve of the Historic Democratic Elections," speech at a Pyongyang Celebration of the Democratic Elections, November 1, 1946, Kim Il Sung Works 1980:463.
17. From 1989, recruitment of ninth-grade local public officials is no longer by gender.
18. "On Revolutionizing and 'Working-Classizing' Women," speech at the Fourth Congress of the Democratic Women's Union of Korea, October 7, 1971, Kim Il Sung Selected Works VI 1976:105-126.
19. In the industrial sector, the average employment duration rate for women is only 2 years (see Tak 1986:98). This phenomenon is compounded by the fact that a predominant portion (90%) of the women in light industries are single and under 30 years old.
20. See Table 8.1 in Haggard 1990:202.
21. "Quote of the Month," Multinational Monitor, December 1982:10, cited in Kowalewski 1989:84.
22. Hagen Koo, cited in Yoo 1985:847.
23. A socialist feminist Zillah Eisenstein's term denoting "the mutually reinforcing dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and hierarchical sexual structuring," quoted in Jaquette 1982:276. For details, see Eisenstein 1979.

**Table 1**  
**Employed Women by Industry**  
 (in 1,000 persons, %)

Year	Industry			
	Total Number	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1963	2,674 (100.0)	1,837 (68.7)	186 (7.0)	651 (24.3)
1976	4,820 (100.0)	2,388 (49.5)	1,031 (21.4)	1,401 (29.1)
1980	5,222 (100.0)	2,034 (39.0)	1,166 (22.3)	2,022 (38.7)
1985	5,833 (100.0)	1,619 (27.8)	1,356 (23.2)	2,858 (49.0)
1990	7,341 (100.0)	1,499 (20.4)	2,058 (28.0)	3,785 (51.6)

Source: Economic Planning Board, Republic of Korea, Annual Report on the Economically Active Population Survey, each year.

**Table 2**  
**Female Cabinet Members**

<b>Date of Appointment</b>	<b>Ministry</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Tenure</b>
1948	Minister of Commerce and Industry	Yim Young Shin	10 months
1950	Minister of Information	Kim Whal Ran	4 months
1952	Minister without Portfolio	Park Hyun Sook	2 years
1979	Minister of Education	Kim Ok Gil	5 months
1982	Minister of Health and Social Affairs	Kim Chong Rye	3 years
1988	Minister of the 2nd Ministry of Political Affairs	Cho Kyung Hee	9 months
1988	Minister of 2nd Ministry of Political Affairs	Kim Young Jung	1 year
1990	Minister of the 2nd Ministry of Political Affairs	Lee Gye Soon	2 years
1991	Minister of the 2nd Ministry of Political Affairs	Kim Kap Hyun	present

**Table 3**  
**Elected Female Legislators (1948-1989)**

National Assembly	Name
1st (1948)	Yim Young Shin
2nd (1950)	Park Soon Chon Yim Young Shin
3rd (1954)	Kim Chol An
4th (1958)	Kim Chol An Park Hyun Sook Park Soon Chon
5th (1960)	Park Soon Chon
6th (1963)	Park Soon Chon
7th (1967)	Kim Ok Son
8th (1971)	none
9th (1973)	Kim Ok Son Kim Yun Deuk
10th (1978)	Kim Yun Deuk
11th (1981)	Kim Chong Rye
12th (1985)	Kim Chong Rye Kim Ok Son
13th (1988)	none
14th (1992)	none

**Table 4**  
**Female Legislators in the National Assembly**

	Total	Number of Women	% of Women
Constitutional Assembly (1948)	200	1 (1)	0.5
2nd (1950)	210	2 (2)	1.0
3rd (1954)	203	1 (1)	0.5
4th (1958)	233	3 (3)	1.3
5th (1960)	201	1 (1)	0.5
6th (1963)	175	2 (1)	1.1
7th (1967)	175	3 (1)	1.7
8th (1971)	204	5 (0)	2.5
9th (1973)	219	12 (2)	5.5
10th (1978)	231	8 (1)	3.5
11th (1981)	276	9 (1)	3.3
12th (1985)	276	8 (2)	2.9
13th (1988)	299	6 (0)	2.0
14th (1992)	299	3 (0)	1.0
Total	3,201	64 (16)	2.0

Note: Numbers in parentheses are elected legislators from electoral districts.



Table 5  
Percentage of Female SPA Members

SPA	Date	%
1st	August 1948	12.1
2nd	August 1957	12.6
3rd	October 1962	9.1
4th	November 1967	16.0
5th	December 1972	21.0
6th	December 1977	20.8
7th	February 1982	15.0
8th	December 1986	21.1
9th	May 1990	20.1

Source: 1st-6th: Dae-Sook Suh, Korean Communism: 1945-1980 (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1981), p. 442. 7th and 9th: Bong Sook Sohn, "Yosong-kwa Jongchi Chaemyea," in Bukhan Yosong-ui Siltae (Seoul, Korea: The Second Ministry of Political Affairs, 1990), p. 227. 8th: Choson Yosong, April 1989, p. 29.

**Table 6**  
**Female Central Committee Members**

Congress	Date	Full Members	%	Candidate Members	%
1st	August 1946	Ho Chong Suk* Pak Chong Ae*	4.7	-	-
2nd	March 1948	Pak Chong Ae* Ho Chong Suk*	3.0	-	-
3rd	April 1956	Pak Chong Ae* Ho Chong Suk*	2.8	-	-
4th	September 1961	Pak Chong Ae Kim Ok Sun	2.4	Yi Yang Suk** Hwang Sun Hui* Pak Hyong Suk Yi Yong Sun Han Kyong Suk	10.0
5th	November 1970	Chong Kyong Hui* Hwan Sun Hui* Yu Chong Suk* Kim Song Ae O Suk Hui Yi Son Hwa Yu Sun Hui Chon Yong Hui	6.8	Pak Yong Sin Sin Chin Sun** Ho Chang Suk** Wang Ok Hwan** Kim Kim Ok Ho Yon Suk	10.9
6th	October 1980	Chong Kyong Hui Yi Son Sil Ho Chong Suk Hwang Sun Hui Han Yong Ok Kim Song Ae Yu Chong Suk Yi Kyong Son Chon Hui Jong Yi Hwa Yong	6.9	Yi Yang Suk Chae Hui Jong Yun Ki Jong Ok Pong Nin Kim Yu Sun Kim Chu Yong Yi Hwa Son Kil Chae Gyong Sin Chin Sun Kwon Hui Gyong Ho Chang Suk Wang Ok Hwan Yi Ho Hyok Kim Nak Hui Ho Min Son Pak Sol Hui	15.5

\*Reelected to full membership

\*\*Reelected to candidate membership

Source: Compiled by the author from Dae-Sook Suh, Korean Communism: 1945-1980 (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1981).

**Table 7**  
**Some Female Members of the Administrative Council**

Cabinet	Appointment	Ministry	Name	Tenure
1st	1948	Ministry of Culture and Propaganda	Ho Chong Suk	9 years
	1957	Minister of Justice	Ho Chong Suk	1 month
2nd	1957	Minister of Justice	Ho Chong Suk	2 years
	1961	Minister of Agriculture	Pak Chong Ae	1 year
	1962	Minister of Commerce	Yi Yang Suk	1 month
3rd	1966	Minister of Culture	Pak Yong Sin	1 year
	1967	Minister of Foodstuff and Daily Necessities Industries	Yi Ho Hyok	1 year
	1967	Minister of Textile and Paper Industries	Yi Yang Suk	1 year
4th	1967	Minister of Foodstuff and Daily Necessities Industries	Yi Ho Hyok	5 years
	1967	Minister of Culture	Pak Yong Sin	5 years
	1967	Minister of Textile and Paper Industries	Yi Yang Suk	5 years
5th	1972	None	-	-
6th	1980	Minister of Finance	Yun Gi Jong	2 years
	1981	Vice-premier	Kim Bok Sin	1 year
7th	1982	Minister of Finance	Yun Gi Jong	4 years
	1982	Vice-premier	Kim Bok Sin	4 years
8th	1986	Chair of External Economic Commission Vice-premier	Kim Bok Sin	4 years
	1986	Minister of Finance	Yun Gi Jong	4 years
9th	1990	Chair of the Light Industry Commission Vice-premier	Kim Bok Sin	present
	1990	Minister of Finance	Yun Gi Jong	present

1st-6th: Both original and interim appointees

7th-9th: Only original appointees

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources.

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