

Chapter 3

Understanding Korean women

3.1 The myth of Korean origin

3.1.1 The story of the myth

The myth of Korean origin is the myth of “*Dankun*”, which means “a useful person for others far and wide”. In the very beginning, there were two animals, a tiger and a bear. Both of them came before a heavenly god in the high mountains to ask to become human beings. The god told them to eat only garlic and water for 100 days in a dark cave with no light, if they wanted to become human beings. If they went out of the cave before the 100 days were over, they would lose their only chance of being transformed into humans.

During the first few days in the dark cave with only garlic and water, the two animals were hopeful and were able to endure their hunger. But day after day, they felt tired and hungry, slowly losing their consciousness of the meaning of being human. The tiger started to complain towards the god, saying how cruel the god was, how much it missed all the other food, the light, being outside, the fresh air, and the wild fields. The tiger went on about how tiring it was to eat only garlic, and how damp and misty the cave was, but the bear encouraged the tiger tenderly by telling the tiger that this would last only for a limited time, then they would change into human beings.

Although the bear consoled the tiger many times, the tiger could not resist the longing for other food and the light. The tiger went out of the cave, but the bear continued to think brightly of the future, and remained there alone. Finally, the 100 days were over. The god came to the bear and gave a blessing. The bear transformed into a beautiful woman. Her name became “*Woong-yo*”, meaning “a woman from a bear” or “a bear-woman”.

At that time, the god’s son came down from the high mountains and fell in love with “*Woong-yo*” at first sight. With permission from his father, the god, he stayed with “*Woong-yo*” on earth instead of returning to the mountains. They got married and soon after had a son, the first person in the myth of Korean origin. This first person was

named “*Dankun*”, meaning “a useful person for any others far and wide”. He was the first ancestor of Korea.

3.1.2 Theological Reflection

Tribes in the world have their own myths. Ruether (1993:8) says about evaluating myths:

“Myths” in the sense of exemplary stories, are not illegitimate. Moreover, history is never completely objective, but is always a selection and interpretation of the past to make meaning for the present. But this does not mean that there can be no historical knowledge apart from subjective wishes, nor that myth does not need to be examined for its spiritual and ethical values.

I think myths basically express people’s thinking. To understand the Korean myth is, in a sense, to understand the basic thinking of Koreans. This myth originated a long time ago during the time when animism prevailed. Ancient society was maternal and women’s power was strong. One scholar of Korean literature, A-Lyoung Lee (1983:24) says, “Korean characteristics are endurance and tenacity of purpose. Koreans have endured all kinds of problems in difficult situations of international politics, economics and histories, and overcome those situations”. Throughout history, Koreans have had many severe, bitter trials and difficulties, some caused by other countries and others within the Korean nation.

Here, firstly, I want to comment on the status of women as reflected in this Korean myth. *Woong-yo* endured her difficulties and gave birth to a son who was the first ancestor of Korea. Through this myth, it is emphasized that women should endure at all times. Women are taught to be obedient without complaint, because *Woong-yo* represents all Korean women. Secondly, after the appearance of *Dankun*, *Woong-yo*’s son, who governed Korea, *Woong-yo* disappeared from the story automatically. *Woong-yo* was just an assisting actor. Korean women are like *Woong-yo*. After their marriage, women lose their names. It means that their identity disappears. They are called “somebody’s wife”, “somebody’s daughter-in-law”, “somebody’s mother”, or “a member of somebody’s family”. Her disappearance means that her role is seen as secondary. It

was believed that the only role for a woman was to give birth to a baby. These ideologies and beliefs resulted in Korean women staying at home for a long time. Women were not allowed to work in public places. In this myth of Korean origin, it was possible to detect words that have been emphasized to Korean women by men – words such as endurance, obedience, women's invisibility, and women's secondary role.

3.2 Political and historical understanding

Korea has a history of 5000 years. I cannot explain the whole history, but I will give an overview of the history of Korea over the last 100 years. During one century, many things happened to Korean men and women historically, politically, economically, and socially. There were many dynasties before the 20th century. Korea had to face Japanese colonization for 36 years (1910-1945), after which Korea gained independence (1945). The Civil War (1950-1953) followed, then the division of Korea into the communist North Korea and the capitalist South, the dictatorship (1961-1979), and lastly the democratic governments (since 1992). Korean history is closely linked with Korean politics during this century. Therefore I deal with the politics and history of Korea together.

3.2.1 Korean history and the political situation in the premodern era

Korea has had a written history from 57 BC. There had been many dynasties that existed up to 1910. Politically, most structures were male-dominated during 2000 years in the dynasties except for three queens, who ruled before the year 1000. The Sundok queen (632-647), the Jindok queen (647-654), and the Jinsung queen (887-897) were very active (Choi MJ 1991:219). These three queens governed the country for 32 years altogether. The other dynasties did not have any queens.

In the 19th century there was confusion in the Lee dynasty or *Chosun* (which was the name of Korea at that time). Political factions were continually divided; and the family members of the king's wives influenced politics for about 60 years. The Lee dynasty established a patriarchal society and protected Confucianism in order to maintain the kingship. There were many political disputes amongst parties. Parties were created by

gathering together the people with a common denominator, such as those with the same surname, the same place of birth, the same family members, the same school and so on. If one party succeeded in obtaining rule in the government, the other parties would have been ruined. Therefore, politicians killed and slandered one another severely towards the end of Lee dynasty. This dynasty had a policy of political seclusion, there was no trade or other relationships with any other countries. This was a negative aspect in terms of foreign affairs. Japan attacked and defeated Korea many times during the dynasty, which rendered Korea powerless. Korea opened itself to foreign intercourse only when compelled to do so by more powerful countries. When Korea opened its doors internationally, they made a concession to other powerful countries. This was the time when a new religion, Christianity, came into Korea.

The provincial leaders, who were highly educated, economically powerful, and respected by the people of their provinces, had political ambitions and different opinions about the politics. They carried out a particular form of government by restraining the growth of any one particular faction and taking turns to exercise power. Later factionalism grew worse and had negative ramifications for the social and economic life of the Lee dynasty. Factionalism was not rooted out even after the country had suffered much on account of the international situation. Thus, factionalism grew in such intensity as to create not only political confusion but divisions in society as well.

Politicians never took an interest in the lives of ordinary people economically and fundamentally exploited them (Kuk Sa 1998:30-32, 34-36). Because of continuous disputing parties and political disorder, the Lee dynasty slowly lost its leadership. The farmers who comprised 90 % of the population were impoverished, social unrest heightened, and popular rebellions spread to various parts of the country. At that time, most of the rural areas were in a difficult situation, with peasants who paid large amounts of taxes. Official corruption created a problem. Thus people's lives were difficult. Moreover, foreign ships appeared on Korea's seacoasts to request commercial activities with Korea. People experienced a crisis on account of these domestic and foreign conditions. Therefore, the voice of the people became louder. People demanded order in government, that their livelihood be stabilized, that the inroads made by western powers be curbed, and that national peace be established in the country (Korean History

1992:183). In the latter part of the dynasty, Western civilization was introduced to Korea via China. Korea entered the international arena by signing treaties with various nations. The treaties were unfair during that time. Korea was forced to permit the rights of low tariff rates, extraterritoriality, and residence of foreign nationals in Korea. On account of this, it was possible for foreign countries to instigate political and economical aggression against Korea. Korea made many efforts to accept the modern civilizations of the West through the diplomatic and commercial trade. The government sent some of the elite to investigate and to learn about industry, how to manufacture modern weapons and how to train the army. Among the new developments in the army were that special military forces were organized and provided with modern military training. The government reorganized political, social, and military systems.

The government continually promoted policies to accept the modern civilization of the West. Confucian scholars rejected this and were strongly opposed to this movement. There were conflicts between the old military and the forces of reform. The government attempted rapid reformation in all fields in order to build Korea into a wealthy, modern nation with a powerful military. But before these reforms were completed the radical reform party was expelled. The retrenched politicians were angry. Civilians did not trust the government and many opposition movements were formed. Conservative politicians requested China to help them regain power and radical politicians asked Japan to allow them to maintain their power. Later this situation caused a war between the Chinese and Japanese in Korea (1937-1940).

Two important events at the end of the 19th century in the pre-modern era impacted greatly on women's lives. One was the Catholic and the other was the *Dong-hak* movement. In the 19th century Catholicism expanded widely throughout the country although it was persecuted. The influence of the newly founded ideas of *Dong-hak* began to grow gradually among the peasants (Korean History 1992:138). Catholicism opposed the Confucian social system, which was maintained by the Lee dynasty (Choi MJ 1991:224). Catholics believe that all human beings are equal in God's eyes. Catholicism rejected the Confucian sacrificial rituals practiced by Koreans. Koreans are spiritually inclined. They respect their ancestors. The last three generations conduct ceremonies for their dead ancestors - sons, daughters, offsprings and relatives gather on the evening of

the ancestor's of death. Women prepare food and set the table, which is called a ritual table. There are rules for setting the table – dried fruits, fresh fruits, a certain kind of biscuit, roast fish, wine, and so on. The oldest male calls on and serves the dead ancestors. During the sacrificial rite, women and children are not allowed to attend, or even to peep. All the males, from the eldest to the youngest must bow down three times in front of the table. People believed that the ancestor would descend and sit down on the other side of the table during the rite. Before the 1960's families were large so the rite would continue through the night. These kinds of Confucian sacrificial rituals took place many times in a year. It was a heavy burden on women to prepare for these rituals. Great amounts of food had to be provided for the many family members and relatives.

However, the Catholic Church in Korea rejected Confucian sacrificial rituals. When Catholicism came to Korea, Koreans thought this religion was rude because they denied the ancestors' worship (see Min KB 1983:36-39, 53-78). People asked where they could have come from if ancestors did not exist. The Catholics claimed that there was only one father, God, so they were against Confucianism. In Confucianism, people regarded the country as the most important, but in the Catholic religion, God was the most important. Catholicism was actually very good news for women believers (Min KB 1983:78). They were freed from their rituals and Confucian ideology, in which women were treated as inferiors. As a result of Catholic evangelization, the old family system was destroyed. A loyal group affirmed the Catholic religion, and governors started persecuting Catholicism. The persecution of the Catholic churches by the Lee dynasty was started in 1785 (Facts 1997:164). One of the Catholic ministers, Kim Bum Woo, who built the Han Yang Catholic Church, was killed at that time. Many believers were killed in prison in 1791, and 300 believers were killed in 1801. After that, 70 believers were killed including 3 Catholic ministers; 8,000 believers and 9 missionaries from France were killed in 1866 (Korean History II 1998:67). Many believers were burnt at the stake, decapitated, slugged, and insulted (Min KB 1993:93-103). One reason for persecution was that some leaders of the opposition party had accepted the Catholic faith. A king, whose name was Taewongun, felt threatened by the opposition party. He wanted to keep his long-term kingship. The other reason was that western knowledge and Catholicism were spreading

very rapidly and they evoked a private response from the people (Kim WM 1986:54, 131, 222). Many people believed and followed the western religion and knowledge.

Some women would reject marriage, which was shocking at that time. Some Catholic female believers would not marry because they wanted to devote their heart and their body to God. So many female believers died a martyr's death for their faith. Women realized their self-reliance and independence from the dominant social order.

A second new idea, which insisted, on the equality of men and women was the *Dong-hak* ideology. The meaning of *Dong-hak* is "oriental knowledge" in itself (Lee JH 1994:11). When the Catholic faith was introduced into the Lee dynasty, the ethics and rules of Confucian society were brought to a crisis. *Dong-hak* emerged against Western knowledge and Catholicism, and promoted itself under the motto of "protection for peasants and country" in the 1860's. *Dong-hak* started at grassroots level from among the peasants. Their aim was to reform politics, to save the country from political collapse and to protect it against other powerful countries. Many peasants followed this movement. *Dong-hak* included traditional and reformatory ideas. Therefore it appealed to people. The core of *Dong-hak*'s ideas was anti-discrimination, anti-classism, anti-hierarchy, equality and prophetic ideas for a new world. The first advocate was Choi Jae Woo (Korean History II 1998:177-178). He belonged to the upper class in the society. He treated women with respect and he gave them hope. Moreover, he released two female slaves. One became his daughter-in-law, and the other became his adopted daughter. But he was burnt at the stake because of his revolutionary ideas. The second advocate was Choi Shi Hyung, who had to travel in disguise, because the government persecuted the followers of *Dong-hak*. He had witnessed male oppression, violence and female oppression. He realized that women, slaves, and children were the weakest in the order of Confucian society. So he wrote a prayer for women, children and slaves. His teaching was to serve and love them, like a heavenly god. The dignity of women in *Dong-hak*'s idea was the starting point of emancipation for women in Korea.

A chief named Cho collected taxes for building a memorial for his father. He destroyed a reservoir, which people were used to, and had a new one built. The peasants labored without any wages to complete it. During the harvest, he forced the people to pay water fees. Because he broke his promises, a spokesman of the villagers complained

many times on their behalf. But there was no change and Chief Cho exploited the people even more with heavier taxation. Peasants and followers of *Dong-hak* invaded the chief's office and destroyed the reservoir in 1894 (Kuk Sa 1998:57-58). The government sent some investigators but they did not rebuke the chief on account of his deeds. Instead, investigators imprisoned the peasants and leaders of the invasion. The followers of *Dong-hak* and peasants of neighbouring villages joined to rise in revolt, which soon spread across the whole of the Southern province of Korea. The third advocator, Jeon Bong Jun was a leader. He emphasized reformation and protested against corrupt politics. His aim was peace for the people. This led to conflict between the peasants and the national army. The peasants gained victories in the battle of Whang To-Hyun and the battle of Jang Sung. The peasants and the followers of *Dong-hak* were victorious in many places. The followers of *Dong-hak* grew in number. The government could not restrain the uproar, so they asked China to send their army to help prevent the peasants from gaining further control. When China sent their army, Japan joined in. At last, the government began negotiating with the peasants and promised to reform politics. After that, peasants and soldiers went back to their homes to continue living their ordinary lives again. The peasants' effort for reformation failed because the Korean government called on the Japanese army to help them suppress the peasant revolt. Some years later, the Japanese army which had more sophisticated weapons did battle with the peasants who wanted to protect their country. The *Dong-hak* movement was jeopardized by wicked governors and the Japanese army (Korean History II 1998:178).

The *Dong-hak* movement was important as it emerged from the people of the lowest class distinction and it had a great effect in changing the ideas of people. The *Dong-hak* movement influenced women to become aware of their situation. Women were treated like slaves in the society, but in the teaching of *Dong-hak* equality was the essential basis of humanity. According to Confucianism widows should remain alone. There were many young widows at that time. The teaching of *Dong-hak*, however, recommended that young widows remarry (Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:23-24). This meant that women's dignity should be accepted in the society. Women were oppressed and discriminated against in the traditional society, but both Catholicism (Western idea) and *Dong-hak* (Oriental idea) contributed to the realisation that men and women are indeed equal.

3.2.2 Japanese colonialism

At the end of the 19th century Russia and Japan, the neighbors of Korea, forced international relations. Since they were more powerful than Korea at that time, this resulted in an unequal relationship. Russia tried to build a naval base in Korea. Britain and Russia were pitted against each other in many places of the world. Therefore Britain gave its approval for Japan to benefit in Korea. Russia and Japan went to war in 1904. After starting the war, Japanese troops were stationed in Seoul and the provincial cities of Korea. Japan compelled Korea agree to their making use of Korean land for military installations, to gain ownership of Korea's economical resources and diplomacy. They forced Korea to forbid the use of the Korean language in schools and that all education should be done in Japanese. They did not allow Korean history to be taught in schools. The situation deteriorated rapidly after Japan won a victory against Russia. At that time Britain and America were exploiting East Asia under the name of political and economical supporting (Kuk Sa 1998:70). Moreover, they made Pacification (Protection Pacific countries by American force). Its intention of America was to have a power around the Pacific. Therefore, they accepted Japanese tacit consent. In 1910, Korea lost the national rights and became a colony of Japan (Kuk Sa 1998:110). Korea's freedom was severely restricted.

The Japanese dispersed the Korean army, which meant that the Korean military lost their power. Moreover, the Japanese took judicial power and dispensed with Korean police officers. The owners of farms became peasants. The Japanese exploited Korean resources for their own industrial development and they sold their products in Korea (Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:98-103). Japanese colonial policy was to make Koreans their slaves and to exploit Korean resources for their own use. This has already been said Japan took possession of large food supplies which meant that Koreans were suffering from a shortage of provisions. Japan not only demanded material goods, but also human resources for the army, mines or factories. During World War Two, Japan especially needed young manpower for the military. Moreover, Korean women were used as prostitutes for their army. Korean traditions were eradicated and supplanted by the Japanese language and customs. People were forced to change their names to Japanese.

During Japanese colonial rule, women participated in the work force even though it did not mean that their social position improved. Women could, however become economically independent and could develop their own perspective on society.

Kang Jung-Suk (1994:86) indicated that the number of female workers was about 3.2 million, which was 33.1% of the female population of Korea. Lee Oo-Jung (in Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:125) estimated that 90% of female workers belonged to the agricultural work force in 1930. Agriculture was still a family business as it was in the premodern era, and men were managing the production. Kang (1994:87) finds that because of colonial policy, women had to work in factories. This meant that families made up 89.7% of the work force in the agricultural sector, 1.8% in industrial factories, 4.0% in service work, and 4.4% in other sectors in 1940. Women became more involved in industrial work at a later stage. Under Japanese colonial rule women's working conditions were bad. Korean women's wages were half of that of Korean males, a quarter of that of Japanese males and the female teenagers' wages were only 1/7 that of that of Japanese males (Kang JS 1994:88). The wages were further diminished by taxation and compulsory savings. Working hours were far too long and working conditions poor. It was an unfair working system controlled by the Japanese. Many women workers lost their health and their lives. Many of them contracted diseases from the hard work. A labour law was established in Japan in 1929 (Kang JS 1994:88). This law protected Japanese female workers but Korean female workers were not protected in the same way because the Japanese were exploiting the colony for maximum benefit to themselves. They practiced monopolistic capitalism.

The Japanese declared war on China in 1937 and later also became involved in World War II. During this period (1937-1945), life was extremely difficult for unmarried Korean women. One example of their exploitation was the phenomenon of "comfort women" (Lee HS 1992:385-415). The women were compelled to be prostitutes for the Japanese soldiers. Initially they were called "female officers and patriots," then at a later stage, "army cleaners," and eventually "comfort women." The Japanese governor sent Korean traveling merchants to recruit young girls. They coerced them with swear words and took them to China where they served as prostitutes for the Japanese troops from beginning of 1938. They were treated as sexual tools for Japanese soldiers. From 1941

every valley in Korea had to provide an equal number of girls. A hundred thousand “comfort women” stayed on the borders of China and Russia in 1941. The Japanese took two hundred thousand young women under the name of “comfort women” to war front. Fifty to seventy thousand of them became prostitutes for Japanese soldiers. They were between sixteen and thirty two years old.

Japan engaged in World War II on the 8th of December 1941. During the first six months the Japanese won victories in East Asia (Malaysia, Burma). At that time all the army bases had prostitutes known as “comfort women”. By 1941 the Japanese began legally taking young Korean women by enforcement and compulsion. They made a law that stated that women and men were to work for Japan. One prostitute had to have sexual intercourse with approximately a hundred Japanese soldiers in a day. The Japanese wanted these women not to waste time, so they were not permitted to take the time to eat a proper meal. They were provided with instant fast foods like sandwiches. When the Japanese moved their army bases these women were sometimes left behind like dumpsters in the battle field, massacred by Japanese soldiers, or buried alive. When the Japanese lost the war many women were dying because of famine, disease, infections, lack of hygiene and facilities. A very small number of these women who became prisoners of war, were able to survive.

The Japanese, not wanting to acknowledge their crimes concerning the “comfort women,” destroyed all records in this regard (see Yu BN 1991:81-83). Similarly, the Korean victims hid their secret, since prostitutes were shamed by Confucian society. Therefore the facts only became partially known. The historical facts did not come to light officially before 1992. The Japanese government never apologized for their crimes and never compensated the “comfort women” or the Korean government.

Korean women devised a counter-plan to find out what the facts concerning the “comfort women” really were. They sent representatives to the Japanese government in 1992 to demand that (Ahn SY 1992a: 352-353):

- The Japanese government should admit to the atrocity that the “comfort women” were taken to Japanese military bases by force
- The Japanese government should apologize officially to the “comfort women”

- The Japanese government should stop denying what they had done
- The Japanese government should build cenotaphs to console the spirits of the dead comfort women
- The Japanese government should compensate those women who were still alive, as well as the families of the deceased
- The Japanese government should teach the younger generations the facts of this history in order to prevent something similar from happening in the future.

3.2 Democratic Republic of Korea

During Japanese colonialisation the Korean church faced many conflicts (Min KB 1983:215-228; see Chandra 1988). One of them was the demand to bow down to the Japanese emperor. The Japanese saw their living emperor as a god who never died, ruled over them and had to be respected. The Japanese proconsul built shrines and compelled Koreans to bow down to Japan. This began in 1931 and soon became a serious problem. The Catholic and Methodist church interpreted it not as a religious ritual, but as a political activity, so they accepted it in 1935. The Presbyterian Church accepted it in 1938. Japan made it a national obligation. Since the acceptance of the churches Christians had to take an oath: "We believe that the Japanese king is a god. We are his sons and daughters and we must obey him" (Min KB 1983:402-404). Before a worship service in Korean churches, Christians repeated this oath and bowed toward the east where the Japanese king was living. There were fixed regulations about the ceremony of the Japanese king in every official meeting of the Korean church. Some ministers refused to perform the ritual of the Japanese king and strongly moved ahead with a rejection plan. Because of this resistance 1200 churches had to close their doors, 2000 Christians were jailed, and more than 50 ministers died as martyrs for Christianity. The national women's meeting of the Korean church had different opinions on the matter. The national women's meeting was officially established in 1927. They worked to create a politically independent Korea and helped to educate and evangelize the poor women in China. They were wise enough to survive and to act against Japanese. They remained an independent movement. Although weak, they would fight against the self-righteous Presbyterian Church, stereotyped theological education, a wrong church system, Japanese aggressive activities and Japanization.

The Korean family and economic systems changed as a result of Japanese exploitation. Japan made new laws about inheritance and this law was upheld until the 1980s. Women were not allowed the right to be the head of the family during Japanese colonial rule. Married daughters were disqualified from receiving any inheritance from their maternal parents. Discrimination against women should be understood against the political, social, and economic background of the colonization of the Japanese.

3.2.3 Democratic Republic of Korea

Korea gained liberation from Japan in August of 1945. Japan surrendered during World War II, because of the atomic explosions and Korea became an independent country. The United States of America and the Soviet Union were involved in Korean liberation, because they were the most powerful countries in the United Nations. This gave the two countries the authority to influence Korea towards self-government. They divided Korea into two parts. The Soviet Union ruled North Korea and the United States of America were involved with South Korea in establishing its autonomy. The United States, Britain and the Soviet Union had a conference about Korean trusteeship in Yalta, Soviet Union. America wanted to transfer the control of Korea to the United Nations. The Soviets insisted that the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union were needed to solve the problems of Korean politics peacefully and that the best policy was for Korea to govern itself after the withdrawal of the armies of the Soviet Union and the United States. The two countries, the United States and the Soviet Union had an agreement, but decidedly different perspectives. It meant that two different countries had their own agendas for obtaining territory and power in Korea. The United Nations decided not to continue with a UN trusteeship, but rather to have a presidential election in North and South Korea (Kuk Sa 1998:162-164; Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:123). The United Nations sent provisional consultants to survey the Korean election, but the Soviet Union did not allow them into the northern part of Korea. The United Nations decided on a presidential election in the south of Korea in 1948. President Lee was elected and the government of the Republic of Korea was established. The northern part of Korea adopted a new constitutional law, elected, and formed a new government, which was called the *Chosun* People's Republic of Korea (*Chosun* means Korea) (Kuk Sa 1998:165).

This was the beginning of communism in North Korea and capitalism in South Korea. Korea was the only country to remain divided, even after the reunification of Germany. The people of North and South Korea originally belonged to one tribe with one language, one culture, and one history. Many relatives and families were separated by the division into North and South. North and South Korea became political enemies. This division of the South and North drove the Korean Peninsula into a state of extreme tension. Furthermore, as the world political situation led by the United States and the Soviet Union was rapidly rushing into a cold war. The Korean Peninsula became a region of instability, not knowing when war might break out (Korean History 1992:271). Using this international political situation, North Korea obtained tremendous military aid from the Soviet Union and was soon equipped with a strong military force. Each government and its politicians emphasized their self-security, so they blamed each other in order to maintain their ideologies. The emergence of these two societies has caused a political division in Korea so that the question of division and reunification constitutes a major problem that has ideological, as well as political, economical, and social components.

After the establishment of the government of the Republic of Korea, the communist group in North Korea attacked various places in South Korea and after reinforcing its military, finally invaded South Korea without warning in June 1950 (Min KB 1983:463-475). The Republic of Korea's army that was confronted by this unforeseen attack fought with inferior weapons. The national army evacuated from Seoul, the capital city, and later retreated. Though the national army was rather weak, it began marching again with the aid of UN forces. The United Nations had already branded the North Korean communists the aggressors and sent forces composed of the armies of the 16 countries. With the participation of the UN forces, the tables were turned, but the Chinese Communist Army joined forces with the North Korean Communists. A new phase began in what was to be a protracted war. Finally, at the end of three years of fierce battles, South and North signed an Armistice (July 1953).

The Korean War left a deep scar on Korea (see Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:173-175). There were millions of human casualties during the war. A high rate of 2.5 million soldiers, including South Koreans, North Koreans, Chinese, American and UN soldiers were killed in this war. Approximately 6 million people died, including civilians. Three

million people became refugees and 10 million people lost family members. The land was destroyed. Countless houses and factories were reduced to ashes. During the three years of war more bombs exploded in Korea than in Europe during World War II. Women, who became widows, were left to carry heavy burdens. They now had the sole responsibility of feeding their families. Women's social position was such that their wages were very low. Women worked both at home and in society. The "political tension" between North and South Korea started to deepen, due to the war. This is the reason why tension exists and confrontation continues even today, a generation after the war. Family members are still separated in North and South Korea; they cannot see one another; they cannot even send a letter to one another; and they do not know whether their family members are still alive or not. In Confucianism societies, families are close and family ties are strong. Therefore, the division of families was an extremely critical issue and had serious ramifications for women.

There were several reasons for Korea's division. The most apparent reason is the Korean Civil War. The division of the country actually started after the War. Firstly, the United States and the Soviet Union occupied two different areas, and had the authority to divide Korea into two parts - the Republic of Korea in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north. The purpose of this was partly for the guidance of Korea into liberalism, but also for the powerful countries to gain more support (Kuk Sa 1998:163). Korea holds US military bases and facilities that have been set up to maintain an area of defense of "the free world" against the "communist world". The "red scare" was intense in Korea. Secondly, during Japanese colonial rule, Japan caused Korea to be separated into pro-Japanese and anti-Japanese groups (Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:175). The politicians, ordinary people, and even the Christian believers divided themselves into these two groups. One group supported the United States and the other the Soviets.

Korea attempted to reconstruct its desolated lands after the armistice. The United States and Korea have had a mutual defense treaty in order to protect themselves against aggression. Koreans worked together to overcome the disasters of war. The first president Rhee Sung-man tried to reconstruct the political situation, the economy and people's lives that were ruined by the war. He emphasized anti-communism in South

Korea and wanted to attack North Korea in order to bring about reunification. Rhee exercised dictatorial rule. There was no democracy. However, he did not gain the people's confidence because his government was unable to establish democracy. The Liberal Party led by Rhee amended the constitution at will in order to extend their political power (Korean History 1992:274). Rhee abused government authority. The government initiated a constitutional amendment to allow the president Rhee long-term presidential rule. The government was corrupt and the people complained. In 1960, there were elections of the president and the vice president. The liberty party achieved a rigged election, e.g. bribery cases, illegal ballot boxes, improper ballot papers, and so on. The students of universities and citizens rose in revolt in April 1960 against irregularities and corruptness, the rigged election, and the dictatorship of liberty parties in many cities (see Kuk Sa 1998:175-177). The government declared martial law and quelled riots. But the students and civilians strongly demanded the president to resign. Then, President Rhee acceded and resigned after 12 years of presidency. This April revolution was significant - people demanded democracy (see Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:233-236). They wanted human rights and freedom.

After the revolution a provisional government took over for the time being. The government preferred a parliamentary cabinet and a bicameral system. Constitutional reform was initiated and a general election held (Facts 1997:29). Yun Bo-sun was elected prime minister and Jang Myun was elected a premier through the National Assembly in 1960. People expected the new government to cease dictatorship and to develop the economy, but the government could not carry out the various reform projects. The ruling party divided into several parties because of the individuals' desire for personal benefits. The government did not succeed with democracy and their government lasted but a few months. Unwillingly, the government transferred power to a military government.

Before the newly formed democratic government took over, a group of soldiers under the general Park Chung-hee carried out a *coup de tat* and established a military government (May 1961). They immediately organized a political party and revised the constitution instituting a president-centered system. Park was the new president and a new government was formed. The new government established a National Assembly that

was to restore Korea and a military administration which governed for two and a half years. The military government emphasized anti-communism, economic growth, political security and new social reform. The military government made an amendment to the constitution, which was decided through a national plebiscite (Kuk Sa 1998:178-179). After that, there were elections for the president and members of the National Assembly according to the new constitution. Park Chung-hee was elected as president and the National Assembly was established in 1963. The president, supported by the government, concentrated on industrial development factories, offices and modern houses were built, jobs were created, new technologies developed, export increased, wages were increased, and people's lives were improved. He believed that diplomacy with many countries was important, so he established ties with other countries. In 1965 a treaty with equal rights was signed between Korea and Japan. This was the first time after Japanese colonial rule that Korea established a relationship with Japan. In the 1960s, the government sent the Korean army to Vietnam to negotiate peace.

Due to the division between North and South Korea the South Korean government increased armaments and military expansion, maintaining a strong army because of the need for security. Because too much money was spent on maintaining the military, the social welfare system of South Korea was hardly improved at all. This caused great suffering and grievances for women, especially among the poor, who became even poorer. Unequal opportunities for jobs created limitations: for instance, jobs in the defense industry and the military were not open to women. US military bases remained in Korea, for security reasons in preparation a possible attack by North Korea. One of these military bases was located in the centre of the capital city. Prostitutes were established near these bases, which caused Korean women to be sexually exploited by US soldiers.

Korean military policy supported the centralization of administrative power. This led to rapid economic development. A bureaucracy was formed on a classist basis. It functioned like a military hierarchy. It was male-centered and authoritarian. Women were isolated from the politics and did not stand a chance of promotion. Classism and sex discrimination functioned to keep as strong military in place.

President Park attempted to revitalize the spirit of loyalty and filial piety, but most liberal-minded intellectuals rejected his attempt, because they thought it ideological

manipulation. Nonetheless, it had educational value for the military establishment and the general populace (Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:296, 297, 299, 300). The military government attempted to revitalize a sense of pride in the Korean past; the cultural elite was called *yangban*. They had enjoyed a high position in the past society. Tu Wei-ming (1991:760-761) observes three assumptions from the Park's military government:

- Korean culture depended on Confucian ethics.
- The legacy of *yangban* still relates deeply with the contemporary Korean society. Even today, people strive to reach a high position in society.
- Even though Koreans tried to achieve recognition within the first world culture, in terms of its economy under the name of a “national effort”, people were still unable to move completely away from personal opinion and prejudice. People could not rid themselves of prejudice of distinguishing between a “low class” job and a “high class” job. For example, jobs such as doctor, politician, teacher, and pastor were considered a “good” job, while jobs such as barber, merchant, and butcher were regarded with less worth.

Tu Wei-ming's (1991:762) study of the 1960s indicates that the overwhelming majority of the interpreters of modernization took it for granted that the Confucian tradition was a major inhibiting factor in Korea's concerted effort to modernize. Speculation abounds in 1960s Korean historiography on what might have happened if the “practical learning” school had been successful in freeing itself from the mainline Confucian tradition: could Korea have developed its own form of industrialization, making her immune to Japanese imperialism (Vipan Chandra 1988:54)? Unless Korea rids itself of its Confucian past, it could not become part of the modern world, because Confucianism connects authoritarianism, hierarchy and anti-democratic tendencies. Tu Wei-ming (1991:762) finds that “the Confucian values such as loyalty and filial piety implemented by President Park regime in order to enhance its authority, had the unintended consequence of the ideological bastardization of Confucian ethics and further alienated the intelligent from their Confucian roots”.

Although President Park was successful with economic improvement, he lacked the ability to create an active democracy. He enforced laws to amend the constitution often in order to hold on to long term political power. He oppressed opposing political parties and those who were too outspoken, so he was criticized as a dictator. After 10 years of presidency he anticipated that it would be difficult for him to be reelected in a democratic election. In 1972 he proclaimed that what Korea needed was its own style of democratic politics. According to his democratic policies the president could be re-elected through the National Assembly, which meant that he could remain president as long as he wanted. President Park was a dictator for a long time (1962-1978). People soon began protesting against his policies and demonstrated for a real democracy (Lee HS 1992:56). Many people were assassinated, tortured and sent to prison because of anti-government movements. In spite of public discontentment and opposition the government managed to keep its power until 1978 when President Park was killed by one of his conveyers. The president and his government had achieved economic growth very rapidly but the shortcoming of the government was that freedom and human rights were not priority. There was apparent growth and rapid changes in many respects, such as buildings, factories, bridges, and housing. In spite of the successes of the government, President Park ruled with long term dictatorship. Rapid growth came with many mistakes. For example, an apartment suddenly collapsed one night due to a failed operation after construction. Many people died. Even under poor working conditions, workers worked very hard, but they did not receive sufficient wages to satisfy even their basic needs (Lee HS 1992:94; see Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:322-346). One worker committed suicide because he was very poor and there were many problems in his factory. His intention with his suicide was to bring the workers' poor conditions to the attention of the people. The government implemented a master plan to build new villages instead of old houses and huts. Sometimes villagers were simply expelled from their homes without receiving what their property was worth.

From the time when General Park Chung-hee seized power in 1961, a military government ruled for almost thirty years. The military government fell because of continual student demonstrations and labour union activities. Tu Wei-ming (1991:759) states that Korean political leadership, intent on whole sale modernization at any cost,

managed to secure the reluctant support of the intelligentsia and the tacit acceptance of the populace in a drastic restructuring of polity and society for the sake of economic development. The military and technocratic elite joined the political system towards presumed quick economic growth and development. The politicians emphasized national security. In other words, if there is any war between the North and the South, the country which has economical power will be win. The result was the perpetuation of political repression from within and imperialistic dictation from without so that “democratic space” was narrow and the presumed achievement of political independence is largely a farce (Abraham 1990:6). The dominant political realities of Korea were as follows (see Abraham 1990:6-10; cf Lee HS 1992:168-173):

- political structures of oppression and dominance;
- the violation and restriction of basic human rights and civil liberties;
- foreign intervention;
- the absence of authentic democratic political institutions through which popular will and sovereignty could be expressed;
- militarisation continues to be entrenched not only as a mode of political rule but also as a way of life in Korea.

Beyond the very direct expressions of militarization, however, there is also a process whereby military values, ideology, and patterns of behaviour continue to achieve a dominating influence on the political, social, economic and external affairs of the state (Abraham 1990:6). It has begun to seep not only into the political life but also into the structures of social, cultural, and educational life. During the military government the violation of human rights, subjugation of popular movements and organizations, suppression of dissenting factions, oppression, summary arrests and summary killings were the order of the day in Korea (Lee HS 1992:168). The value of obedience, subservience, and “cooperation”, which were predominant in the military ethos, were becoming equally inculcated in the cultural and educational life of Korea.

The women in North Korea faced the communist system, which insisted on equal labour of both men and women (Kim AY 1995:250). This, however, does not mean that

North Korean women have been liberated. Kim AY (1995: 250-251; cf Lee OJ & Lee HS 1989:183) distinguish three stages change in the lives of the women of North Korea:

- The first stage is that all women should work according to the law of the equality of men and women. This meant that the old feudalism was discarded. Kindergartens were built to encourage communism from an early age. All the children were sent to compulsory learning facilities, while their parents were at work. This gave the women less obligations and responsibilities for the care of their children and more freedom to get married or divorced.
- The second stage is that all women were given the same working conditions and labour wages as men. Women attained the same opportunities and positions as men.
- The third stage is that women had to play the role of mother in the communist style through family revolution (Kim AY 1995:251). They also had the duty to socialize the children.

North Korea denied people the right to own property (See Min KB 1983:486-488), because that would create classism, discrimination between the rich and the poor, and sexism, as was the case in South Korea. North Korea claimed that the structure of women's social working conditions made the equality of all people possible (Kuk Sa 1998:192-193). They thought that traditional gender roles in the family led to sexism, so the role of women as a mother at home was minimized. Nevertheless, sexual differences and sexual discrimination could not be eradicated in North Korea, even though the position of women was improved through social revolution. There were still charismatic governors and a heritage of political power in the family remained. They followed the traditional family system, an example of which is Kim Il Sung, the president of North Korea. His son, Kim Jung Il took over from him after his death. People should obey their president in North Korea and although they deny religion the president is treated as a god. This means that a new patriarchal or hierarchical social system was built.

The communist motto is to work equally; to share equally; to live equally. Taking advantage of this, the North Korean government paid low wages - to every person the same amount. The people were poor but had no insight that this was a fraudulent act.

Actually, the government deprived women in North Korea of their abilities, their potential in their work, wages, and lives in a way which all women are treated exactly same.

Women in South Korea rarely participated in politics. There were only limited opportunities for women during the dictatorship government. Actually the military government discriminated against women on a social level. Women dared not speak of political matters even when the government was wrong. Korean women tried to work very hard to improve their lives. They were given more opportunities to work in factories and in society. Attitudes towards women in the society were still influenced by traditional thinking. The prejudice that women were inferior was still rife, so they received lower wages than men did. However, women became more efficient both at home and at work. Because of an increased income, people could build more convenient houses and improved their lives in many ways. Women strove to improve their quality of life economically. But the political situation often made it difficult because their family members were often sent to prison, or were tortured, or lost their social positions suddenly. This often happened many to members of anti-government movements. Many students of universities were sent to jail or were expelled from their universities so they could not study and they could not get jobs. Their mothers were victims of the dictatorship.

Democracy settled in South Korea after long and hard times. The efforts of people who demanded political democracy brought this about. They persevered in emphasizing good prospects for the realization of a completely free country. This has been done for the 50 years since Korean independence. Korea has many tasks:

- among others to make progress in the dialogue between North South Korea the peaceful reunification of two countries;
- social welfare;
- fighting the accumulated public evils;
- the improvement of diplomatic relationships with other countries in the world;
- the elimination of injustice and corruption;
- guaranteeing civilians their rights and freedom (see Yang MK 1991:334-343).