



DANGEROUS WOMEN

Gender and Korean Nationalism

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Ideals of Liberation:
Korean Women in Manchuria

Although Korean migration to Manchuria dates back to the seventeenth century, it became substantial in the 1880s, following a series of natural disasters and crop failures in Korea. As many peasants and small landowners lost their tenancy or land during the Japanese colonial rule, the Korean population in Manchuria swelled from roughly 202,070 in 1910 to 1.5 million in 1945. In the 1930s, Korean women participated in the riots and the ensuing revolutionary and nationalist movements. The riots of 1931 and 1932 were typical grain riots, similar to the food riots and tax rebellions in Europe and Japan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ Korean peasant women cooperated with both Korean and Chinese Communists throughout the 1930s to achieve the conjoined goals of changing eco-

conomic conditions and liberating both Korea and China from the Japanese rule.²

These revolutionary and nationalist movements in Manchuria fell far short of a feminist vision of social change: the Chinese Communist Party's (henceforth CCP) attempts to expand women's independence from the family and to change the family structure were short-lived. As Johnson and Stacey observed in other parts of China, such policies were replaced in 1934 by pro-family policies that discouraged divorce and stressed family harmony.³ As a result, the movements in Manchuria seemed to serve men rather than women, despite equal participation and commitment on the part of women. Economic and national exigencies of revolutionary change seemed to proliferate women's oppression.

A different conceptualization of women and their identities may, however, suggest an alternative meaning for the participation of women in the revolutionary and nationalist movements. As deconstructionist gender studies argues, women are not a homogeneous group, lacking any unity due to different social positions; nor is women's identity unidimensional, given their diverse social positions and ensuing influx of experience.⁴ In light of these theoretical insights, it is not feasible to assume unified and general interests of women in revolutionary and nationalist movements. A single form of liberation may not be shared by all women in different national and class positions and in different historical contexts. Awareness of differences among women raises some questions regarding what groups of women might have felt deluded by, or agreed with, the Communist policies to preserve the family structure and existing gender relations. Questions of whether women's identities changed during the process of movements also need to be addressed.

Pursuing these issues, I will analyze variations in women's social positions, interests, and political activities in Manchuria. In the early stage of the movements, variations are most evident when Korean Communist women are compared with Korean married peasant women. The political activities of the two groups of women merged as they acquiesced to family policies of the Chinese Communist Party. Tracing the process of their activities will inform about us when and how the politics of these two groups of Korean women differentiated and coalesced.

Communist Women's Vision

Becoming Communist

The women in Manchuria who joined the Chinese Communist Party tended to be unmarried Korean peasants. This national, class, and gender background is indicated by three documents on Korean women's participation in the Chinese Revolution: Volumes I and III of *Changbaek ū t'usadil* (*Heroes of Changbaek Mountain*) and *Hangil yō t'usadil* (*Heroines in the Anti-Japanese Struggle*).⁵ According to these sources, Korean Communist women, like their male counterparts, came from poor peasant families that barely survived cultivating rented land or smallholdings. Sixteen of twenty-five female guerrillas shared poor peasant family backgrounds. Most women joined the Party between the ages of 18 and 23. At the time they encountered Communism, they tended to be unmarried or about to be forced into an arranged marriage. Their age and marital status contrasted with those of other Korean peasant women a great deal, as I will discuss later.

Arranged marriage or forced early marriage triggered these women's support of Communist activities, as many anecdotes suggest. Hong Hye-sun⁶ was the daughter of a doctor and among the most highly educated Korean women. In 1925, at age of eighteen, she chose to become engaged to a committed revolutionary named So Sōng-gyu over her parents' objections. Her engagement put her village into shock. Hō Sōng-suk,⁷ another well-known revolutionary woman, left her family upon hearing the news that her wedding had been arranged by her parents. She attempted suicide by jumping into a river. She was saved by a guerrilla and started living with the guerrilla army, using a new name, "daughter of guerrilla army." Yi Chōng-in,⁸ a *minmyōnūri*, child bride, escaped from her husband's family after an unbearable two years. While staying at her uncle's home, she joined the 1931 uprisings and participated in guerrilla activities. She remembered her experience of being sold at age fourteen as a *minmyōnūri*, and contrasted that with her life in the guerrilla army, where she was treated like a human being with dignity and freedom.

The Korean Communist women's experiences corresponded to those of the Chinese Communist women. The Manchuria Committee

of the Chinese Communist Party (henceforth the Manchuria Committee) implemented what the CCP had enacted across the rest of China. In Communist language, arranged marriage, early marriage, daughter-in-law adoption, concubinage, and footbinding constituted diseases of the old society, and these diseases were a defilement of women's rights and blasphemies against humanity. The CCP declared absolute freedom in marriage and divorce as the central means of instating women's equality. The Manchuria Committee applied the same gender policies to both Chinese and Korean peasants in Manchuria. Conceiving of Chinese and Korean women as belonging to the same category of women, the CCP made no reference to ethnic or nationality differences. The Manchuria Committee's inability or unwillingness to evaluate ethnic or national differences in gender relations stemmed from the CCP's desire to enforce uniform policies all across China to maintain unity across the country as well as among Korean and Chinese Communists within Manchuria. To prevent nationalist divisions and conflicts within the Manchuria Committee, the CCP and the Manchuria Committee suppressed expressions of national identity among Korean Communists, who comprised the majority of the Chinese Communist Party in Manchuria.

Although the CCP lacked an understanding of Korean culture, its gender policies challenged the oppression of Korean peasant women too, because family systems were similar in Chinese and Korean communities. Except for the practice of footbinding, which was unique to the Chinese, other practices that the Manchuria Committee identified as oppressive feudal traditions were shared. In both national communities, marriage was arranged by the kin or the fathers of the two families, without consent from either the bride or the groom. Divorce was hardly ever allowed to women for any reason, although a woman's inability to give birth to a son or her inadequate care of her husband's family were enough reason for a man to divorce his wife.

Minmyōnūri, the practice of child-bride marriage among Korean peasants, and daughter-in-law adoption practices among Chinese peasants were similar in origin and form. In both cultures, the marriages of young girls from poor families were in fact transactions exchanging their labor for material benefits to the families involved. These practices orig-

inated in patrilineal family systems in rural villages where unmarried daughters became a burden because they were less likely to bring income to the family than were unmarried sons. Meanwhile, the groom's parents could ensure that their son would have a bride as well as low marriage costs. For example, *minmyōnūri* was prevalent among the Koreans during the poor economic conditions in the 1930s. When Korean families with some economic and financial means lacked labor power either for agricultural production or for housework, they paid cash for the daughters of poor families who were anxious to reduce their family size because of the lack of income. A girl was sent to the expected husband's family at the age of seven or eight and married after several years of working in that family. The Chinese practice of daughter-in-law adoption was similar. Kazukuo⁹ explains it as the most oppressive feudal practice widespread across China, including northeast China. At a low cost, a bride could be provided for a son by adopting a future daughter-in-law while she was a child. In Shanxi province, prices were set according to the girl's age: the older she was, the higher the market price. Adoption of a daughter-in-law served two purposes at once: the girl's parents were not only spared the expense of her board, but also received a small sum from her sale. The daughters-in-law so purchased were frequently older than the boys for whom they were intended. This was done so that the family could get at least some useful labor from the girl early on.

Whether the Manchuria Committee intended it or not, its declarations for free love and marriage and against trafficking in women seemed to challenge both the Chinese and Korean patriarchal systems. Protection of women's rights defied two long-standing pillars of the Confucian morality: "Man is respected and woman lowly (*namjon yōbi*)"; plus "three subordinations of women (*samjongjido*)"; and "three fundamental principles and five moral disciplines in human relationship (*samgang oryun*)."¹⁰ The CCP's critique of patriarchal authority over women's marriage was designed to dismantle the authority codes of the old society. Since marriage was decided according to the authority of the father and kinship, challenges to feudal arranged marriages and the advocacy of free love and free divorce seemed to pose a significant threat to the existing peasant society.

Overturning Gender Policies

The radical gender policies of the Communists were short-lived. Although the rhetoric of “women’s liberation” and “the guarantee of equality regardless of sex” continued to appear in the platforms of the People’s Governments, what was evident in the specific guidelines of the Manchuria Committee and the women cadres was the abandonment of “free marriage and divorce” and an emphasis instead on family harmony. The reversal was as abrupt in Manchuria as it was in other regions of China.

As the initial gender policy of the Manchuria Committee followed the central policies of the CCP, the retreat of the Manchuria Committee once again corresponded to the course and logic followed by the CCP beginning in 1934. The radical measures of freedom of marriage and divorce invoked antagonism, mistrust, and resentment among male peasants and the elderly in Manchuria. The peasants seemed to believe that the Communists had denounced family relations, instigating young people to defy the family. They also were suspicious that the Communists were luring young women to abandon their virtue and join a group of indecent people who advocated sexual freedom. In response, the CCP determined that marriage reform threatened the class unity that was essential to its vision of rural revolution, since the family was a crucial unit of economic production and socialization and women played the key role in reproducing family relations. To build strong ties with the peasants, the Chinese Communists withdrew those policies that threatened to deprive male peasants of their two most valuable possessions—land and women. The drive to enforce freedom and equality in marriage and divorce was replaced by the pro-family principle, which was further reinforced by the united front with the reformist Guomindang Party during the Chinese-Japanese War (1937–1945).

Japan’s symbolic war also contributed to this setback in Communist gender policies. The Japanese incited the peasants by spreading rumors that Communists were bandits who burned houses, plundered food and property, and kidnapped women. To prevent misunderstandings, the CCP took extra precautions not to allow young people to join without their family’s approval.¹⁰ As the behavior of women cadres became a

Japanese pretext for fanning the flames of suspicion among the peasants, the Manchuria Committee called on women cadres to pay respect to patriarchal values so as not to confirm the image of Communist men and women as morally corrupted seekers of unrestrained sexual pleasure.

The Manchuria Committee made every attempt to retain the trust and support of the peasants in the villages. It embraced “tradition,” defining chastity and subordination as women’s primary virtues. Female “beauty” now meant women’s traditional, nurturing roles, which offered absolute respect for elders and unquestioned commitment and sacrifice for the well-being of the husband’s family. The principle of “true love and true marriage” replaced slogans of “free love, free marriage, and free divorce.” “True love” was defined as serving the collective interest of achieving revolution and/or the liberation of the nation, while free love was criticized as a selfish pursuit of individual freedom. “True love” was possible only in relations within the boundary of revolutionary struggle—whether the love was between husband and wife or between comrades—and only when people’s minds were committed to the highest love, love for the nation, which entailed even a willingness to sacrifice one’s life for it. Ch’un-hyang and Sim Ch’öng, two of the best-known heroines of Korean folklore, were elevated as models and virtuous beautiful women. The story of Ch’un-hyang was the best representation of the virtue of chastity, while the story of Sim Ch’öng extolled the virtue of filial piety.¹¹ Even the short haircuts of women, which had symbolized defiance of tradition and the beginning of modernity in China since the May Fourth Movement in 1919, were now under attack.

According to a number of records, Korean women cadres tried hard to become accustomed to, instead of restraint, the peasant woman’s life.¹² Korean Communist women helped peasant women in doing such work as washing clothes at the river, pounding grain, and collecting vegetables and edible grass in the mountains. Ann Sun-hwa,¹³ a well-known Korean woman cadre, visited every peasant household to explain revolutionary work while she helped them with weaving and other housework. Fearing criticism that she neglected housework herself and thus undervalued the woman’s role as wife and mother, she carried out her own housework more diligently.

Pak Nok-küm¹⁴ visited wells and rivers where village women often

gathered to fetch water and wash clothes. To please the elders in the village, she made efforts to learn village customs, such as the way women carried pots on their heads when they fetched water from the well, and the way that they walked. Only after these precautions and services brought her trust from the village people did she begin to organize "toenori," a village custom where people sat together and made food. While women peeled potatoes and cooked, they listened to what she told them about the revolution. She was praised for her wisdom in convincing elders who had previously objected to their daughters-in-law's involvement in study groups and in Women's Committees (*Punyŏhoe*). Pak organized meetings at houses where the parents were reluctant to accept Communist teaching. While making thread and weaving together with them, she explained to the young women that they had to respect their parents-in-law, serve their husbands, and take good care of children. These strategies often turned out to be successful in earning the trust and permission of the elderly, as intended.

Peasant Women's New Imagined Society

Migration and Women's Work

Married Korean peasant women differed from Communist women in terms of their understanding of the movement, their age, and their family experience. The married Korean peasant women were drawn by class and national issues rather than gender issues. Their concern for the survival of their families led them to their commitment to the movements.

The Korean migration to Manchuria reinforced changes in work patterns, which involved women in agricultural work. This migration created an environment unfavorable to the revival of collective work practices, such as "ture," which had been in decline since the late nineteenth century in Korea. As *Contemporary Manchuria*, a Japanese journal, reported in 1940, the tradition of "ture" was regenerated to the extent that it was organized to carry out occasional collective work that individual families could not accomplish alone, such as drawing water from a river, changing the course of a stream, or digging holes for irrigation

systems. The Korean community also revived practices of mutual help in such events as funerals and weddings.

While farming could be done with hired labor, those who could afford it were few. Most Korean peasant households instead spread the burden among household members. When the individual family became the unit for tilling land, gender relations framed the farming experience. Before the migration to Manchuria, Korean farming was done mostly by men, who exchanged labor and planned with neighbors the detailed timing and cooperation necessary for cultivation, while most women managed the housework and took care of the elderly and the children. After migration, reliance on family labor brought more women into growing crops such as beans and rice, an involvement that must have been extended as their husbands and other male adults left for wage jobs in railway construction and mining.

Yet not all Korean peasant women were brought into farming. The boundary between women's work and men's work was crossed to the extent that married women were incorporated into the field labor force. The relative absence of unmarried women's or girls' work in agricultural production was shaped by both gender- and class-specific dynamics. Demand for female chastity and sex segregation after age seven constrained unmarried women from engaging in contact with men other than family members and led peasants to consider an unmarried daughter the last person to work in the fields. Furthermore, limiting the potential contributions of unmarried women to agricultural production was also a class-specific phenomenon. Families with small holdings required only a limited number of people to work in agricultural production and were consequently less likely to employ unmarried women in the fields.

Multifaceted Meanings of Motherhood

How peasant women interpreted the experience of intense work depended on how they viewed marriage, the family, and giving birth. Under the patrilineal system, the natal family was only a temporary place for women. Marriage was the ultimate fate for women of all classes. The

family that a woman made after marriage was not considered her own, but her husband's family. Frequent visits back to her parents' home after the wedding were regarded as a signal of her lack of commitment and loyalty to her husband's family, a development that would embarrass both families. The husband's family was a strange place for a newly wed woman and one from which she could not escape. Marriage was not the place to find affection. Women's plight in the peasant family was heightened by the physical burden of work and discipline. Folk songs and labor songs, which Korean peasant women sang while at work, best illustrate this. "*Milmae norae*," a song about wheat, crystallized a woman's life in her new husband's family and the hardships that she had to endure:

Sister, sister, my sister. How is married life in the home of your husband's parents? Although peppers are said to be very hot, they cannot be compared to the hard life of married women. In three years of hard work in my husband's family, my silky hairs were turned into a chestnut bur. My white hands, which used to be soft as a silky hair brush, wore out and turned into the foot of a duck. My sisters-in-law are like little mice. What is this all about?¹⁵

Giving birth to a child and becoming a mother transformed the meaning of work and life in the husband's family. Whether a Korean woman married the son of a peasant or a landlord, giving birth to a son secured her position in her husband's family. She was then no longer a stranger to the family, but a mother of sons who would pass on the family name, if not its wealth, to the next generation. Her newly acquired identity as a mother and therefore a key member of the family brought new meaning to her exhausting work both in the fields and in the landlord's house. If before having children Korean peasant women endured overwork and exhaustion out of helplessness, as mothers they now did so for the sake of assuring the survival of their children and other family members.

Motherhood also shaped a Korean peasant woman's class experience when they leased land from the landlord. For these women, motherhood was not confined to delivering children; nor did it necessarily mean always giving immediate attention to the needs of babies and children.

Motherhood for the peasant woman, especially a woman from a poor tenant family in Manchuria, often meant denying the body's basic need to recover from delivery. Pak Kyöng-suk recalls that her landlord harassed her mother to work in the fields immediately after she had given birth, and her mother was ill afterwards.¹⁶ Landlords wanted to maximize the use of peasants' labor power in order to increase the harvest, since the rental rate was set as a percentage of the harvest.

Motherhood also meant enduring the pain of separation when a family had to be broken up because of poverty. When high rents and increasing tax burdens threatened the subsistence of the peasant family and their hard work was not enough to support them, a common strategy of individual families was to reduce their family size by sending children to live with other families as servants. Men in the family left for work as agricultural laborers or as miners and construction workers in urban areas or in Japan or Russia. Young boys and girls also worked as servants for their landlord's family. Sometimes they were paid in cash or in kind for their work; sometimes they worked to pay off family debts to buy food. Boys helped with agricultural production, tended livestock, and did jobs such as collecting wood and cleaning house. Young girls were sent to the landlord's family or some other relatively wealthy family to do childcare, carry water, cook, wash dishes, pound grain, and clean house.¹⁷

Motherhood and Women's Politics

The experience of mothering itself influenced the collective political action of Korean peasants. As Bohstedt demonstrated in his study of English riots, motherhood is not always the origin of women's political empowerment.¹⁸ Instead, several political, economic, and gender factors coalesced to bring married Korean peasant women in Manchuria to revolt. With worldwide economic depression, inflation, high interest rates, and rising rent and taxation, the peasant family economy deteriorated. As much as married peasant women shared agricultural work with men and became key household members taking responsibility for the survival of the family, they considered this family economic crisis as

their own and joined the riots and the revolution. Similarly, as much as they continued to be subject to Japanese harassment, surveillance, and arrests even after they moved to Manchuria, their struggle was directed against the Japanese.

The married peasant women's involvement was promoted by the moral standing which positioned them as mothers and wives. They were to be brought into the social struggle by family members, especially sons and husbands. When the men insisted, the women reluctantly came to support their activities on the grounds that it was better to try to protect the lives of their sons and husbands by helping rather than criticizing and interfering with their activities. The women kept watch to see whether strangers were coming near their houses when their sons held secret meetings there. They sent their young children to the village entrance to watch for the approach of policemen. They hid secret documents inside the kitchen fireplace or in the walls. They offered secret agents a place to hide, such as in the root cellar under the house, or in a mountain tunnel. They cooked for and nursed the guests of their sons and husbands, and even washed and sometimes made the clothes for the visitors. These women were also asked to help with work outside of the family. They distributed propaganda flyers in markets and streets and posted them on village walls, or ran errands to the Communist agents or to Communist organizations in other villages.

The experience of Kim Myōng-hwa¹⁹ exemplified this process. Before she joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1932, her first experience was to cook for the "revolutionary people" who visited her husband and brother-in-law. Being persuaded by her husband, she began to help her son, Ma Tong-hwi, a well-known Communist. Disguising herself as a chili merchant, she delivered her son's messages to other guerrillas and underground activists across the Amnok River, going back and forth from Hamgyōng province of Korea to northeast China. She sometimes brought books published by the guerrilla army, such as *Hwajōnmin* and *Sam'ilwōlgan*, to the village. Whenever secret agents came to her house late at night, Tong-hwi's wife cooked with care so as not to make smoke in the chimney, which would make neighbors suspicious. Hyōn Kūm-son, the wife of well-known Korean Communist, Pak Tal, recalled that "the more my husband participated in the revolu-

tionary activities, the more documents I had to hide, from small black memo books, to packages, to a big box full of secret notes and documents. I had to hide them in holes covered with snow, bunches of grain, and bushes."²⁰

Arrest of family members by the Japanese and Chinese armies spurred the Korean peasant mothers toward more active participation. These women adopted the revolutionary commitment of their husbands and sons as their own. "I observed and watched how cruel the Japanese are," Kim In-suk said.²¹ She explained that her will for revenge motivated her activities:

My son, Tong-gi, and his friends were arrested as suspects in the harvest uprisings. Right after being released by the police due to lack of evidence, Tong-gi and his seven friends went to the mountains to join the guerrilla armies. I heard later that they engaged in attacks of the pro-Japanese, pro-landlord Self-Defense Group (*Chawidan*) in 1932. My second son and 12 other village people, including my daughter-in-law, were convicted. My second son was tortured and killed during the investigation. Since then, I always carried a hand-made bomb and a knife hidden in my clothes. I was determined to avenge the death of my son. That was 29 years ago [in 1932] and I was 45 years old. I received military training, carrying my baby on my back. I worked in the Storm Corps and the Red Defense Corps. In October 1933, I became the leader of the Women's Committee in Namgol, Pon'gaedong.

Kim Myōng-hwa was determined to fight the Japanese, saying that "although my husband could be killed before the day of liberation comes, I have to fight. If he dies before the revolution succeeds, I have to see it through on his behalf. Even if I cannot see the liberation, I have to fight so that my children can see it."²² Chang Kil-bu recorded how a letter her son sent from prison rescued her from despair after the deaths of her daughter and daughter-in-law:

After sending my daughter-in-law and daughter to the guerrilla army, I returned to Korea with my mother-in-law. Several years later, I heard that Kuk-hwa, my daughter, died in the battle at P'aldogu. Kim Yong-gūm, my daughter-in-law, lost her life in a fire set by the Japanese while she was making army clothes as a member of the sewing batch at Chiyanggaegol. I was subjected to continuous torture by the Japanese

police whenever there was labor strike or tenant dispute among the peasants. Because of my pain and suffering over the death of my daughter and from my torture, I attempted to commit suicide.

However, I changed my attitude after receiving the letter my son sent me just before his death in prison: "Kind and strong mother, please follow the flag of Kim Il Sung's army, even by surviving as a beggar. Supporting and following the army is the only way to liberate Korea and establish a new society for workers and peasants. I, your son, dedicate my life to this. Our enemy can end my life but cannot take my commitment from me. Mother, please live and enjoy a new society that I cannot see." My son's last letter provided me with great strength. I became fearless whenever I thought of my son's courageous death.²³

The sons' and husbands' activities rekindled married women's political consciousness and sustained them through hardship. Misfortunes spurred mothers and wives with anger, desire for revenge, courage, and the will to survive and struggle. In contrast, there are few records that daughters inspired them to do similar works. The asymmetrical relations of mother-son and mother-daughter can be attributed to the character of the "uterine family," which Wolf characterizes as mothers who exercise their power through a grown-up son, a head of the household.²⁴

Solidarity among Women

The married Korean peasant women's supportive activities stirred their consciousness and carried them to the point of trying to find their own ways of contributing to the struggle. The helping activities women engaged in for their sons and husbands, or their assumption of their sons' and husbands' roles, created the context in which married Korean peasant women widened the boundaries of their social relationships with other women. Accumulated experience and contact with other women in the struggle led them to broaden their perspective beyond individual household boundaries, as they understood that the personal goal of reintegrating their families was common to all of them. The construction of a new society in which families could be united would be achieved only by carrying out the struggle and winning the war against the Japanese and the landlords. The married peasant women

who participated in the struggle at this stage were no longer simply accomplices under the domination of their husbands and sons. Although their identity as mothers was the basis of their solidarity around the Women's Committee, their own families were not the sole source of their identities and strength. Their sense of responsibility had moved beyond their own family relationships.

The deepened sentiment of solidarity was expressed in the formation and activities of the Women's Committee. The Women's Committee carried out various assignments, such as producing crops; supplying guerrilla armies with food, clothing, and other necessities; and conducting reconnoitering missions. Since many male householders had joined the guerrilla armies at their bases or were involved in other secret activities, the women were responsible for planting, harvesting, and threshing crops. The Committee also opened a night school for peasant women. Along with the principles of the revolutionary and national liberation of Korea, reading and writing were also taught. Another important achievement of the Women's Committee was organizing and training the Children's Corps, which was crucial for standing sentinel and delivering messages to other subdivisions of the Manchuria Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as for performing dances and plays to entertain and inspire the guerrilla armies. The group was organized with about twenty children, most of whom had lost their parents or family members.

Whenever women sent food and crops to the armies, they worked all night for several nights in a row. They risked being caught by the Japanese or the landlords, since the Japanese watched for peasants who bought large amount of food in the markets, or threshed and pounded grains. A memoir noted:

When village people had to send rice or other crops to the armies, mother and sisters hulled rice in the mortar at night when it dropped to 30 degrees Centigrade below zero. We pounded the wet barley, while they dried it. In 1936, our village sent a lot of barley and potato powder to the army. It was not easy because we all were suffering from hunger. However, we helped the army because we knew that the army would fight for the new society in which peasants and workers would live better.²⁵

Ch'oe Chae-ryŏn describes the difficulties of carrying out clandestine activities:

We were in charge of providing food, supplies, and secret communications. It was hard to carry out such jobs. We did not have any money to buy cloth to make army uniforms, because policemen, the punitive forces, and the pro-Japanese (Koreans and Chinese) searched the village and threatened and arrested people day and night. Core members of the Women's Committee visited nonmember women and asked for donations. We bought cloth little by little in different markets in order to prevent the merchants from suspecting us. We even had to lie to the merchants that we were buying cloth for marriages, ceremonies, or anniversaries, since buying a lot of fabric led them to suspect us. The Japanese often investigated those who bought a lot. We made clothes at night, not sleeping for several days, since we had to make all the uniforms by the date the army had set.²⁶

Carrying out reconnoitering missions, delivering messages, and providing and buying necessities for the guerrillas were risky jobs that endangered the lives of entire families, not just the lives of the women. Their activities were watched by *Minhoe*, pro-Japanese Korean committees organized by landlords under the supervision of the Japanese police and army. *Minhoe* collected information about village people and identified revolutionaries. For example, when the Japanese police found out that Eun-bok communicated with the army, they killed her mother-in-law and her son and burned their house.

In successfully carrying out tasks and responsibilities in the Women's Committee, motherhood was a strategic resource that the peasant women resorted to. The members of the Women's Committee took advantage of the tendency of Japanese police to relax their supervision of women based on their perception that women were not politically dangerous, and especially that mothers with babies were not aggressive enough to do anything violent. The members volunteered for work such as reconnoitering, delivering messages, and buying necessities for the guerrilla armies, claiming that they would not be suspected by the Japanese police and army. The members were mothers and grandmothers who were proud of their sacrifice for the revolutionary cause. Disguised as merchants, they approached policemen who guarded railway construction sites and spent weeks getting acquainted

with them to get confidential information regarding imminent attacks on guerrillas and peasants at the bases. Women also utilized their practice of foraging for mountain vegetables and edible grasses to hold secret meetings or to organize the Women's Committee, away from the surveillance of the police.

The mother-in-law of Yang Chŏng-suk volunteered to blast railroads with bombs, insisting that the police guard near the railroads would not suspect an old woman.²⁷ Women also gained access to police stations near the Japanese armies in the mountains and forests, under the pretense of grubbing for vegetables. Han Mae-mul was selected to buy necessities for the army because the Japanese would be less suspicious of a woman with a baby. Carrying her baby on her back, Han had to walk all night on dangerous mountain paths across the Amnok River to buy mimeograph paper, sewing thread, and needles.²⁸

Conclusion

The Communist policies in Manchuria followed patterns that feminists have observed in other revolutions. The Communists' anti-family policies were quickly replaced by pro-family measures. After a brief period of enforcing measures to promote free marriage, divorce, and an end to trafficking in women, the Communists began to uphold the traditional family. In 1933, they dropped the signifier "new liberated woman," replacing it with "true revolutionary woman." Ideals of revolutionary militancy were grafted onto traditional views of virtuous Korean womanhood. The new Communist utopian vision of women's liberation was thus couched in terms of filial piety, chastity, and motherhood. These values became the moral basis for commitment and loyalty to the new state/nation. The return to tradition was a corrective to potentially still powerful resistance from the Communists' constituency—the peasant family in revolution. As a result, the family came to be understood as a source of collective unity, rather than an oppressive space where women occupied a low and dependent position. Accordingly, the issues of women's own rights over their bodies and sexuality hardly appeared in the revolutionary struggle.

Communist women and Korean peasant women rarely resisted the Party's reversion to conservative family policies. Their identity and interest in the movements, however, differed in terms of marital status, especially at the beginning of the movements. It was young, unmarried women who were attracted to early Communist proclamations of women's freedom in marriage and divorce. Korean peasant mothers' identities were bound to their families, and their own interests overlapped with those of male peasants and the Communists. The choice between resistance against class exploitation and gender struggle against male domination was not available to Korean peasant mothers. Instead, what explains the dilemma of Korean peasant mothers in Manchuria is their class/national experience and interests, as they were embedded in patriarchal relations. For agricultural production in the Korean peasant community in Manchuria, the family became the unit of production. Since family relations were shaped by patriarchal relations, the logic of work and regulation was rooted in patriarchal relations. As a result, gender identity begot class experience and class interests. One gender-specific class interest for which Korean peasant mothers struggled was the reintegration of the family. Gender struggle against male domination was something that Korean peasant mothers in these historical circumstances could not undertake, since their class interests were built upon such patriarchal relations.

Korean Communist women acquiesced to the Party's new family policies, which stressed more the family harmony than women's rights in the family. Their activities were thus merged with those of Korean peasant mothers. However, their later similarities should not elide the fact that acquiescence to the Party's conservative policies occurred not because these women shared a single form of liberation. Instead, their investments in the family stemmed from very different experiences of work and family relations.

NOTES

1. Bohstedt, John. 1988. "Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots 1790-1810." *Past and Present* 120: 88-122; Dekker, Rudolf. 1987. "Women in Revolt: Popular Protest and its Social Basis in Holland in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." *Theory and Society* 16: 337-362.
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12



HYUN YI KANG

Re-membering Home

"Go back home."

This xenophobic slur has always puzzled me in its facile command to some magical retraction across great distances and lengthy separations. Bearing the double-edged implications of (once and future) belonging and of (present) repudiation for the immigrant subject, the concept-word-space "home" thus invoked holds out additional paradoxes for those whose gender, sexual, and class positionings would have precluded any secure, comfortable habitation *in the first place*. This essay attempts to track such awkward movements through four cultural productions by Korean immigrant women: Myung Mi Kim's poetry volume, *Under Flag*, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's book *DICTEE*, and multimedia piece *EXILÉE*, and Kim Su Theiler's film *Great Girl*. These works