

# LESSON 8

## Women at the Crossroads

Over the centuries, cross cultural influences have had an impact on Korean society. The lives of women in Korea have been affected by political, economic and religious changes. In this lesson, students will examine primary source documents to explore women's lives during five major eras of Korean history.

### LINKAGE WITH CURRICULUM

\*World History  
\*Women's Studies

### MATERIALS

\*Handouts  
\*Readings  
Accompanying  
This Lesson

### Purpose of Lesson and Overview

Through this lesson, students will be able to:

- examine central aspects of women's lives in five time periods: under the Silla, Koryo, and Choson kingdoms, under Japanese colonial rule and in the modern era;
- interpret primary source documents to better understand changes affecting women
- compare and contrast the status of women in the five eras;
- evaluate contradictory evidence on women's lives.

### Content Focus

Five ways in which cross cultural ideas can influence societies are paired with five major eras of Korean history in this lesson.

Era	Cross Cultural Influences
Unified Silla (618-935)	May stimulate cultural change and provide a cultural renaissance in which women participate.
Koryo (918-1392)	May introduce new social roles that are voluntarily accepted later part of Koryo.
Chosun (1392-1910)	May institute rigid standards or values that take away traditional rights.
Japanese Colonial Rule (1910-1945)	May alter the traditional values to fit foreign patterns.
Modern (1945-present)	May provide new choices for women and men.

The purpose of this lesson is to examine ways in which cross cultural and intracultural influences have impacted the lives of women in Korea. Some of these changes have been voluntary and some have not. In the past, women were a vulnerable group, so changes were often imposed on them. Today, Korean women have more freedom to accept or reject cross cultural ideas. Social change is complex and may affect various members of society differently.

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## The Lesson: Time Periods in Korean History

### STRUCTURE OF LESSON

1. This lesson is divided into five exercises that match the five eras described in the chart on page 119. Following the opening discussion, divide the class into five groups. Have each group specialize in one time period. Or, students could work in teams through all five eras and compare their results:

Each of the five exercises contains background information to provide context as well as primary sources and questions for discussion.

### OPENING

2. Describe a time in the history of the U.S. or any other society when political change impacted the social and personal lives of the people. Were these effects the same for men and women in the society? Have students discuss these questions, suggest examples and help them speculate about how political or economic changes may affect men and women differently.

### CONDUCTING THE INVESTIGATION

3. In this lesson, we shall explore the impact of cross cultural influences on Korean women during five major eras in Korean history. Cross cultural influences include new ideas or technologies brought from one culture to another through trade, conquest, or other interactions.

Historically, political, social and economic changes have affected men and women differently. By taking a close look at the lives of Korean women, we can better understand current issues facing them today and Korean society in general.

Organize students into their work groups and distribute the five exercises. Students can consult other sources to extend their findings. Explain to students that through our investigations, we will see how these cross cultural influences occurred and what impact they had on women's lives. Have them look for patterns and issues as you investigate the data. We shall Following this, reconvene as a class to compare Korean women's lives across the five eras.

### ASSESSMENT

4. Have each group report on its findings to the class. Have groups evaluate the chart from page 119 and add or change it based on their findings.
  - Ask students: "What in your opinion were the best and worst cross cultural effects on women's lives? Give examples to support your answer."
  - Ask students: "If Korean women were to ask you what advice would you give them about accepting or rejecting new social ideas, what answer would you give?"

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## EXTENSION

5. Have interested students examine the extent of western influences on Korean women. They might examine the establishment of girls' schools like Ewha Womans Academy; the American missionary movement; the ROK's current positions on women; major issues facing Korean women today.

### Resources For Further Research

- Committee for the Compilation of the History of Korean Women. Women of Korea: A History from Ancient Times to 1945, Seoul: Ehwa Womans University Press, 1976.
- Lee, Peter. Sourcebook of Korean Civilization. New York: Columbia, 1993.
- Kang, Sok-kyong. Words of Farewell: Stories of Korean Women Writers. Seattle: Seal Press, 1989.
- Chung, Sei-waha. Challenges for Woman: Women's Studies in Korea. Ehwa Womans University Press, 1989
- Kendall, Laurel and Mark Peterson, edit. Korean Women, View from the Luner Room. New Haven: East Rock Press, Inc. 1983

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## Exercise I

### Silla Queens: A Golden Age

#### BACKGROUND

During the Unified Silla Era (618-935 A.D.) Korea was united for the first time with its common language and cultural heritage. Silla rulers used China as an ally against enemy states but rejected Chinese attempts to conquer them. Under the Silla, Korea was attracted to Chinese civilization, but proud of its own cultural achievements.

Silla was a golden age of Korean culture and, much like Elizabethan England, a queen presided over its most culturally rich moments. In fact, the Silla era had three major queens: Sondok, Chindok and Chinsong. Women rulers were accepted because the Korean inheritance system stressed, “closeness to the bone,” — hereditary relationships — rather than gender roles.

#### PROCEDURE

The handout for Exercise I include:

1. A list of ways in which Queen Sondok and Queen Chindok used cross cultural ideas, mainly from China, to blend in with Korean culture;
2. A diagram of Cultural Universals, ways to categorize achievements of the Silla queen;
3. Questions under Points to Consider for the group to discuss and answer.

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## Handout for Exercise I

### Queens in the Golden Age of Silla

During the Silla age, Korea was open to new ideas and developed its own religious, educational and other institutions. Queen Sondok and Queen Chindok played key roles during this golden age. Some achievements of this era are listed below.

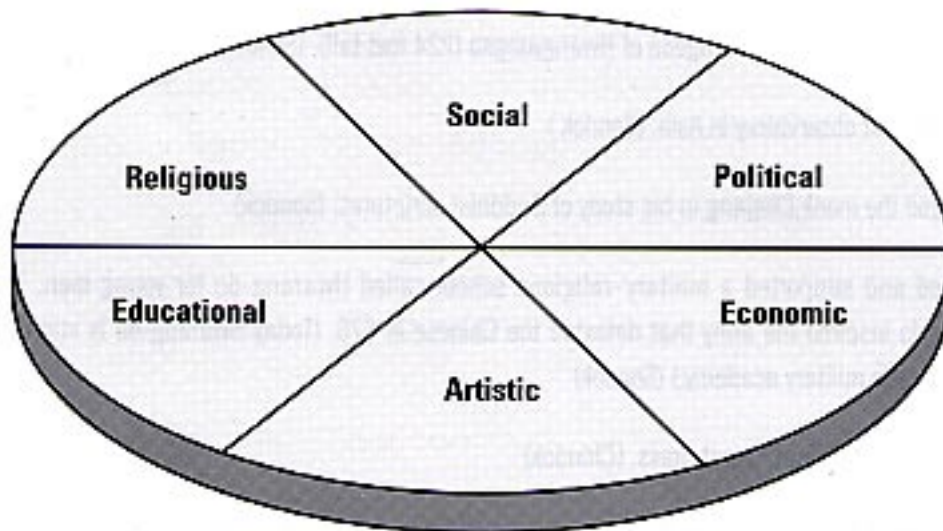
1. Sent students to China to receive higher education not available in Korea. (Sondok)
2. Built Buddhist temples. Although Buddhism had originated in India, it later spread to China and Korea. Buddhism allowed for women's participation. (Sondok)
3. Built the famous nine-tiered pagoda of Hwangyongsa (224 feet tall). (Sondok)
4. Erected the first observatory in Asia. (Sondok )
5. Encouraged the monk Chajang in his study of Buddhist scriptures. (Sondok)
6. Sponsored and supported a military – religious school called Hwarang-do for young men. The code of Hwarang-do inspired the army that defeated the Chinese in 676. (Today Hwarang-do is still the title of a modern Korean military academy.) (Sondok)
7. Adopted Chinese styles of court dress. (Chindok)
8. Reorganized the government to increase royal authority, making it similar to that of Chinese rulers. (Chindok)
9. Adopted Chinese calendar. (Chindok)
10. Encouraged the use of the Chinese writing system. (Sondok, Chindok)

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## Cultural Universals

A country's culture can be divided into distinct elements, such as economic, political, social, religious, educational, or artistic. Review the achievements of the Silla queens and categorize each achievement into one of these cultural universals.

- Economic (trade, technology, industry, agriculture)
- Political (government, military)
- Social (family, community)
- Religious (beliefs, values, formal belief systems)
- Educational (learning, schools, writing)
- Aesthetic (art, music, literature)



### POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. Which aspects of society seemed to be most emphasized? Least? Why might some areas of Korean life have received more attention than others at this time? Use research to support your answer.
2. How might these achievements have stimulated Korean intellectual and cultural life?
3. Do you think the gender of the ruler influenced his/her accomplishments? Why or why not? Use research on Silla to support your views.
4. Which item do you think was the most significant achievement? Explain your choice.
5. Read a summary of Elizabethan England. Then compare and contrast Queen Elizabeth I's achievements to those of the Silla queens.

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## **Exercise 2**

### **Koryo: A Time of Transition**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Koryo Kingdom (918-1392) inherited Silla's achievements. Indeed, the first king was married to a Silla princess. This era also contributed to Korean cultural achievements, primarily in ceramics and printing. Like Silla, Koryo rulers borrowed cultural elements from China. For example, in 958 Koryo adopted China's system of civil service examinations to select government officials. The examination subjects were entirely drawn from the Confucian classics. Even though Confucianism played an important role in the government, Buddhism influenced every aspect of social and religious life.

During the Koryo Kingdom, as during earlier periods of Korean history, women enjoyed nearly equal status with men. This situation was due in part to equal inheritance laws that gave both daughters and sons a share in family property. Brothers and sisters (siblings) enjoyed equal status within the family and the bond between siblings functioned alongside marriage ties. The relatively equal status of women was also due in part to the uxori-local marriage system under which the bridegroom moved into the household of his wife's family for a time.

The primary source that follows shows that Koryo society was in transition. By the later part of the Koryo Kingdom, Confucian ideals were acquiring greater importance, especially among the ruling class. In time, Confucian views would replace traditional Korean customs regarding the status of women and inheritance rights.

#### **PROCEDURE**

Have the group or class read Part A, which explains Confucian ideals for women and Part B, an epitaph that a Koryo man wrote to praise his dead wife. Students should use the Points to Consider to compare the Confucian ideal with the epitaph.

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## Handout for Exercise 2

### Koryo: A Time of Transition

#### PART A:

The statements below were to express Confucian views toward women in Korea during the Koryo times:

1. *Sam-jong-jido* : “Women must serve three males: her father, husband and son.”
2. *Ch'il-go-ji-ak*: “Women must not do the seven evils (disobedience to parents-in-law, infertility, adultery, jealousy, bad illness, talkativeness and stealing).”
3. *Pu-hang-pyon*: “Codes for women’s behavior include:
  - A) should stay in their assigned status;
  - B) those under 20 must not go outside of their houses for social activities;
  - C) should make food and clothing for men;
  - D) should not become involved in political affairs;
  - E) should accept marriages arranged by parents.”

(Source: Chung Sei-wha. *Challenges for Women*. Seoul: Ewha University, 1984 )

#### PART B: TOMB INSCRIPTION OF YOM KYONGAE

Lady Yom, an upper class woman, died in 1146. Her husband, Ch’oe Nubaek, composed this epitaph to honor his wife.

Her name was Kyongae. When she was 25, she married me and gave birth to six children. The first boy is named Tanin, the second Tanwi and the third Tanye. All have aspired in scholarship. The fourth son, Tanji, became a monk. One daughter, named Kwigang, married Cho-oe-Kuk, recording officer of the Awe-Inspiring Division. When Cho-oe died, she returned home. The second daughter, Sungang, is still young.

As a person, my wife was pure and modest. She was very literate and well understood moral obligations. In speech, appearance, skill and conduct, she was superior to others. Before marriage she ably served her parents; after marriage she was extremely diligent in wifely ways. She was the first to perceive and carry out the wishes of elders and with filial piety she nourished my now dead mother.

Earlier, I was sent out as a magistrate to Cholla. Without hesitation, crossing mountains and streams, she accompanied me all the way. And when I was involved in military matters, she endured hardship in our poor home and often made and sent military uniforms. And when I was a palace attendant, she used every means possible to supply delicacies to present to the king. How she followed me through all these difficulties for twenty-three years I cannot entirely record.



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Although my father died before we were married, she still offered sacrifices to him during the hot days of summer and the cold memorial days of winter. She personally wove cloth, saving it little by little and then made by hand a jacket or pair of pants. Whenever it came to the day of sacrifice, she set upon the altar and presented these as offerings. And when attending Buddhist services for the deceased, regardless of the number of people, she prepared stockings and presented them to the monks. This is what I most certainly cannot forget.

One day she said to me, “You are a man of letters. Mundane matters should not be important to you. I consider providing clothes and food for the family to be my work. Even though I repeatedly put forth effort to do this, it does not always come up to my expectations. Later on, even if I unfortunately die first and you attain more income, enabling you to do everything you wish, please remember me for trying to ward off poverty, not for my lack of talents.” As she finished speaking, she released a vast sigh.

In the spring of 1145, I advanced to drafter of royal edicts. My wife, showing her happiness in her face, said, “It seems we have almost seen the end of our poverty.” I responded to her, “Being a policy critic is not a position to earn a rich stipend. “My wife said,” If suddenly one day you are standing in the palace court with the king arguing over an issue, even if I am forced to wear a thorny wood barrette and poor cotton skirts and carry heavy burdens in making our life, I will accept it willingly.” These were not the words of an ordinary woman.

My wife fell ill and died. What remorse I felt. I continued to be promoted many times and successively received higher stipends. In looking at my family’s present situation, however, it is not as good as in the days when my wife struggled to make ends meet. How could anyone say my wife did not have talent? When my wife was about to die, in leaving her last instructions to me and our children, all her words were reasonable and many were worth listening to.

*(Source: Peter H. Lee, editor. Sourcebook for Korean Civilization. New York: Columbia University, 1993: 321-22)*

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. In what ways did Lady Yom fulfill the Confucian ideal?
2. Did parts of her life go beyond Confucian expectations or represent values different from the Confucian ideal? Explain your answer.
3. In your opinion did Lady Yom’s actions seem voluntary or were they done just to conform? Give evidence to support your view.
4. In your own words, describe the relationship between the husband and wife (at least as presented by the husband). If the husband had died first, what might Lady Yom have written about her husband?

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## Exercise 3

### Choson: Imposing the Confucian Model

#### BACKGROUND

During the Choson Kingdom (1329-1910) Korean rulers imposed Confucian practices on society, gradually transforming it. In a long, ongoing process, education, government, family life, social relationships and religious rituals were made to conform to Confucian ideals.

Confucianism emphasized reverence for ancestors and obedience to (male) authority. As the Confucian model was imposed on Korea, the status of women changed. In Confucian tradition, only a male could perform the rituals needed to honor a family's ancestors and ensure prosperity and harmony. Because women were seen to be useless in this regard, boys were honored above girls.

Marriage customs and patterns of inheritance also changed under the Confucian model. In place of the old Korean custom of the bridegroom living for a time with his wife's family, Confucian practice required the bride to move into the home of her husband's family. There, she was defined by her role in his family as wife, daughter-in-law, mother, or widow. Under the Confucian inheritance system, property passed to male heirs. Thus Korean women lost the inheritance rights that they had enjoyed in earlier times. During the Choson Kingdom, therefore, the status of women in society and their economic independence declined.

During the later Choson era, Korea closed itself to foreigners, becoming the Hermit Kingdom. In the late 19th century, westerners forced their way into Korea and wrote about the Confucian model and its impact on women.

#### PROCEDURE

Have students read Part A, which includes official statements of the Choson era that helped to solidify Confucian values and Part B, which gives western views of Korean women in the late 19th century.

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## Handout for Exercise 3

### Choson: Imposing the Confucian Model

#### PART A: CHANGES MADE IN THE CHOSON ERA

Three examples are given below of legal changes made during the Choson era that affected women. As you read, consider the impact of each change.

1. During the Koryo era, polygamy, or the practice of having more than one wife, was accepted. While Confucian thought did not forbid this practice, it did stress the importance of the first wife. During the Choson era, the royal records of King Taejong's rule describe new regarding marriage:

The Office of the Inspector-General memorializes as follows: Husband and wife are the mainstay of human morality and differentiation between the main wife and the concubine may not be blurred. At the end of the former kingdom, morality was not pervasive and the relationship between husband and wife deteriorated. The members of the officialdom followed their own desires and inclinations: some who had a wife married a second wife, others made their concubine their main wife. This has consequently become the source of today's disputes between main wives and concubines.

We have carefully examined the Ming Code (from China), which reads: The one who makes a concubine his main wife while the latter [main wife] is alive is to be punished with ninety strokes of the heavy bamboo and the situation must be rectified. Someone who already has a main wife and still gets another one is also to be punished with ninety strokes and they must separate. We have already tried to differentiate between main wife and concubine by means of the marriage arrangement.

2. During the Koryo era, husbands usually moved into their wives' family homes for about one year in what is called uxorilocal marriage. Later Confucians saw this as a threat to the husband's role in the family. Confucian scholar Ch'oe Hang (1409-1474) argued successfully with King Sejong to change the custom. Here is part of his argument:

The man enters the woman's house and thereby confuses the meaning of husband and wife. Yang (thought to be the male principle) obeys yin (thought to be the female principle) and thereby opposes the principle of heaven and earth. Is there not a deficiency in the codes of this well-ruled time?

Your servant wishes that Your Majesty would not say that old local customs cannot be changed all of a sudden and that what makes human feelings at ease cannot be restored to the state of antiquity. The rites are the means by which the unregulated of the people is regulated; the government is the means by which the unordered of the people is ordered. If you enforce over a long period of time strict measures against the wrongs in the decadent women's quarters, people will themselves recognize the quality of the rite and will no longer dare conduct weddings in violation of the proper rites. Barred from office in order to encourage integrity and morality, the sons and grandsons of twice married women will no longer be listed as members of the upper class.

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3. During the Koryo era, a widow could remarry. But by the Choson era, Confucian ideals, particularly for the upper class, discouraged remarriage. This report from King Songjong's reign gives advice on proper behavior concerning widows.

If a woman of an honorable house loses her husband at a young age and swears to preserve her chastity until her death, this is very good indeed. Women remarry only because people of later generations are afraid of freezing and starving to death. But to lose one's integrity is a very serious matter. To starve to death, however, is a very small matter. If a man takes someone who has lost her integrity to be his own match, it means he himself has lost his integrity.

Thus, a marriage once concluded cannot be changed within a lifetime: this is a woman's principle. (Men could remarry). A woman who in disregard of the law remarries, should be punished by having lost her manners and her sons and grandsons should also be barred from office in order to encourage integrity and morality. The sons and grandsons of twice married women will no longer be listed as members of the upper class.

*(Source: Peter H. Lee. Sourcebook for Korean Civilization. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: 558-572)*

## POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. In your own words, describe the change discussed in each reading. Explain how each reflected Confucian ideals.
2. Explain how the changes during the Choson era might have affected Choson women compared to Koryo times.
3. Evaluate the overall impact of these changes on Korean women and on Korean society.

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## Handout for Exercise 3

### Choson: Imposing the Confucian Model

#### PART B: KOREAN WOMEN THROUGH WESTERN EYES

In the late 19th century, westerners visited Korea for the first time. They came with their own set of assumptions about the roles of women in society. As you read, look for how those assumptions color their views of Korean society and of Korean women.

##### 1. View of William Elliot Griffis

Their (Koreans) houses are small, but one story high. The nobility have always an apartment forward, where they receive their friends and lodge their acquaintances. The women's apartment is in the most retired part of the house, that nobody may see them.

Tradesmen and the chief townsmen generally have a storehouse adjoining to their mansion-house. There are virtuous women among them, who are allowed the liberty of the people and going into company... but they sit by themselves and opposite their husbands.

Kindred are not allowed to marry within the fourth degree (cousins). They make no love, because they are married at eight or ten years of age. Though a woman has borne her husband many children, it is in his power to take them away when he pleases and take another wife, but the woman has not the same privileges unless she can get it by law. To say in truth, they make no great account of the wives and use them little better than slaves, turning them away for the least faults.

(Source: William Griffis. *Corea, Without and Within*. Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1885: 137)

##### 2. View of Isabella Bird

I have mentioned the women of the lower classes, who wash clothes and draw water in the daytime. Many of these were domestic slaves and all are of the lowest class. Korean women are very rigidly secluded, perhaps more absolutely so than the women of any other nation. In the capital a very curious arrangement prevailed. About eight o'clock the great bell tolled a signal for men to retire into their houses and for women to come out and amuse themselves and visit their friends. The rule which clears the streets of men occasionally lapses and then some incident occurs which causes it to be rigorously reinforced. So it was at the time of my arrival and the pitch dark streets presented the singular spectacle of being tenanted solely by bodies of women with servants carrying lanterns. At twelve the bell again boomed, women retired and men were at liberty to go abroad. A lady of high position told me that she had never seen the streets of Seoul by daylight.

But I am far from saying that the women fret and groan under this system, or crave for the freedom which European women enjoy. Seclusion is the custom of centuries. Their idea of liberty is peril and I quite believe that they think that they are closely guarded because they are valuable chattels. One intelligent woman, when I pressed her hard to say what they thought of our customs in the matter, replied, "We think that your husbands don't care for you very much!"

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Domestic happiness is a thing she does not look for. The Korean has a house, but no home. The husband has his life apart; common ties of friendship and external interest are not known. His pleasure is taken in company with male acquaintances and guessing (dance women); and the marriage relationship is briefly summarized in the remark of a Korean gentleman in a conversation with me on the subject, "We marry our wives, but we love our concubines."

(Source: *Isabella Bird. Korea and Her Neighbors. London: KPI 1897: 47, 342*)

### 3. View of Homer Hulbert

The Korean woman's main business is wifedom and motherhood, but even so, there are many opportunities for her to help with the family finances and supplement the wages of a husband who is too often shiftless and dependent or even worse.

First as to occupations open to women of the upper class. Strange as it may seem, the only kind of shop such a woman may keep is a wine-shop. Of course, she never appears in person, but if her house is properly situated she can turn a portion into a wine-shop where customers can be served by her slave or other servant. No lady would ever think of selling cloth or vegetables or fruit or anything except wine. Silk culture is an important industry, in which ladies take prominent part, especially in the country. The care of the eggs, the feeding of the worms, the manipulation of the cocoons and the spinning of silk afford means whereby the wife of the gentleman farmer passes many pleasant hours and adds materially to the finances of the household.

Sewing and embroidery are usual occupations of ladies, but they do little of it for money. The vendible (selling) goods of this kind are made by a different class.

Many Korean ladies of restricted means act as tutors to the daughters of their more fortunate sisters. They teach the Chinese characters and literature, letter-writing, burial customs, music, housekeeping, hygiene, care of infants, obstetrics, religion, fiction, needlework and embroidery. Of course the teacher is not seen by the gentlemen of the house.

In the country it is not beneath the dignity of a lady to tend bees and help in the care of fruit trees. If an inmate of a house is taken ill, someone must run for an exorcist to come and drive out the evil spirit. Any blind woman, whatever her rank, can become an exorcist. Nor do indigent ladies hesitate to enter the ranks of fortune-tellers. But the higher form of labor to which a lady is eligible is that of physician; in fact, no woman can be a physician here unless she belongs to the upper class. Korea has many native lady physicians. A lady physician is called in most often for obstetric cases where a male physician would not be tolerated for a moment.

(Source: *Homer Hulbert. The Passing of Korea. New York: Doubleday, 1906: 354-55*)

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. Which of the three writers seems to understand Korea best? Explain your choice.
2. What assumptions does each of the visitors make about women? Give specific assumptions.
3. Write a paragraph evaluating how westerners saw Korean women.

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## Exercise 4

### **Korean Women Under Japanese Rule**

#### **BACKGROUND**

Japan moved into Korea in the late 19th century and by 1910 annexed Korea, making it part of Japan. It then tried to suppress the Korean culture. The Japanese military was strongly influenced both by Confucian values and *bushido*, a military creed based on male dominance. Korean women and men tried to resist Japanese oppression, but only in 1945, did the Japanese occupation of Korea end.

#### **PROCEDURE**

Divide students into groups or have the class examine each of the readings on the impact of Japanese rule on Korean women. After reviewing the documents, students should answer Points to Consider on page 126.

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## Handout for Exercise 4

### Korean Women Under Japanese Rule

#### I. QUEEN MIN'S ASSASSINATION

In the late 19th century, various nations — from China and Japan to Russia, the U.S. and the Western European countries competed for power in Korea. Within Korea, various leaders wanted different nations as allies. The wife of King Kojong, Queen Min thought Japan posed the greatest threat to Korea. The king's father, however, was a major supporter of Japan. The Japanese military took matters into its own hands in 1895 and assassinated Queen Min. Queen Min's son, the Crown Prince, later described the assassination:

The whole affair did not occupy much more than an hour. The Crown Prince saw his mother rush down a passage followed by a Japanese man with a sword; there was a rush of assassins toward her sleeping apartment. In the upper story the Crown Princess was found with several ladies and she was dragged by the hair, cut with a sword, beaten and thrown downstairs. Yi, Kyong-jik, Minister of the Royal Household, seems to have given the alarm, for the Queen was dressed and preparing to run and hide herself. When the murderers rushed in, he stood with outstretched arms in front of Her Majesty, trying to protect her, furnishing them with the clue they wanted, (thereby identifying the queen). They slashed off both his hands and inflicted other wounds, but he was able to drag himself along the verandah to the King's presence, where he died.

The Queen, fleeing from the assassins, was overtaken and stabbed, falling down as if dead, but one account says that, recovering a little, she asked if the Crown Prince was safe, on which a Japanese man jumped on her breast and stabbed her through with his sword.

*(Source: Isabella Bird. Korea and Her Neighbors. London: KPI 1897: 273-74)*

#### 2. MARQUIS ITO AND THE AMERICAN VISITOR

Although the Japanese tried to cover up the killing of Queen Min by saying she had taken money and run away, the international community pushed pressure to have those responsible put on trial. The trial, however, did not result in any real punishment. One of the Japanese who had opposed the military and who generally had a good reputation in the west was Marquis Hirobumi Ito. He took over as resident general in Korea and tried to create an image of Japan helping Korea. One way he did this was to invite Americans as his guest to “see for themselves the conditions in Korea.” George Ladd was one of those invited to events arranged by Ito. He observed the situation of Korean and Japanese women in Korea:

The social functions that are now encouraged by the Resident-General (Ito) are valuable by way of bringing the upper classes into apparently – and as, I believe, will prove, genuinely – friendly relations with the Japanese. The hardest crust to break will doubtless be the Korean lady. In Japan there has never been anything quite comparable to the present degrading influences bearing upon the womanhood of the upper classes in Korea. But while we were in Seoul, for the first time so far as known in its history, a Korean lady walked upon the streets and after making several calls in this fashion, rode home in the electric car! Her companion was a Japanese lady and the two were selling tickets to a public entertainment given on behalf of a benevolent enterprise. Being present ourselves at this same entertainment, we saw to our surprise quite one hundred



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Korean women, dressed in their native costume, enter the theater and seat themselves among the Japanese of their own sex. If this thing goes on, racial hatred is doomed. For soon Korean ladies will attend garden parties and frequent afternoon teas and evening receptions, at which foreigners of both sexes are present.

(Source: George Trumbull Ladd. *In Korea with Marquis Ito*. New York: Scribners, 1908: 86-87)

## 3. LOUISE YIM'S IMPRISONMENT

Ladd's predictions about garden parties did not come true. Instead, as the Japanese took over Korea's lands and resources, Korean nationalism grew. In March 1919, Koreans demonstrated in support of self-determination. Many Korean women, including Louise Yim, participated in the demonstrations and were arrested. Yim, who later fled Japanese-ruled Korea, told of prison life with starvation diet, forced kneeling on cold floors for long hours, and beatings. In this excerpt, however, Yim described the terrible ordeal of her arrest.

The great line surged forward [of demonstrators]. Suddenly shots sounded. I could see the flashing sabers of the Japanese police. Everything became mixed up. Part of the crowd was surging forward, part was falling back. Somebody pushed a heavy flag into my hand. I ran ahead. Blows fell on my body. I could not turn around to see what had hit me. We were in the middle of one of the streets surrounded by Japanese police. One by one my friends were dragged away. I could hear them being beaten and slapped. I could not rise from the ground, until one of the police grabbed my arm and pulled me to my feet. "Get up before we kill you." A Japanese grabbed my long hair and dragged me through the streets to a police station. There were now thirteen girls in jail. Three, who were under the age of twelve were released. The others were all my friends. As we entered the largest cell room, the prison officer called out, "Take off your clothes!" When none of us moved, husky Japanese soldiers moved forward. We held our clothes as tightly as possible, using what little strength was left after the ordeals of the day. To be naked in front of these men was the greatest shame that could have befallen us. If we had had any weapons we would have killed ourselves. Korean girls after the age of seven do not even talk to little boys. The humiliation was so great that I have never been able to forget that wretched night.

We could hear loud noises from outside, where thousands of Koreans were protesting our imprisonment. They were crying and yelling and stoning the Japanese. If it had not been for this, the Japanese might have killed us instantly.

We were forced to march between two rows of Japanese. We tried to cover the private parts of our bodies with our arms, but this only made the Japanese laugh. They pulled our arms in different directions and then others took whips and lashed our backs. Some of the girls fell to the ground. Then, when they tired of the "sport," the jail guards dragged our bare bodies across a hall into another cell, a dark one. There was the heavy click of a metal door. There was a vile stench in the air. I could hardly breathe. I felt myself sinking into a coma. My naked back was bleeding. There was nothing left for me to do but to die.

(Source: Louise Yim. *My Forty Year Fight for Korea*. New York: A.A. Wyn, 1951: 114-116)

Yim did not die, but survived her trial. She fled to the U.S. and later returned to Korea after Japan's defeat in World War II and served in the Korean government.

# LESSON 8

## 4. KOREAN COMFORT WOMEN

During World War II, the Japanese army forced women to become prostitutes for their soldiers. The Japanese called them “comfort women.” Women from Malaysia, the Philippines, Australia and European women prisoners of war were taken. By far the largest group — about 80% of all comfort women were 200,000 Korean women. The women suffered rape, disease and other hardships. Korean women have taken the lead in seeking justice for those women who managed to survive. In 1990, the Alliance of South Korean Women’s Organization presented a list of demands to the Japanese government. Japan has yet to accept full responsibility or fully apologize for the horrors suffered by Korean women. Although World War II ended more than 50 years ago, the issue of a Japanese apology still shapes Korean-Japanese relations.

We [The Alliance of South Korean Women’s Organization] make the following demands of the Japanese government:

1. That the Japanese government admit the forced draft of Korean women as comfort women;
2. That a public apology be made for this;
3. That all barbarities be fully disclosed;
4. That a memorial be raised for the victims;
5. That the survivors or their bereaved families be compensated;
6. That these facts be continuously related in historical education so that such misdeeds are not repeated.

By these means can Japan be absolved of its guilt and become a democratic state endowed with true morality. We women of South Korea intend to watch closely the practical steps taken by the Japanese government.

(Source: George Hicks. *The Comfort Women: Japan’s Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1994: s185)

## POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. Why do you think the assassination of Queen Min came to symbolize a major change in Japanese policy toward Korea? Why do you think Koreans remember this event with such horror?
2. How did George Ladd view Japanese influence on Korean society in the early 1900’s? In light of later events, do you think he was overly optimistic? Why or why not?
3. When Korean women joined the nationalist movement, were they violating Confucian ethics or following it? Explain. (Consider Confucian values such as obedience to authority and loyalty to the family.)
4. Why do you think the issue of a Japanese apology for the brutal treatment of Korean comfort women during World War II has strained relations between Korea and Japan?

# **LESSON 8**

## **Exercise 5**

### **Making Choices: Korean Women in the 1990's**

#### **BACKGROUND**

In 1995, the UN Women's Conference met in Beijing, China. Participating countries offered reports about the status of women in their nations. South Korea reported that women were making progress and that more women were getting a voice in the changes that were affecting their lives.

#### **PROCEDURE**

Handout the speech by Sohn Myoung Soon, wife of the President of the ROK and the charts of current statistics on women in Korea. Point out to students that an asterisk \* in the speech should correspond to statistical information in the tables. Have students find the correlations. Finally ask them to answer the Points to Consider questions. You may also wish students to read "A Woman's Rights Leader Reflects on Korean Progress" included in the Special Readings in Lesson 9.

# LESSON 8

## Handout for Exercise 5

### **Making Choices: Korean Women in the 1990's**

#### **Part A: KOREAN WOMEN AT THE 1995 UN WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

At the 1995 UN Women's conference, Sohn Myoung Soon, the wife of South Korea's President spoke about the status and progress of Korean women. Here are some excerpts from her speech.

In Korea, women's suffrage, labor rights and the right to education became guaranteed with the promulgation of the Constitution and the founding of the Korean Government in 1948. I am proud of the fact that the Republic of Korea has not only achieved remarkable economic growth and democratization, but also made substantial progress in the field of women.

Especially, in the belief that the expansion of education opportunities for women is a fundamental, long-term method to guarantee women their substantive equal rights, the Korean Government vigorously pushed a five-year governmental campaign in 1950 to eradicate illiteracy. As a result the Republic of Korea now boasts one of the highest literacy rates in the world and a relatively high educational level among its female population.\*

The Office of the Second Minister of State for Political Affairs was created to be exclusively responsible for policies concerning women. In addition, the Family Act was revised and a Gender Equality in Employment Act and an Infant and Child Care Act were newly enacted. More recently, a new law prohibiting the sexual harassment of women has been enacted to help eliminate violence against women.

Since all these legislative and institutional measures for gender equality are only the first step toward realizing genuine equality, the Korean government is also making increased efforts to remove gender discriminatory elements from school education and mass media. (See "Women's Right Leader..." in the Special Readings in Lesson 9.)\*

As we face the advent of the 21st century, women should join hands and launch a movement to preserve the sound family system, build a healthy society and protect the natural environment. By doing so, let us build a genuine community where we, based on a future-oriented philosophy and an ideal world view embracing neighborly love and genuine peace, can all enjoy our lives.

The women of Asia, including Korea, whose age-old histories have taught them the wisdom of harmony between humanity and nature, will work hand in hand with women of all other regions of the world to build a happy global village.

# LESSON 8

## POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. How would you describe the condition of women in Korea based on Sohn Myong Soon's speech?
2. In what progress has South Korea made in the area of women's rights? Cite specific examples from the tables.
3. Based on the statistics, how were the experiences of women and men in the Korean economy similar from 1963 to 1977? How were they different?
4. Write a generalization about women's education in the ROK that can be supported by statistics.
5. How might international conferences like the 1995 UN Conference on Women affect the cause of women's right?

## Part B: Statistics on Women in Korea

# LESSON 8

## Part B: Statistics on Women in Korea

### Status of Women Students and Teachers in Schools

		1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
High School	Schools	1,152	1,353	1,602	1,683	1,830
	% of female students	38.2	42.6	46.1	47.0	48.1
	% of female teachers	12.7	17.1	20.4	22.9	23.9
Junior High School	Schools	88	128	120	117	145
	% of female students	25.4	26.4	36.0	36.9	37.6
	% of female teachers	17.9	16.7	23.6	26.4	30.4
College and University	Schools	88	96	111	118	142
	% of female students	27.8	23.8	27.7	29.0	32.6
	% of female teachers	13.9	15.1	16.1	17.5	21.3
Graduate schools	Schools	66	121	201	298	421
	% of female students	17.1	18.1	19.1	23.7	29.3
	% of female teachers	6.1	9.2	13.5	16.7	22.0

### Distribution of Employment by Gender and Industry

Year	Female				Male			
	Total (000's)	Agriculture Forestry & Fishing	Mining & Manufacturing	Services	Total (000's)	Agriculture Forestry & Fishing	Mining & Manufacturing	Services
1963	2674	68.7%	7.0%	24.3%	4998	60.1%	9.7%	30.2%
1970	3578	57.2%	12.2%	30.6%	6167	46.5%	15.6%	37.9%
1980	5222	39%	22.3%	38.7%	8462	31%	22.7%	46.3%
1984	5535	30.2%	22.9%	46.9%	8894	25.2%	25%	49.8%
1986	6165	26.3%	25.1%	48.6%	9339	21.9%	26.4%	51.7%
1987	6613	24.3%	28.2%	47.5%	9741	20.3%	28.1%	51.6%
1988	6771	22.9%	29.2%	47.9%	10099	19.1%	28%	52.9%
1991	7535	18.6%	27.6%	53.8%	11076	15%	26.9%	58.1%
1994	8005	15.9%	22.1%	62%	11832	12%	25%	63%
1997	8639	13%	18.5%	68.5%	12409	9.7%	23.4%	66.9%

(Source: National Statistical Office. Report on the Employment Structure Survey, 1998)