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“ THEY ARE NOT MACHINES ”

**KOREAN WOMEN WORKERS AND THEIR FIGHT FOR
DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNIONISM IN THE 1970's**

By

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
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DEDICATION

This thesis is humbly dedicated to women workers, in all corners of the world, who continue the struggle against poverty and prejudice. May they gain strength from the example and the achievement of South Korean women in the 1970's.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The list of people who have been so kind and helpful to me throughout my long journey is almost endless, and I trust they will understand that space does not permit me to mention them all by name. The fact that they are not identified individually does not mean that their contributions are not deeply appreciated, and they may rest assured that they are remembered with sincerest gratitude in my prayers.

Special tribute must go to my supervisor, Professor Peter Fairbrother, without whose patience, humour, perception, and tact, this work would never have been completed. He has not only been unstinting in his support and encouragement, but has made me feel that I have gained more than an academic mentor from whom I can seek advice and guidance in the future; I have gained a true friend.

I would also like to express my respect and gratitude to Professor Richard Hyman who not only started me on the right track, but who also introduced me to Peter Fairbrother.

Without financial assistance my work would not even have begun, and I therefore consider myself exceptionally fortunate to have been favoured by so many generous benefactors. I wish to place on record my deep gratitude to the Miserior organisation of Aachen, Germany, whose scholarship enabled me to commence my studies in England. My profound appreciation is also extended to the Doo-Rae Research Institute in Seoul, whose contribution has not been limited to the purely economic: the weekly tape recordings of the sermons of the Reverend Kim Jin-hong have never failed to sustain me in the frequent periods when obstacles appeared insurmountable. My thanks must also go to the administrators of the University of Warwick who not only awarded me a most generous scholarship, but who were also unfailingly sympathetic and helpful when financial difficulties arose. My gratitude also goes to the British Council whose scholarship, supplemented by voluntary contributions from friends and colleagues in Seoul, enabled me to complete my final year of study.

I am indebted to Christopher Joel for proof-reading this manuscript and for suggesting corrections and improvements to my written English.

Finally, my heartfelt gratitude is offered to my family and friends in South Korea; they have provided the motivation for this thesis, and I can only hope that it is worthy of them.

ABSTRACT

The 1960's and the 1970's were decades of extraordinarily rapid change in South Korea. The military coup that took place in May, 1961 presaged eighteen years of increasingly harsh and oppressive authoritarian rule under the leadership of Park Chung-hee, during which time South Korea shed its centuries old dependency upon rural agrarianism and emerged as one of the world's premier industrial economies. At the forefront of this advance was the textile and garment industry; a manufacturing complex characterised by a myriad of sweat-shop factories in which the overwhelming majority of employees were girls and young women.

Working conditions in these establishments were of a universally low standard, and all notions of workers' rights and dignities were sacrificed for the government-sponsored imperative to maximise exports and minimise costs. To facilitate this circumstance, the Park Chung-hee regime constructed a nation-wide trade union organisation that was, in effect, nothing more than an agent of the state: unrepresentative of, and unresponsive to, the interests of workers in all industries.

With little, or no, support from male co-workers, and despite their political naivety and the traditionally subordinate status of Korean females, the women textile and garment workers confronted the state, the employers, and their 'official' trade union representatives, and succeeded in forming the nucleus of a fully democratic labour organisation. The enterprise-level democratic trade unions thus formed were not isolated or transient phenomena but included educational and vocational 'outreach' programmes of mutual support, the purposes of which were to enhance individual awareness and extend the concepts of solidarity and collectivity throughout the industrial sector.

One of the purposes of this dissertation is to make visible the hidden history of these women. Writers and commentators on South Korean industrial relations share a common disregard for the achievements of the women activists of the 1970's and, instead, locate elsewhere the birth of democratic trade unionism. This study takes advantage of unique access to the life histories and personal records of many individuals, both male and female, who were actively involved in the events of the period. It presents a narrative of the lives and the attainments of women workers whose struggles have gone largely unrecorded, and whose outstanding accomplishments have, until now, remained uncelebrated.

About The Author

Born in 1954, Chun Soonok is related to two personalities who figure prominently in the history of the labour movement in South Korea. Her mother, Yi So-sun, has dedicated her life to the cause of human rights and the establishment of democratic trade unionism. Now into her seventies, she continues to play a leading role in representing the interests of workers and in fighting for all those whose voices are not heard.

After years of fruitless protest against the inhumane treatment of the thousands of girls and young women employed in South Korea's textile and garment industry, Chun Soonok's brother, Chun Tae-il, poured petrol over himself in November, 1970 and sacrificed his life to draw attention to their plight. His dying words were: "They are not machines". This singular act was the catalyst that galvanised the grass-roots opposition to the officially-sanctioned, male dominated, organisation of labour, and which led directly to a new order in Korean industrial relations. The memory of Chun Tae-il is revered throughout the international human rights community, and in South Korea he is recognised as 'the father of democratic trade unionism'.

In the spring of 1970 Chun Soonok began work in one of the sweat-shop garment factories in central Seoul. Imbued with the notions of democracy and fairness that she inherited from her mother and elder brother she has, from the beginning, devoted herself to helping those workers most in need. A list of some of the projects in which she has been involved is indicative both of the focus of her attention and of her experience:

- Vice-President of the Kindergarten Association of Korea;
- General Secretary of an Unmarried Mothers Project;
- Founder and manager of a day-care centre for the children of women workers;
- Founder and manager of a community house for under-age women workers;
- Executive member of the Korean Women Workers Association;
- Since 1988 has been a guest speaker on trade union affairs and women's issues in many countries including Japan, Germany, the Irish Republic, and Finland.

In 1989, and with the encouragement and support of her co-workers, Chun Soonok came to the United Kingdom to learn the English language. She then embarked upon a programme of academic study that would broaden substantially the scope of opportunity for her to further the cause of the democratic labour movement in South Korea.

ORDERING OF KOREAN NAMES

In Korean script, the names of individuals usually consist of three parts, with the family name, e.g. Kim, Lee, Park, Chun, coming first. Unlike the general practice in the west, a Korean women does not adopt the family name of her husband after marriage. The family name is followed by the personal name, which is seldom used outside the intimate sphere of the family. Finally, and more frequently with males than with females, there is a generational name that distinguishes between generations within the clan.

When translated into English, Korean names may retain the same order, e.g. Park Chung-hee or Kim Dae-jung, but it is not unusual for Koreans to opt to re-order their names in accordance with western custom, e.g. Seung-man Rhee rather than Rhee Seung-man. The potential for confusion is further compounded by the absence of a standard phonetic equivalent when Korean names are written in English. Thus, Chun can be written as Jun; Lee as Yi or Rhee, and Park as Pak, etc..

Throughout this text, and to maintain consistency, Korean names are written in 'Korean style', with the family name first. Phonetic translations are as close as the author can achieve. Any offence that may be caused by adherence to these standards is unintended and sincerely regretted. Because there are far fewer different family names in Korea than in the west, and to avoid the inevitable confusion that might ensue, the full name is given when reference is made to Korean sources in the main text.

Abbreviations

ACGWU	American Clothing and Garment Workers Union
ARO-ICFTU	Asian Regional Organisation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
AMG	American Military Government
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CISJD	Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development
DRP	Democratic Republican Party
ECCKP	Emergency Christian Conference on Korean Problems
FKTU	Federation of Korean Trade Unions
ITGLWF	International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation
JOC	Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne (Catholic Young Workers Organisation)
KCTU	Korean Confederation of Trade Unions
(K)NTWU	(Korean) National Textile Workers Union
LDC	Late Developing Country
LSL	Labour Standard Law
LSMSNS	Law Concerning Special Measures for Safeguarding National Security
NCU	National Conference for Unification
NIC	Newly Industrialised Country
NDP	New Democratic Party
PELFIF	Provisional Exceptional Law for Foreign Invested Firms
ROKA	Republic of Korea Army
SCNR	Supreme Council for National Reconstruction
TWARO	Textile Workers Asian Regional Organisation
UIM	Urban Industrial Mission

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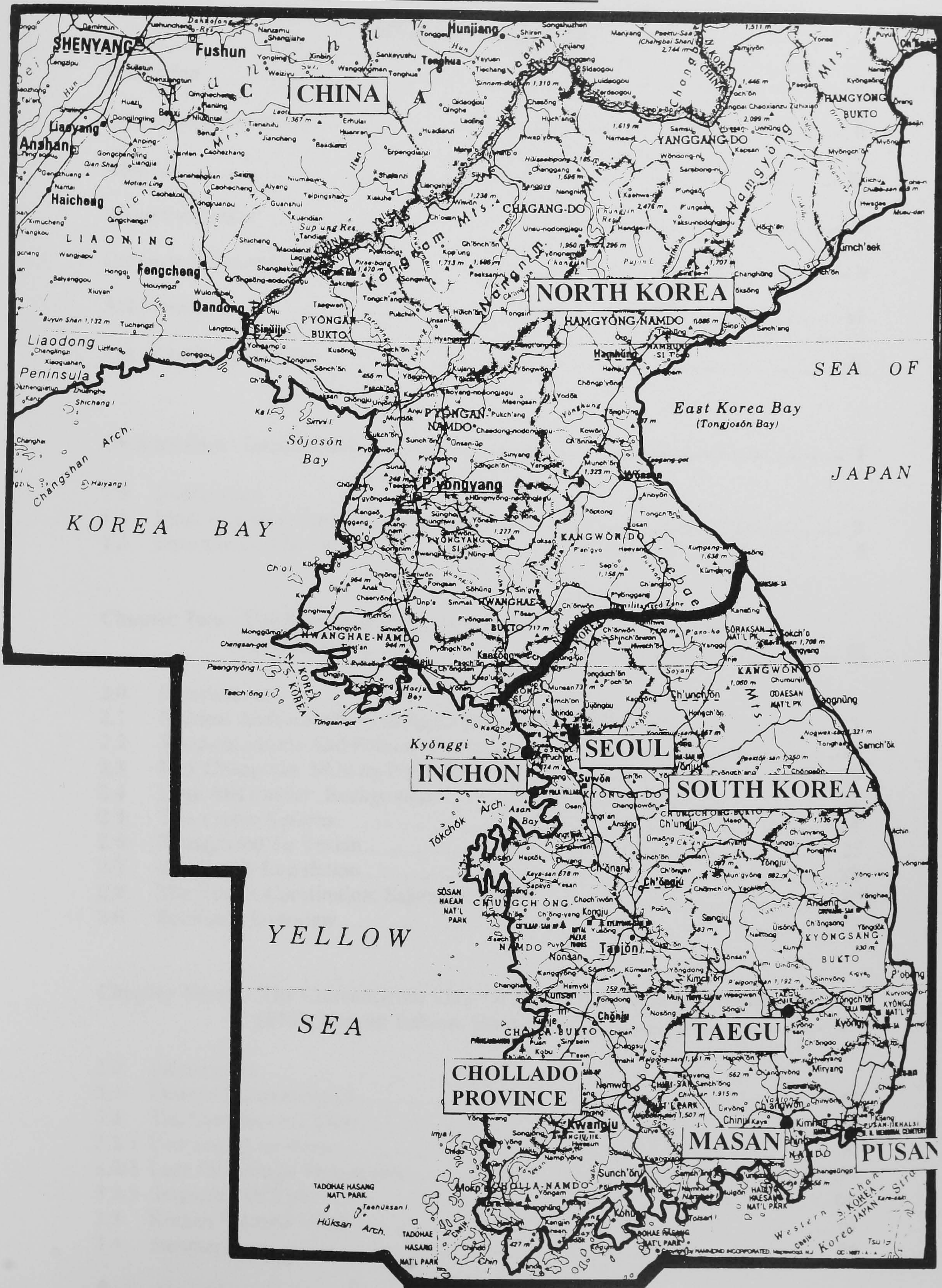


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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

There are two extraordinary lacunae in the collective psyche of the people of South Korea. The first concerns the circumstances surrounding the execution of the man who, above all others, was instrumental in defining the salient characteristics and economic dynamic of modern industrial South Korea. The second is centred upon the role played by the one section of South Korean society that contributed most to the metamorphosis from repression to democratisation that began during the era of his dictatorship.

In the early evening of 26 October, 1979, the president of South Korea, Park Chung-hee, sat down to dine with three of his closest friends and colleagues. Less than two hours later, and with the meal still in progress, the president's oldest friend drew a revolver from the waistband of his trousers and fired one shot at the president's chief bodyguard, striking him in the wrist. The gunman then stood up, pointed the revolver at the man who had been almost like a brother to him for more than thirty years, and who was the leader of his country, and shot him in the chest. Some moments later he approached the prostrate Park Chung-hee and dispatched him with a single shot to the head.

In many, if not all, countries the assassination of the president or prime minister arouses intense and protracted speculation and comment which, in turn, tends to ignite similar reactions abroad. Interest is not normally restricted to idle gossip but

is manifested in the publication of a plethora of books and articles purporting to offer the definitive explanation of the event; the factors which led to it, and the implications and repercussions which would likely flow from it. Not so in South Korea where, for reasons not easy to ascertain, the details of the violent death of a man who had single-handedly dominated every aspect of social and political life for little short of two decades was regarded with almost universal indifference. Despite the period of instability that was inevitable following such an event, the general tenor of the explanatory and placatory messages promulgated by the 'public relations' machinery of the South Korean state appeared to satisfy the South Korean populace and few, if any, questions were asked. That circumstance remains extant to this day: no serious works focusing solely upon the assassination itself have been published, and the collective attitude appears to be that all that needs to be known is already known. This popular incuriosity about an occurrence that might otherwise be expected to have aroused, and continue to arouse, at least some degree of inquiry and controversy constitutes the first lacuna identified above.

During the era of his national stewardship, from May, 1961 until October, 1979, Park Chung-hee supervised the radical change in the South Korean economy from one that was predominantly agrarian and relatively backward to one that figured among the leading industrial nations of the world. Such an extraordinary transformation could not have been achieved without sacrifice and, in the case of South Korea, the brunt of that sacrifice was borne by manual workers in the textile and garment industry, most of whom were women. The true extent of the price paid by girls and young women for the achievement of what came to be known as the 'Korean miracle' and, far more importantly, the contribution those women made to the emancipation of their gender

and to the democratisation of the labour movement constitute both the second ‘blind spot’ in the collective mind of the South Korean people and the core of this study. These two phenomena; the absence of interest in the murder of a long-serving and powerful head of state and the dismissal of the pivotal role played by women workers, are inextricably interlinked, and in seeking to redress the latter, this thesis will throw new light upon the former.

1.1 Main Arguments And Research Questions

It has become almost a truism that major studies of the history of the trade union movement in South Korea have dealt inadequately with the period of the 1970’s. Such studies of that decade which do exist in the literature are, without exception, poorly supported by data and signally lacking in informed critical analysis. Furthermore, few academics or other experts in the South Korean industrial relations arena have paid more than scant attention to any consideration of the experiences and the contribution of women workers. In what may be referred to as ‘the conventional view’ of the labour movement in the 1970’s there is, therefore, an almost total neglect of the significance of the involvement of women, and a disregard of their efforts to establish democratic trade unions during this crucial period. Proponents of the conventional view have been highly selective in the specific topics and events isolated for analysis and discussion, and this marked selectivity has resulted not only in obfuscation and distortion of the contextual circumstances, but is also, as will be demonstrated, an exemplar of historical reductionism.

The key objective of this research is to assemble all available facts pertinent to women workers of the period in question and analyse them from a number of

perspectives. In the facilitation of this objective every opportunity will be afforded to the expression of the views of women who were personally involved in the struggle. In so doing, it is anticipated that a more perceptive appreciation based, for the first time, upon experience rather than upon supposition and theory, will be gained of just how high was the price paid by the women of South Korea in the name of economic development. This research will explore several interrelated themes which are crucial for a full understanding of the involvement of women in the democratic trade union movement in the 1970's. The major theme is centred upon how the concentration of women in the textile and garment industry provided both the imperative and the initiative for organised industrial action. Emphasis will be placed upon how the manipulation of gender relations dominated the labour control process; the nature of the mechanisms of male-controlled trade unions, and the processes by which women workers were able to challenge that control.

The key factors which will be argued in this study are:

1. That prior to the initiatives taken by women workers in the textile and garment industry in the early 1970's the trade union organisation extant in South Korea was a corrupt and male-dominated agent of the state, whose meaningful endeavours on behalf of its grass-roots membership were negligible;
2. That throughout the period under consideration the Park Chung-hee regime colluded with the 'official' leadership of the labour movement and employers in a concerted policy to obstruct and restrict the emergence of democratic trade unionism;
3. That despite this institutional opposition, and in the absence of support from male co-workers, women workers overcame deeply embedded cultural mores and formed trade unions in locations where none had existed previously and, where male-dominated organisations had been in place, used the democratic process to replace the established hierarchy;
4. That, once established, the female-led labour organisations initiated the systematic implementation of educational and vocational programmes the purposes of which were to enhance the individual circumstances of workers and facilitate the spread of the democratic ideal throughout the industrial sector;

5. That the extraordinary achievements of the women workers of the 1970's destroyed the stereotypical image of the passive, timid, obedient, and unworldly Asian female and showed them to be courageous, determined, compassionate, and intelligent individuals capable of generating and sustaining a co-operative spirit of the highest order;
6. That the long and bitter struggle endured by women was not motivated solely by parochial self-interest but included a genuine awareness and regard for wider political and social implications and dynamics. Thus, the outcomes of their activities were not only beneficial to the circumstances of workers, but also brought about fundamental changes to the cultural and political history of South Korea;
7. Finally, that the main body of South Korean industrial relations literature has ignored the achievements of the women activists of the 1970's and post-dated the birth of democratic trade unionism in that country by almost two decades.

In support of the assertions identified above specific questions will be addressed which are both elementary and profound:

- i. What was the importance of the textile and garment industry to the South Korean economy in the 1960's and 1970's?
- ii. What was the true nature of the work and life circumstances experienced by the girls and young women employed in that sector?
- iii. How did those circumstances arise, and what were the levers of power which maintained them in place?
- iv. What was the role, status, and influence of the organised trade union movement extant in South Korea prior to the involvement of women?
- v. What was the genesis, evolution, and degrees of success and failure of that involvement, and how important were the contributions, both positive and negative, of individual personalities?
- vi. Why was President Park Chung-hee assassinated, and to what extent was the assassination a direct result of the politicised activities of women workers?
- vii. What were the key differences between male-led and female-led trade unions, and in what ways did women activists change the face of South Korean labour movement organisation?
- viii. What has been the legacy, in the wider society, of the efforts and achievements of the female textile and garment workers of the 1970's?
- ix. In summation of the above questions, was the price of the 'Korean miracle', in human terms, too high?

1.2 Structure Of The Study

Chapter Two will consist of an examination of the tripartite interrelationship between the state, capital and labour. In the economic development strategies of most developing countries the state exercises a dominant role in determining the basic character of the country's industrial relations system. This was certainly true in the case of South Korea, where the state claimed to be the primary architect of the nation's economic development. This posture was characterised by the effective exclusion of workers from all decision-making processes in regard to policy and production. By the early 1970s, however, democratic local-level trade unions, imbued with a militant and adversarial disposition to management, emerged and grew rapidly. This chapter has several objectives: first, it will attempt to characterise the salient features of the industrial relations philosophy of the South Korean state and the socio-economic and socio-political models upon which the government of President Park Chung-hee single-mindedly pursued export oriented strategies. The second objective is to analyse Park's 'Yushin' reform as it impacted upon the state's labour policies, and its repercussions for the union activities of women. The third objective is to examine the provisions of the Korean Labour Standard Laws, both in theory and in practice, and consider how those instruments were implemented and manipulated by the Park Chung-hee government. The final objective is to offer a coherent analysis of the consequences of the constitutional role played by the state and the implications for South Korean industrial relations structures.

Chapter Three will enunciate what is referred to throughout the study as the 'conventional view' of the involvement of women in the 1970's labour movement. To this end, abstracts from a selection of works which can, *in toto*, be fairly regarded as

representative; and which, indeed, constitute the common currency in contemporary South Korean discourse, will be discussed. Whilst the majority of relevant studies have emanated from a predominantly masculine perspective and, therefore, make up the dominant strand in the conventional view, there is, nevertheless, a distinct feminist ‘conventional’ strand, albeit relatively insubstantial, and any exposition of the generally held view of women in the South Korean labour movement would be incomplete without some recognition of that element. However, due to the paucity of available data on the subject, the discussion will, of necessity, be brief. Finally, an analysis of each of the above perspectives will be presented and, in so doing, lay the groundwork for the exposition of an alternative view; one which will be supported, not least, by evidence gained from women workers who were themselves actively involved in the democratic trade union movement in the 1970’s.

Chapter Four will clarify the research methodology employed, and will expand upon the case studies selected for scrutiny and describe the relevance, in the context of the study, of the individual interview subjects. The chapter will also focus upon two specific areas of conceptual ambivalence, the resolutions of which dictated the philosophical and structural dynamics of this thesis. The first concerns the author’s preference for evidential rather than theoretical considerations, whilst the second reflects a deep uncertainty about the true value of statistical data in the science of social enquiry. The closing section in the chapter will focus upon the nature and sources of primary data.

Chapter Five, although predominantly descriptive, is of great importance because, in its addressing of the evolution of the Korean textile and garment industry, it encapsulates the protracted and inexorable historical process whereby the Korean

peninsula became 'acclimatised' to military and economic domination by external powers. The chapter also points up the extraordinary re-emergence of Japan as a major industrial player after that nation's defeat in the Second World War, and its rapid penetration into the post-war South Korean economy. Seoul is much more than the capital city of South Korea and the locus of most of the events portrayed in this study; it does, in fact, command an almost mystical regard in the minds of all South Koreans. It is, therefore, pertinent to devote one section of this chapter to an explanation of how this circumstance came about. Within the industrial environs of metropolitan Seoul lies the *Pyung-hwa Shichang*, or Peace Market; the collection of buildings housing a warren of more than 850 sweat-shop garment factories employing, in 1970, in excess of 27,000 workers, mostly women, in what can only be described as Dickensian conditions. The circumstances of the Peace Market, and the endurance of those who laboured there, are keys to the entirety of this study: thus, a close examination of its history, and of the characteristics of those who profited from its existence, merits the chapter's final section.

Chapter Six is devoted to a discussion centred upon the nature of the female workforce in the textile and garment industry; their social origins and status, their aspirations, cultural legacies, economic circumstances and political sensibilities. The first section will outline theoretical issues in an analysis of gender in relation to culture, and will address the question of why female labour power was favoured by the holders and users of capital. The opportunity will be taken at this stage to elucidate the reasons for the high growth of female participation in the South Korean industrialisation process. The final section will summarise the major discussions in the chapter and their impacts upon the social life and social status of women workers.

Those impacts will be illustrated by the utilisation of primary research profiles and life stories.

Chapter Seven will focus upon conditions experienced within the Peace Market factory setting, and will include detailed job descriptions, the garment production process, employment relations, and conditions encountered by girls and young women for whom the factory was not merely a place of work, but which was also their 'home'. The occupational effects upon workers' health will be examined, as will be the nature and causes of some of the tensions which arose between workers themselves and between workers and management. Having scrutinised what the women were required to do in the factory, and the material circumstances in which they laboured, the chapter will conclude with an analysis of how much they were paid for their efforts and the purchasing power of that remuneration. This chapter effectively paints in the circumstances which combined to provide the seed-bed from which democratic trade unionism would emerge.

Prior to the iconoclastic initiative taken by women workers in the textile and garment industry, trade unionism in South Korea was characterised by two identifying features: first, it was exclusively male dominated and, second, it had a propensity to align with state and capital rather than with rank and file membership. Chapter Eight traces the historical development of the Korean labour movement and describes the process whereby successive governments were able to control and manipulate to their own ends organisations whose objectives were, ostensibly, to protect the rights of workers. The implications of Park Chung-hee's Yushin reforms on trade union activity will be discussed, as will be the crucial issue of the conflict between women workers

and the company-sponsored, 'yellow' or *oyong*, unions. The final section of the chapter will consist of an overview of the reaction generated among the international labour community by evidence, emanating from women workers in South Korea, of the oppression of organised labour by the Park regime.

As a reflection of the author's deep conviction that the contributions of individual personalities can exert an extraordinary and disproportionate influence upon historical events, Chapter Nine is devoted to the development of this belief and a discussion of the impacts upon the South Korean labour movement of two such biographies. Yi So-sun and Han Soon-nim; both women, and both endowed with courage, determination, and intelligence. However, whilst the contribution of the former to the furtherance of democratisation in the workplace was positive in the extreme, and continues to the present day, that of the latter proved to be negative, damaging, and ephemeral.

Chapter Ten is, of necessity, the longest chapter in the study, for it details two of the most socially important events in the history of South Korea: the actual birth of democratic trade unionism brought about by the efforts of women workers in the textile and garment industry, and the death of Park Chung-hee, the incumbent President. Although these two phenomena took place almost a decade apart, the research presented in Chapter Ten will establish a clear, direct, and undeniable linkage between them. It will draw upon the personal accounts of the founder members of the first 'autonomous' trade union, and illustrate graphically the lengths to which the state and the employers were prepared to go in their attempts to inhibit the realisation of the ambitions of the new organisation. The oral testimony, recorded on tape, of the high-

profile political figure who brought the life of Park Chung-hee, and of his oppressive regime, to an abrupt end provides an insight into his motive that has not previously been aired, and casts serious doubt upon the 'official' explanation.

The final chapter forms the conclusion of this study, and draws together all the diverse strands and themes which have been developed in previous chapters. In so doing, the seriously flawed nature of the 'conventional view' of the role of women in the process of democratisation in South Korea will be demonstrated, and the true dimension of the contribution made by those women, and their rightful place in South Korean history, will be established.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE AND ORGANISED LABOUR: BACKGROUND AND EVOLUTION

"I am the state"

(Louis XIV)

2.0 Introduction

It can be argued that the modern history of South Korea began as recently as 16 May, 1961, the day upon which General Park Chung-hee led the military coup that overthrew the legitimate, yet highly unstable, government of Chang Myon. History began in the sense that all which had gone before can be seen as having led inexorably to that single momentous event, whilst all that followed stemmed directly from it. The brevity of this time span, allied with the enormous changes which took place within it, constitutes a social and political milieu whose characteristics can be radically distorted by even the slightest misinterpretation or misrepresentation. Within the broader context of this chapter, two such instances will be considered and realigned; one being the erroneous conflation, and thus confusion, of terminology, and the other being a fundamental misreading of historical fact.

Following a brief summary of Korean political administrations between 1945 and 1987, successive sections will examine pertinent circumstances which existed prior to the inception of the Yushin reform, discuss some of that reform's salient characteristics, and illustrate the totality of its impact on the South Korean labour movement in general and the young women workers in the garment industry in particular. In so doing, two significant outcomes will emerge: Park Chung-hee's inexorable progression along the path to what can only be termed paranoia, and, at least

in terms of national economic growth versus human suffering and mass exploitation, an assertion of the axiom that the 'end' justifies the 'means'.

2.1 Political Administrations In South Korea 1945-1987

There were seven political administrations in South Korea between 1945 and 1987:

American Military Government 1945-1948

The American Military Government (AMG) governed the Korean peninsula south of the 38th parallel of latitude as an 'occupied area' rather than as a 'liberated area', even though Korea had not been a 'party of belligerency' during the Second World War (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). This was a period of direct rule by an external power during which Koreans were systematically denied meaningful active participation in the political process of government. Reflecting the fervent anti-communist ideology prevalent in the United States, the AMG favoured the rightist-conservative element in Korean politics and thereby paved the way for the traditional 'landlord class' to re-exert its influence and restore its social privilege. This rightist bias also enabled the revival and retention of the Japanese colonial bureaucracy. Factionalism among the right-wing groups was already in evidence, however, with the Korean Independence Party, led by Kim Ku, disassociating from the Rhee Seung-man faction because they feared that partition would become permanent (Yang Sung-chul, 1981).

The First Republic 1948-1960: Rhee Seung-man's Liberal Party

Rhee Seung-man's Liberal Party¹, the leadership of which consisted largely of nationalists returning from exile abroad and Koreans who had benefited from the Japanese colonial presence, formed what the United Nations General Assembly referred to as: "the only and lawful government of Korea" (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989) in July, 1948. Corrupt and reactionary, and informed by a US inspired Manichaeian view of politics in which all that was anti-communist was good, Rhee's administration promoted no constructive plans for economic development; took no steps to democratise the political process, instead restricted the power of both the political opposition and the National Assembly, and failed in its policy of social reconstruction. Guilty of excesses which matched those experienced under the Japanese, the Rhee government entered a period during which its legitimacy was increasingly questioned. The Korean War (1950-1953) effectively suspended coherent internal political activity. Having amended the constitution in 1954 to remove the two-year limit on presidential terms in office, Rhee's subsequent manipulation of the electoral process would have enabled him to remain in power indefinitely. The full extent of administrative improbity was publicly revealed during the rigged election of 1960 which returned Rhee for a fourth term as president. Nation-wide demonstrations, led by university students, and participated in by students from both middle and high schools (Kuah Kang-man, 1968), precipitated the downfall of the First Republic in April, 1960 (Bedeski, 1994).

The Second Republic 1960-1961: Chang Myon's Democratic Party

During a three-month period of interim government, led by Acting President Ho Chong, the Constitution was revised to provide for free and fair elections; a bicameral legislature, and the replacement of the presidential system with a parliamentary system (Korea Annual 1980). The subsequent administration of Premier Chang Myon's Democratic Party set out to strengthen the legislature and weaken the executive, while measures to devolve power to the regions were put into effect. The general orientation and long-term economic development plans of the Chang regime appeared highly promising (Kihl Young-whan, 1988), but they were not to be allowed time to come to fruition. The problems which confronted the Liberal government were not new, but had persisted throughout the period of the First Republic, and were too complex to resolve in less than one year (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). Internecine feuding, mainly between the old and the new factions both in government and in the military, blunted the progressive thrust of the administration, while university students emboldened by their success in the 'April Revolution' became increasingly vocal once again. Social disorder was met with hesitancy and indecision on the part of government and provided the pretext for a military coup that overthrew the Second Republic on 16 May, 1961.

Military Rule 1961-1963

General Park Chung-hee came to power as one of the leaders of the coup in May, 1961. In the single-minded pursuit of economic development, as the primary means whereby the military junta could gain political legitimacy, Park Chung-hee began by prohibiting elections for two years and suspending all political and labour institutions, and rebuilding them in accord with his own preference (Yang Sung-chul, 1981). Throughout his 18 years as the leader of South Korea, Park held resolutely to the view that: "Excessive interest in politics is one of the greatest obstacles to economic development" (Quoted in Kim Nak-joong, 1982). The main instrument of 'overt' political rule, and what would subsequently become one of Park's 'rubber stamp' institutions, was the Democratic Republican Party (DRP), founded in 1962 by Park and his close associate Kim Jong-pil. In reality, however, the true locus of socio-political power was the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, founded by the same two individuals, which became an all-pervasive and: "... awesome instrument for silencing dissidents" (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989).

The Third Republic 1963-1972: Park Chung-hee's Democratic Republican Party

The military leadership, having changed into civilian clothes, permitted what Ha Bong-gyu (1989) refers to as: "a period of relative democracy" in the 1960's during which party politics on a limited scale were allowed and national elections for the presidency and the National Assembly were conducted in a: "reasonably honest manner" (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). Park Chung-hee's strongest weapon against the opposition, and the reason for the electoral successes of the DRP, was the spectacularly high rate of economic growth and the explosive achievements of export-oriented industries. These were achieved at great social cost, however, and the disparity between

the wealth of the nation and the poverty of its workers fuelled increasing popular resentment. In response to internal and international pressures Park Chung-hee suspended the constitution and declared Martial Law in October, 1972.

The Fourth Republic 1972-1979: Park Chung-hee's Autocratic Rule

The 'Yushin Constitution', introduced in 1972, heralded a return to and, indeed, an enhancement of, arbitrary, authoritarian, and repressive rule. The Democratic Republican Party, the supposed party of government, became ineffective, and all the levers of power were in the hands of Park Chung-hee himself. Growing social unrest was met with an increasingly harsh reaction by the state; nation-wide rebellion was almost inevitable and, indeed, broke out. The means by which the state reacted to this burgeoning civil disorder were the direct triggers for Park's assassination by one of his closest friends in October, 1979. The vacuum left by the abrupt demise of a president who had acquired absolute power and a comprehensive apparatus of repression was not to be filled easily. The Prime Minister under Park Chung-hee, Choi Gyu-ha, assumed the presidency in December, 1979 but, deprived of the patronage of Park Chung-hee and lacking any independent political base, he stood little chance of remaining in office without the support of the army and its Chief of Staff, General Chun Doo-hwan.

The Fifth Republic 1980-1987: Chun Doo-hwan's Autocratic Rule

Support for Choi Gyu-ha was not forthcoming, and in August, 1980 Choi was 'persuaded' to resign (Lee Man-woo, 1990). Chun Doo-hwan relinquished his army commission at the same time and, on 30 August, was himself elected president by the National Conference for Unification, the 'rubber stamp' electoral college for the president created by Park Chung-hee. As the only candidate, Chun Doo-hwan received 2,524 votes out of a possible 2,525; one vote being declared invalid. Chun assumed the presidency of the Fifth Republic on 1 September, 1980 (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989)

2.2 Socio-Economic and Political Background

The thirteen years between the creation of South Korea as a separate nation and the military take-over by Park Chung-hee were turbulent in the extreme and were dominated by three major elements; the period of rule, and the legacy, of the AMG; the Korean War 1950-1953, and the continuing threat, sometimes warranted and sometimes 'manufactured', from communist North Korea (Kim Kihwan, 1993).

The authoritarian nature of the first 'indigenous' government in South Korea was determined by the US imperative to establish a political order conducive to its own

interests, and was reinforced by the corrupt and manipulative conduct of the president of the First Republic, Rhee Seung-man (Calverley, 1982). Indeed, it was the dramatic escalation of the authoritarianism of his administration; the overt repression of the political left, and the blatant misuse of state machinery, which gave increasing momentum to a coalition of opposition parties, and which heaped fuel on the fire of widespread popular unrest (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989). This burgeoning atmosphere of opposition and insurgency culminated in 1960 with the 'April 19 Student Revolution', an event marked by unmitigated violence on the part of the state police, which brought about not only the deaths of two hundred demonstrators, but also the almost immediate collapse of Rhee's government. The success of popular, extra-institutional, resistance was to remain within the collective psyche of subsequent anti-authoritarian movements in South Korea.

An interim government led by Ho Chong was superseded by what was, in effect, South Korea's first experiment with parliamentary democracy in the form of the Chang Myon administration, the Second Republic. It endured for only nine months, however, because it contained an inherent ambivalence. On the one hand, it came to power on the strength of a popular, revolutionary uprising, while on the other, its fundamental conservatism prevented it from responding to the demands for the punishment of the corrupt elements in the Rhee administration, and the equally radical demands for changes in relations with both the United States and North Korea (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). As a reflection of this disquiet, approximately one million people took part in some two thousand street demonstrations during Chang Myon's brief period in office (Ogle, 1990). The accompanying internecine factional conflicts, corrosive as they were, were not confined to the body politic but were reflected, with far greater

significance, in the army. Following the demise of Rhee Seung-man, two opposing groups became clearly delineated within the higher echelons of the military; those older, senior officers who had collaborated with the Rhee Seung-man regime, and those more junior generals who wanted to purge that older element (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). It was this younger group, led by General Park Chung-hee, who seized the initiative on 16 May, 1961.

2.3 Park Chung-hee: Military Politician

The military revolution is not the destruction of democracy in Korea. Rather it is a way for saving it: it is a surgical operation intended to excise a malignant social, political, and economic tumour. The revolution was staged with the compassion of a benevolent surgeon who sometimes must cause pain in order to preserve life and restore health (Park Chung-hee, 1962).

In his major work ‘Our Nation’s Path: Ideology of Social Reconstruction’ published in 1962, Park Chung-hee spells out in detail his interpretation of the socio-political history of Korea; the endemic malaise that was the legacy of that history, and his vision for the future. Being, as he unquestionably was, such a seminal figure in the unfolding, and defining characteristics, of South Korean history, it is considered useful to examine briefly the nature and background of the man who was to hold his country in an iron grip for almost two decades, and who was to be instrumental in the restructure of its economy and the eradication of its democracy.

Born in 1917 to peasant farmer stock in Kyongsang Bukdo province, in the south-east of the Korean peninsula, Park Chung-hee was the youngest of seven children. His first full-time employment, at the age of twenty, was as a teacher at the local primary school, where he remained for two years before enrolling at the Manchukuo

Military Academy in 1939. Graduating two years later at the top of his class, Park was immediately selected to attend the Imperial Japanese Military Academy in Tokyo. This was followed by one year of commissioned service in the Japanese army before he was discharged at the end of the Second World War. Having decided that military service was his forte, Park entered the Korean Military Academy in 1946, from which he graduated later in the same year with the rank of captain² (Yang Sung-chul, 1981).

Park was both a charismatic and an enigmatic individual; austere, idealistic, highly intelligent, intensely patriotic but, as will be shown, fatally flawed. One of the most intriguing, and as yet not fully explained, events in his life took place in 1948 when Park was court-martialled and sentenced to death for his active involvement in the South Korean Workers' Party, a communist underground movement that had infiltrated the military. Partly due to the enthusiasm with which he co-operated with those delegated to investigate his misdemeanour, Park was pardoned and reinstated (Yang sung-chul, 1981). The fact that, some twelve years later, he was to ground his social, political, economic, and cultural philosophy on a robust and uncompromising anti-communist ethic poses as many questions about his intellectual and ideological flexibility as it does about the experiences which precipitated his Damascene conversion during those intervening years.³ Advancement came swiftly during the Korean War, and Park Chung-hee's record of promotion bears testimony both to his ability to 'reinvent' himself, and to his unique leadership qualities: by the age of thirty-six he was a Brigadier General and five years later he became Chief of Staff of the First Army (Park Chung-hee, 1962).

One of the fundamental components of all political ideologies is an

understanding, or an interpretation, of human nature (Leach, 1991) and, both in his published works and the declared principles upon which he based the policies of his administration, Park demonstrates the extent to which he was imbued with the ethos of the military and its concept of the 'disembodied' human being. With these considerations in mind, the essential characteristics of the Army of the Republic of Korea (ROKA) prior to the military coup in May, 1961 can be seen to afford crucial insights into the nature of the state machinery that evolved subsequently.

Having expanded greatly after the Korean War as a result of substantial investment of US capital and expertise, the ROKA consisted of some 600,000 men at the time of the military coup (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). There were, however, growing internal grievances and a decreasing morale amongst the officer corps of this huge military institution; a rising level of discontent due largely to post-war promotion bottlenecks. To this degree of tension must be added the facts that the ROKA was neither democratically-trained nor democratically-minded. For a variety of reasons, not least its relatively recent formation, it had neither a deeply-embedded foundation in professionalism nor had it developed any tradition of political neutrality, unlike its counterparts in the US and the United Kingdom. The experience of the Korean War propelled the ROKA into an unprecedented position vis-à-vis skill, managerial techniques, specialisation, and the facility to design and maintain institutional structures. Such was the measure of the proficiency of the ROKA that General Park Chung-hee and a core of only twenty middle-ranking officers needed to mobilise fewer than 1,600 men to execute the almost bloodless coup in a matter of hours (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). It will be shown how the politicisation of the army, and its direct involvement in national politics, was an essential pre-condition for Park Chung-hee's

rise to power.

A further prerequisite for military rule was the 'de-politicisation' of civil society. By 22 May, 1961, a mere six days after the initiation of the military coup, over 2,000 politicians, including the deposed premier Chang Myon and his close associates, had been arrested. By the end of the summer, 17,000 civil servants and 2,000 senior army officers had been either taken into custody or summarily dismissed (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). The fact that, as has been indicated above, the Second Republic of Chang Myon represented South Korea's first venture into the realm of parliamentary democracy magnifies the radical nature of such sweeping measures.

As a product of the military institution, it is unsurprising that Park Chung-hee should develop into an exemplar of the 'military politician'. Indeed, a direct correlation is evident between his military and political careers inasmuch as it is possible to read across the profound emphasis he continued to place on modernisation, authoritarianism, the importance and value of the intelligence services and, perhaps above all, the fervent anti-communism mentioned above. It was this latter element that Park asserts was the trigger for his military coup (Park Chung-hee, 1962). South Korean students, who had played leading roles in the waves of social unrest which had swept the country for more than a year, announced that they had contacted their counterparts in the North and had agreed upon a process of unification. The first proclamation made by Park's 'revolutionary military government' declared that the coup had been essential, principally in order to pre-empt a communist take-over⁴ (Park Chung-hee, 1962).

The fundamental objective of the Park Chung-hee junta was, in fact, twofold;

the elimination of leftist elements in the country and the construction of a national economy (Cole, 1971). For the nascent labour movement in South Korea these dual aims were to become inextricably interlinked. As will be shown, the construction of a national economy in accordance with Park Chung-hee's Yushin ('revitalising reform') model was dependent upon the rigid control and exploitation of the labour force, and all opposition to the measures adopted to establish and maintain such control would be automatically, and expediently, labelled 'communist'.

For Park, anti-communism is the ultimate truth, and everything contrary to it must be suppressed ruthlessly (ECCKP, 1975).

The first formal, administrative structure to replace the Chang Myon cabinet assumed the title of Supreme Council for National Reconstruction (SCNR) and was chaired by Park Chung-hee himself. It immediately discarded the Constitution of the Second Republic by the implementation on 6 June, 1961 of the Law Regarding Extraordinary Measures for National Reconstruction. This first illustration of the Park Chung-hee imperative to cloak all repressive intention with a veneer of legitimate legislative instruments referred all executive, legislative, and judicial powers to the SCNR. Although at this stage the appropriation was collective, Park had taken his second step towards personal and absolute power.

It is imperative and even inevitable in this transitional stage of our revolution that we maintain a strong ruling machinery. As the task of national reconstruction gradually achieves success, however, the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government should be separated and assume their respective responsibilities for the public welfare (Park Chung-hee, 1962).

After two years of rule by the 'revolutionary military government' there was, indeed, a formal return to civil government; however, this entailed nothing more than Park and his cohorts changing out of army uniform into civilian suits. Furthermore, the

promised separation of powers was never to materialise: on the contrary, under Park's stewardship they would become seamlessly unified (ECCKP, 1975).

2.4 State And Labour: Background

It is important to note that on successful completion of the military coup, the SCNR faced neither a coherent working-class in South Korea nor a systematically organised labour movement. The former can be explained, in part at least, by the facts that the devastation of the Korean War added ideological homogeneity to an already culturally homogeneous population and narrowed markedly the range of debate on development issues. There had been a total reliance upon US aid to facilitate the rebuilding of the country, and import-substitute industries were largely undeveloped, inhibiting the formation of occupation-specific groups and thus, by extension, a recognisable working-class. As in all industrialised, or industrialising, societies, whilst the constituents of a 'working-class' may be in place and may be multiplying in number, until and unless those constituent parts coalesce into at least a semblance of a cohesive whole, empowered by that collectivity to further the cause of mutual economic and political advancement, such aggregations cannot be considered in 'class' terms (Thompson, 1966).

With reference to the absence of a coherently organised labour movement, it is necessary to look only briefly at history. It is not too great a simplification to view the development of the pre-1961 Korean labour movement as comprising three phases. The first phase was its development as an integral part of the anti-colonial, national independence movement during the period of Japanese rule. Within three months of liberation from the Japanese, there emerged a highly militant, left-wing trade union

leadership entitled Chun Pyong⁵ (National Council of Korean Unions). In the second phase, this leadership took over the entire labour movement within a remarkably short space of time (Kim Nak-joong and Kim Yun-hwan, 1970). The extreme nature of the Chun Pyong leadership was anathema to the AMG because of the clear threat it posed to US interests in South Korea, and by dint of a concerted and protracted application of all available measures and resources, the AMG succeeded in virtually eliminating Chun Pyong, whose membership fell in less than three years from a peak of more than 500,000 to almost zero (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). Of equal significance, and in order to fill the vacuum left by the demise of Chun Pyong, the third phase began when the AMG fostered the emergence of a more amenable and malleable labour leadership in the form of Hangoog Noryon (later to become the Federation of Korean Trade Unions, and to be referred to hereafter as the FKTU). From its beginning, the FKTU was closely aligned with the ruling administration (Lee Jeong-taik, 1988). From the First Republic of Rhee Seung-man (1948-1960) to the present day, the FKTU has been an ancillary organisation of the government in office and has been used consistently as a political instrument of reinforcement.

That there was little state intervention in the activities of organised labour in the early part of the 1960's cannot be construed as being indicative of a pro-labour mind-set on the part of the Park regime. The mass of industrial workers was still relatively small, albeit growing at a rapid rate, and their embryonic organisations were seen to pose no immediate threat or constraint to the declared intentions of the military dictatorship.

2.5 The Yushin Reform

The word ‘Yushin’ (revitalising reform) was first used in the context of this study by Yun Chu-chong, the Minister of Culture and Information, when he referred to President Park Chung-hee’s suspension of the Constitution and declaration of Martial Law on 17 October, 1972 as: “the October Yushin”. In simple terms, the Yushin model describes the process whereby the president constitutionally legitimised the concentration of all political and economic power into his own hands. In common with such evocations as ‘gulag’, ‘final solution’, and ‘ethnic cleansing’, the rubric ‘Yushin’ carries deeply ingrained and ambiguous connotations. It is necessary only to voice the phrase in South Korean society to elicit images and responses of an intensely polarised nature. For the overwhelming majority of the labour movement, religious organisations, and the intellectual community, ‘Yushin’ encapsulates all that was evil and socially destructive about the Park Chung-hee era, yet in that same society there still remains a strand of opinion that harks back to the period 1972-1979 with a degree of what can only be termed nostalgia. It is, perhaps, akin to the hackneyed yet prevalent attachment to fascism expressed in the catch-phrase: “at least he made the trains run on time” when critics of Italy’s Benito Mussolini are confronted.

The erroneous conflation, and thus confusion, of terminology referred to in the introduction to this chapter is that which occurs with the labels ‘Yushin Constitution’ and ‘Yushin System’, which appear to be considered as identical and interchangeable in much written and verbal discourse. There is, in fact, a clear and important distinction between them, insofar as the former can be strictly defined as the tangible document discussed below, whilst the latter was the mutable process that flowed from it. The crucial point is that the Yushin System was not defined by the Yushin Constitution but

was only facilitated by it. Any number of widely differing policies could have been grounded upon that same document, and it was specifically Park Chung-hee's use, or misuse, of the Constitution that gave the Yushin System its particular characteristics. A different president, or Park himself with a different mind-set or in different circumstances, could have governed within the same parameters encapsulated in the Yushin Constitution and yet have achieved more universally favourable outcomes⁶. It can, after all, be argued that there is nothing wrong with a 'dictator's charter' providing the dictator for whom the charter is drafted is both wise and compassionate. Such a licence could even be considered as 'democratic' if it had the approval, and represented the preference, of the majority of the populace. By the end of 1972, however, and after more than a decade in power, Park Chung-hee had forfeited any claim he might previously have had to either of the exemplary qualities of wisdom and compassion.

2.6 Background To Yushin

Two processes germane to the events of October, 1972 began to unfold during the 1960's; one internal and the other international. The internal process was that of the growing opposition, on many fronts, to the Park regime and which constitutes the core of this study. The international process, on the other hand, acquired added and dramatic momentum on 25 July, 1969 when US President Richard Nixon spelled out what came to be known as his 'Guam Doctrine'. This shift in US foreign policy was driven by the imperative for that nation to extricate itself from the conflict in Vietnam. In essence, the Guam Doctrine stated that unless any nation in Asia was confronted by a threat from a nuclear power, the US would not intervene. Furthermore, Nixon made it clear that US military aid programmes, particularly where they involved the disposition of American troops on foreign soil, would be attenuated. Changes in the international

stance of the US were not confined to broad generalisations or hypotheses; the acceleration of US/China rapprochement and moves towards agreement on peaceful co-existence between Washington and Moscow added to the sense of alarm being felt by the South Korean government (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). These shifts in policy and intent must, after all, be viewed from the perspective of a nation that was founded on the basis of the Cold War and whose security, and thus existence, was entirely dependent upon the continuing commitment of the US to its 'containment' strategy.

Internally, Park Chung-hee faced three discrete challenges: one being from within his own party, the Democratic Republican Party (DRP); the second being from the main opposition party, the New Democratic Party (NDP), which, on 29 September, 1970, elected Kim Dae-jung as its leader, and the third being the burgeoning extra-parliamentary dissident movements which included religious organisations, students, intellectuals, and the growing mass of disaffected workers (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989). The first of the above challenges was countered by a series of purges, expulsions, and enforced resignations which effectively de-politicised and marginalised any individual or faction that was perceived to constitute a threat to Park's leadership and authority in the DRP. The suppression and eradication of the other two challenges was the *raison d'être* of the Yushin reform, and all that was required to facilitate its implementation was a sufficiently convincing justification.

Confronted by the potentially disastrous consequences, as he saw them, of the withdrawal of the US security umbrella, Park Chung-hee had two distinct options: he could initiate a rapid and overt expansion of South Korea's military capability in order to point up to any would-be aggressor the inadvisability of such an adventure, or he

could embark upon a process designed to reduce tension between North and South and thereby pave the way for a relationship of 'peaceful co-existence' or even unification (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989).⁷ It is entirely consonant with his philosophy of government that Park elected to embrace both options, and his responses to these international diplomatic, and internal socio-political, developments illustrate both his opportunism and his duplicity. Opportunist insofar as he believed that he could utilise the national security issue to justify his assumption of absolute power, and duplicitous in the way that his public actions bore no relation to his private intent.

Within months of US President Richard Nixon's 'isolationist' pronouncement on the island of Guam, the Park administration launched a peace initiative aimed at the Kim Il-Sung regime in North Korea. This initiative appeared to be of real substance and was strongly encouraged by the United States and positively received by Kim Il-Sung. By August, 1971 a dialogue, mediated by the South Korean Red Cross, resulted in secret exchanges taking place in the following December. In the very same month, and much to the chagrin of the US State Department, Park Chung-hee declared a State of National Emergency on the grounds that: "fanatical war preparations of the North Korean puppet" were taking place (ECCKP, 1975). Casting some doubt on the veracity of these grounds, a US State Department spokesman asserted that:

The US has no evidence to support the claim that North Korea has acted provocatively (Quoted in Ha Bong-gyu, 1989).

Thus, the first major step toward the achievement of 'legitimate' authoritarian rule was accomplished despite there being no legal basis for Park's proclamation other than his inaugural oath to "defend the state".

Almost as though the State of National Emergency and, more pertinently, the alleged justification for it, were incidental to the primary focus, Park permitted the North/South diplomatic initiatives to escalate to such an extent that, on 4 July, 1972, a joint communiqué was issued declaring that:

First, unification shall be achieved through independent Korean efforts and not subject to external imposition or interference. Second, unification shall be achieved through peaceful means, and not through the use of force against each other. Third, as a homogenous people, a great national unity shall be sought above all, transcending differences in ideologies and systems (Quoted in Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989).

Barely three months after this historic announcement, and amid a widespread atmosphere of excitement and optimism generated by it, Park Chung-hee issued the proclamation of Martial Law which brought his manoeuvring for absolute power finally to fruition. In the light of the reality of events, and despite his protestations to the contrary, the introduction of the Yushin reforms could not be justified on the basis of a threat to national security (ECCKP, 1975). It is considered that a more credible explanation for the Park regime's apparent enthusiasm for *détente* with the North is that the 'peace' process bought time in which to complete a military build-up; while the real reason behind the introduction of the Yushin reforms, far from being to protect the nation from external threat, was a palpable expression of Park's fundamentally anti-democratic nature and his single-minded determination to crush all internal opposition.

2.7 Pre-Yushin Legislation

Labour legislation implemented by the US occupation administration in Japan after that nation's surrender in August, 1945 mirrored the legislation that had evolved in the United States; whilst the Labour Standard Law (LSL), first enacted in Korea in 1953, was no more than a *verbatim* translation of the counterpart instrument previously

imposed in Japan (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989). For reasons discussed elsewhere in this study the US administration in Japan was far more in tune with Japanese domestic circumstances post-World War II than was the case with the AMG in Seoul during its incumbency from September, 1945 until June, 1947. Whereas the 'American model' of labour management might be seen to have proved efficacious in Japan, it was singularly unsuited to Korean social, cultural, and industrial circumstances. It was a 'modern' piece of legislation; modern, that is, in Korean terms, which prescribed all the usual protections implicit in the administration of labour forces in advanced nations but, as will be shown, in South Korea during the 1960's and 1970's only some large companies dependent upon skilled employees saw it as being in their interest to comply with its provisions. Smaller firms, epitomised by the myriad of 'sweat-shops' in the Peace Market which constitute the focus of this study, could ignore the LSL with impunity; even such fundamental entitlements as payment for overtime or night work being routinely denied. The precise means whereby small-scale employers of unskilled labour could overtly bypass the requirements of state legislation and, indeed, how the state colluded with such evasion, will be discussed under separate headings.

The imperative to take cultural and social differences into account before legislation deemed appropriate in one society can, with a modicum of anticipation of success, be transplanted into another is both interesting and important, especially so in the case of South Korea. It is, therefore, considered useful and relevant to examine the issue in closer detail.

It is a matter of historical record that the process of developing a sophisticated framework of labour law in the United States was both protracted and substantially

influenced by the activities of workers, as opposed to constituting merely the reflections of governmental or managerial preference (Porges, 1991). For example, legislation defining the evolution of the collective bargaining system in the US can be traced through the Clayton Act of 1914, the Norris-La Guardia Act of 1932, the Wagner Act of 1935, the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, and the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959: almost half a century of the gradual modification and enshrinement into law of the rights and the protection of workers. Thus, the structure, the spirit, and the application of labour laws in the United States resulted from a dialectic extending over many years between American governments, the American judiciary, American management, and the American labour force. Crucially, that dialectic was grounded upon the circumstances and problems specific to the American industrial experience, and the outcome, not unreasonably, was a labour organisation that it was anticipated would be particularly suited to the United States (Huntington, 1968). With that in mind, it is submitted that a degree of insouciance or hubris, or both, would be necessary to assume that identical, or even similar, outcomes could be achieved by the application in totally different circumstances of such a singular template.

Numerous references are made throughout this study to the pervasive influence of traditional Confucian ideals in Korean society and there is no doubt that, although the latter part of the twentieth century witnessed a dilution of that influence due to the infiltration of western mores, those ancient principles continue to play a significant part in Korean life. This is certainly true in respect to the individual's attitude not only to the concept of 'authority', but also to the very idea of what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' (Lee Man-woo, 1990). These collective psychological traits are fundamental to any explanation of societal behaviour and throw into the starkest contrast the differences

between personalities and circumstances in Korea and those which pertained in the United States during the period of the formulation of that nation's labour system. They do, therefore, merit further consideration in this study.

Confucianism not only embraces the concept of authoritarian rule, but positively encourages its adherents to serve the ruler without question and without reference to any extraneous 'law'; whether that ruler be the monarch, the head of the family, or the boss of the company. Thus, the concept of 'the supremacy of the law' generally held in non-Confucian western societies; that fundamental and universal principle of fairness and 'just deserts' to which all citizens, with no exception and no matter how exalted, are subordinate, runs counter to the grain of traditional Korean thought. When community harmony is threatened with disruption by civil or political conflict, hierarchical authority immediately exerts itself, and any judgement of the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of an action is suspended in favour of the preservation of peace and order. In effect, 'the law' is whatever the monarch, the head of the family, or the company boss says it is.

The importance of 'conformity' within the Korean psyche is not only in accord with the Confucian ethic but has also been substantially reinforced by the fact that over the past 4,300 years the Korean peninsula has been subjected to invasion by a foreign power, on average, every five years (Pae Sung-moon, 1992). It is submitted that any nation whose history is so characterised by invasion and enforced subjugation is likely to become socialised into a clearly discernible state of routine obedience within which individualism is signally absent. Any society modified in such a way would have no tradition of deciding important public issues for itself through the exercise of debate

and deliberation and would, therefore, appear ideally conducive to the acceptance, through force of habit, of authoritative and dictatorial rule. Furthermore, any coherent enquiry into the truth or falsity of a proposition is unlikely to prove successful when the art of rigorous debate has atrophied; the overriding imperative becomes one of finding conciliation in amicable discourse, even at the expense of the truth. Lee Man-woo (1990) sums up succinctly the Korean character, in the context of this section, thus:

Given the importance of loyalty, hierarchy, family, unity, and uniformity emphasised by Confucianism, the potential for arbitrariness and authoritarianism is embedded within the culture. The collective consciousness of the Korean people still retains many traditional cultural traits. Aversion to individualism, diversity, abstract conceptualisation, and rationalism is still deeply ingrained. They believe people must share homogenous substance and quality in personality, ideas, and the way of life. Hence, management treats labour as the enemy (Lee Man-woo, 1990)

When confronted by a first generation labour force made up almost entirely of individual workers each of whom is deeply imbued with an almost spiritual aversion to any form of disobedience of established authority, it is not difficult to envisage the plethora of inherent difficulties confronting any extra-institutional attempts at labour organisation.

Yet another historical difference between the United States and South Korea, and one that further detracted from the likelihood of the US labour organisation model being appropriate for direct application by the AMG in Seoul, is the fact that in the United States industrialisation preceded unionisation. Thus the process of unionisation was one of reaction to problems and circumstances actually being experienced. In Korea, on the other hand, labour law was imposed upon a workforce prior to industrialisation and, therefore, prior to the experience of labour problems which would be unique to the Korean circumstance (Porges, 1991). It is, perhaps, unsurprising that,

given the levels of social and political chaos which existed in Korea after World War II and which are discussed in more detail elsewhere in this study, a system for the management of labour that was designed in the context of a radically different culture to meet substantially different agendas stood little realistic chance of unqualified success.

In the latter half of the 1960's a number of factors combined to mitigate against the Park Chung-hee regime's initial policy of detachment from involvement in the shaping of trade union structure and leadership. Most fundamental of these was that the extraordinary pace of industrialisation forced the regime to confront a problem endemic to all developing societies (Frankel, 1995; Young, 1993; Seidman, 1994; Jayant, et al., 1996); that is, how best to integrate a rapidly growing labour force consisting entirely of first generation industrial workers into a newly industrialised system. Another important factor was Park Chung-hee's Second Five Year Plan, initiated in 1967, which required a shift from 'import substitution' industrialisation and domestic capital mobilisation to 'export oriented' industrialisation based on foreign capital (Lee Jeong-taik, 1988; Cho Soon-kyung, 1987; Amsden, 1989; Lee Ok-jie, 1990; Hart-Landsberg, 1993; Janelli, 1993; Haggard and Cheng, 1987); the success of which depended upon the maintenance of an international comparative advantage in low-wage, passive labour. However, as both the size and the political awareness of the labour force grew, and as union organisations became more sophisticated, there was a commensurate increase in the collective preparedness to confront the state; clearly an unwelcome development that demanded governmental attention. The reality of the threat posed by organised labour became apparent towards the end of 1968 and early in 1969 when a series of large-scale industrial disputes brought about the closure of a number of American-owned electronics factories and the loss of much-needed foreign investment (Baker, 1979;

Ogle, 1990). Park Chung-hee's predictable response to this labour crisis was to institutionalise the direct control of labour in a manner corresponding to the accelerating dynamic toward the authoritarianisation of politics discussed elsewhere.

The turning point in Park's labour policy came in December, 1969 with the enactment of the Provisional Exceptional Law Concerning Labour Unions in Foreign Invested Firms (PELFIF). As its title suggests, this piece of legislation restricted the rights of workers in companies which were either foreign-owned or the recipients of foreign investment. Apart from acting as a portent of what was to come, PELFIF had minimal immediate effect on unionisation because at the time of its inception foreign capital in South Korea was relatively small; forming only 4.3% of total investment. (Choi Jang-jip, 1989). Its subsequent impact was to be far more profound, however.

Economic difficulties and social unrest increased throughout 1970 and 1971 as did the number of violations of civil liberties. Unarguably the single most significant event, in the context of the emergence of the democratic labour movement, to take place during this period was the public self-immolation on 13 November, 1970, of the young male textile worker Chun Tae-il⁸ (You Jong-il, 1995; Kim Hwang-joe, 1993; Cho Young-nae, 1984). It was apparent that the society of South Korea was caught inextricably in an ever-tightening spiral of opposition to the state, a vortex within which opposition was met by harsh reaction which, in turn, generated further opposition and even more severe suppression. The frequency of arrests; the use of torture; the absence of clemency except in response to massive international pressure and protest; the routine use of improper trial procedures, and the severity of punishments meted out, were all indicative of the abandonment by the state of the guarantees of civil justice and the

ever-widening gap between the ruler and the ruled.⁹ (Interviews, Lee Don-Myung and Hong Sung-woo, human rights lawyers, March, 1999). But such a downward spiral requires two primary actors, and while the Korean people were being subjected to increasingly onerous and punitive restrictions, Park Chung-hee was becoming more clearly established on an ineluctable path to isolation.

Finally, on 6 December, 1971, the State of National Emergency referred to above was declared on the dual pretext of the threat from North Korea and the heightening of international tension. That the true reason for the state of emergency was the domestic crisis was graphically confirmed on 27 December when a special bill was passed at a secret and illegal sitting of the National Assembly (Yang Sung-chul, 1981). The ensuing Law Concerning Special Measures for Safeguarding National Security (LSMSNS) granted to Park Chung-hee extraordinary emergency powers which included the rights to ban public assemblies and demonstrations; to control “irresponsible debates” in the mass media; to freeze wages, rents and prices; to intervene in labour disputes, and to mobilise any material or human resources for national purposes (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). It is not easy to reconcile these provisions with either the imperative to counter a threat from North Korea or respond to an increase in international tension. It is far less difficult, however, to conclude that the Park administration was all too aware of the reality of the economic rewards for subjugating the labour force and stifling the *vox populi*. The development of the Korean economy had, after all, become a major public issue, and economic progress had been seen by Park, from the earliest days of his Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, as the only means by which the regime could acquire international legitimacy.

It is at this juncture that the fundamental misreading of historical fact referred to in the introduction to this chapter occurs. The overwhelming majority of South Korean industrial relations studies identify the Yushin Constitution as the exemplar, the high point, of the subjugation and suppression of the South Korean labour movement. As has been described previously, the very mention of the soubriquet 'Yushin' can trigger a conditioned reflex of association with the sudden implementation of ruthless and uncompromising anti-labour legislation. In contradistinction to this widely held conviction, however, the view of the author is that it was the LSMSNS, with its transformation of collective bargaining practices into a compulsory arbitration procedure supervised by the state, and its prohibition of all industrial action, that was the watershed in the industrial relations arena during the Park Chung-hee era. The Yushin Constitution was not to come into effect for another ten months.

On 17 October, 1972 a State of Martial Law was proclaimed and, in a manner corresponding to the events of the previous December, the pretext for the proclamation bore only tenuous connection with the actual motive. The dual justification presented was that national unity was essential before meaningful dialogue with North Korea could be safely undertaken and, once again, international diplomatic circumstances (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989). These included Park's uncertainty about the outcomes of both Sino-US *rapprochement* and Sino-Japanese diplomatic normalisation; the severing of Japan's official ties with Taiwan, and the deteriorating situation in Vietnam. Park also felt considerable, and perhaps understandable, insecurity over the withdrawal from South Korea of some 20,000 military personnel of the US 7th Division that had begun in March, 1971 (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989).

The immediate effects of the Martial Law decree were the suspension of the Constitution (what little of it remained); the dissolution of the National Assembly, and the complete revocation of all freedoms of speech and assembly. It also facilitated a significant reinforcement of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) and other secret service organisations which were omnipresent in labour organisations; universities, and the mass media (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). What the decree constituted in reality was a '*coup in office*'; the disassembly of the Third Republic, and a precursor for Park's assumption of absolute power: by the end of October, 1972 it was given permanence in the form of the Yushin Constitution.

In the short transition period between the Third and Fourth Republics, a National Conference for Unification (NCU) was formed in order to retain at least a semblance of the democratic process; Park Chung-hee, as incumbent president, assumed the chairmanship. The NCU was to consist of no less than two thousand, and no more than five thousand, members who were publicly elected but who were prohibited from alignment with any political party and who were prohibited from the discussion of any overtly political issues during their individual election campaigns (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). The NCU was clearly destined to become little more than a 'rubber stamp' for decisions made exclusively by Park Chung-hee himself. On 23 December, 1972, Park was elected first President of the Fourth Republic.

2.8 The Yushin Constitution: Salient Features

The overriding tenor of the new Constitution was the great distinction and emphasis it placed on the office of president; the administrative structure of the Fourth Republic being based entirely on the changes made to the relationships between that

office and all other branches of government. In so doing, it gave legal form to the decline of party politics that Park Chung-hee had initiated during the latter part of the 1960's. Whilst the constitutions of the Second and Third Republics had guaranteed the plurality of the political party system, any effort to encourage the growth of political parties was absent from the Yushin Constitution. On the contrary, the previous requirement for all candidates for elective office, including those of membership of the National Assembly and the office of President itself, to be endorsed by a recognised political party, was removed (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989). Factionalism had been at the centre of many problems experienced in South Korea since the time of partition, and the resultant plethora of independent, unendorsed candidates would clearly lend credence to the 'divide and rule' axiom. Having acquired his 'rubber stamp', Park Chung-hee's marked preference for a strong executive over strong legislative and judicial systems was to be allowed free rein, and his inherent distaste for 'politics' was to find a more propitious ambience.

Under the provisions of the Yushin Constitution, limitations on presidential terms were also removed; he was empowered to make political appointments; nominate one-third of the members of the National Assembly and, perhaps most crucial of all, as will be illustrated below, issue any decree he deemed appropriate. The structures of the one-house National Assembly, and the Supreme Court, were weakened, and on the question of local self-government; the devolutionary process begun by Chang Myon that would detract substantially from the absolute power of the president, Park was unequivocal:

Local assemblies under the present Constitution shall not be formed until the unification of the fatherland has been achieved (Article 10, The Constitution of the Republic of Korea 1972).

Having used emergency legislation to great effect, albeit with questionable legitimacy, it is not surprising that Park should enshrine such powers in his new constitution. Article 53 informed the Korean people that:

In time of natural calamity or a grave financial or economic crisis, and in case the national security or the public safety and order is seriously threatened the president shall have power to take necessary emergency measures in the whole range of the state affairs, including internal affairs, foreign affairs, national defence, economic, financial, and judicial affairs (Ibid.).

The precise interpretation of ‘calamity’, ‘crisis’, ‘necessary emergency measures’, and ‘seriously threatened’ is clearly fundamental to the practical efficacy of this instrument and, as in all other administrative matters, such interpretation was at the sole discretion of Park Chung-hee himself.

The utility of the martial law device was also reflected in the Yushin Constitution, as was the breadth of the president’s latitude to declare it:

... in time of war, armed conflict or similar national emergency, when there was a military necessity, or a necessity to maintain the public safety and order by mobilisation of the military forces (Article 54(1) Ibid.).

The latitude afforded to the ‘interpreter’ of key words and phrases is, once again, of crucial importance.

From May, 1961 until December, 1972 Park Chung-hee had skilfully constructed a multifaceted apparatus for the control of all aspects and levels of South Korean society, an apparatus he had frequently utilised in order to bend and manipulate the constitution to suit his purpose. His actions were now no longer subject to judicial

review (Article 53(4) Ibid.), and he was the sole arbiter of their legality. In effect, the constitution, in Park's hands, had itself had become the ultimate control mechanism.

Park used the presidential emergency powers invested in him by the Yushin Constitution on numerous occasions, and to support the contention that it was Park's use of the Constitution that formed the 'Yushin System', not the Constitution itself, three idiosyncratic examples are submitted. On 9 January, 1974, Emergency Decree No. 1 was issued:

It shall be prohibited for any person to deny, oppose, misrepresent, or defame the constitution of the Republic of Korea. Any person who violates or defames the present emergency measures shall be subject to arrest, detention, search or seizure, without warrant thereof, and shall be tried and sentenced in the emergency courts martial and shall be punished by imprisonment (Laws and Documents, Korea Annual 1975).

Thus, all criticism of Park was outlawed. Under this instrument countless persons were arrested, 203 were tried and, in April, 1975, 8 were executed¹⁰ (ECCKP, 1975). Emergency Decree No. 4, promulgated on 3 April, 1974 was designed to counter anti-Park activities on the part of students, that segment of Korean society that had long been a thorn in the side of successive administrations, and singled out the National Democratic Youth and Student Federation. Not only did the decree prohibit the joining of that organisation, it also made it illegal for any citizen to: "praise, encourage, or sympathise with it" (Ibid.). 13 May, 1975 witnessed the issue of Emergency Decree No. 9 which made it a criminal offence to: "spread false rumours" (Laws and Documents, Korea Annual 1977).

These examples, and others of similar ilk, which effectively rendered any criticism of the state, in public or in private, and in any form whatsoever, an indictable

offence, are direct reflections both of Park's intent and of his paranoia; they are not attributable to the Yushin Constitution *per se*.

The aim of our revolution was not to ignore the value of democracy but to lay a solid foundation for rebuilding true democracy..... the author believes that the democracy we aim to build in this revolutionary period should be the one that meets social and political reality, and not the unworkable West European democracy (Park Chung-hee, 1962).

After his assassination, one of his associates recalled:

The impression that Park's domain was infested with his intelligence agents permeated every nook and cranny of the society. A sense of the immediacy of his governance pervaded the whole country. Bureaucrats, politicians, judges, military men, diplomats, businessmen, journalists, professors and scholars – not to mention his minions and sycophants – all performed for a one-man audience, “the personage on high”. When it was necessary to refer to him in private conversations, even his critics resorted to hushed euphemisms (Quoted in Clifford, 1994).

The irony is that instead of ‘Koreanising’ democracy, Park destroyed it.

As has already been highlighted, the labour movement was not greatly affected by the provisions of the Yushin Constitution because the fundamental changes in policies pertinent to labour had been enacted ten months previously in the Law Concerning Special Measures for Safeguarding National Security. Neither the Constitution itself, nor the subsequent revisions to labour laws which were to take place in March, 1973 and December, 1974 were, of themselves, of major import; they were, in fact, little more than restatements of LSMSNS. However, LSMSNS did have a dual implication for the labour movement that was to engender major repercussions and developments. On the one hand there was the institutionalisation of direct control by the state over the growing number of newly-organised unions, and on the other there was the added impetus given to the emergence of politically dissident worker groups which

were to initiate a cleavage within the labour movement. One side of the cleavage was represented by the official, company-dominated, and state-sponsored structure with the FKTU at the top, and the other by the unofficial, autonomous, 'democratic' organisations, led by women workers in the textile and garment industry. For obvious reasons the two factions were bitterly antagonistic toward each other, and although the 'democratic' organisations (which were subsequently to come within the aegis of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU)) were technically illegal, they could, with substantial justification, claim moral legitimacy. Whilst the FKTU continued to constitute an integral part of the state mechanism, the activities of the autonomous unions rapidly made them both the only centre for the labour rights movement, and a political opposition force (Choi Jang-jip, 1989).

2.9 Economic Overview

Although subsequent chapters will address the levels of oppression and exploitation endured by workers during the period under consideration; ever-worsening conditions which flowed directly from Park Chung-hee's systematic tightening of the restrictions imposed on organised labour, it is pertinent at this juncture to comment upon the broad economic circumstances within which such restrictions were imposed.

The evidence of South Korea throughout the incumbency of Park Chung-hee (1961–1979) may be seen as running directly counter to the hypothesis that the more economically successful a country is, the greater the opportunity for improving the quality of life for the mass of the population, and for facilitating the advance of social democratisation. In the Korean case, extraordinary economic success was achieved largely by strategies which markedly reduced the quality of life for the majority of

working people, and which removed even the most fundamental of human rights. Three characteristics of the growth of the Korean economy as a whole are worthy of mention:

- a. Its speed. GNP growth averaged 8.5% per annum between 1962 and 1980, and 10% per annum in the peak years 1967-1976.
- b. Reliance upon exports. Merchandise export growth averaged 30% from 1962-1981, far above any other country in the world.
- c. Relatively fast inflation

(Calverley, 1982)

Interestingly, Calverley lists one more indicator of the Korean economy and, in so doing, falls foul of one of the statistical problems, that of the trustworthiness of the source, highlighted in Chapter Four. For the same period covered by the three characteristics noted above, Calverley compliments the economy for:

Its equity. The distribution of income in Korea between urban and rural sectors and among the population is one of the most equitable of developing countries (Ibid.).

Those tens of thousands of workers, mainly women, who laboured interminably in the sweat-shops of the Peace Market and the surrounding area would have found such an assertion somewhat difficult to reconcile with their own experience. Difficult, that is, until they noted the sources of the figures upon which the compliment was based. Those sources were the Bank of Korea, an institution under the control of Park Chung-hee, and the Economic Planning Board, originally entitled the Ministry of Reconstruction, and led by the Deputy Prime Minister who: “received his instructions directly from the President” (Kim Kihwan, 1993).

Statistics which do accord with all the primary and personal evidence garnered by the author, and which were produced by the Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development (CISJD), clearly illustrate that, far from being distinguished by its equity, income inequality progressively increased during the Yushin period, and

substantiate the reality of the practical application of Park Chung-hee's 'growth first, distribution later' imperative, and of his regime's harsh labour controls. Between 1970 and 1978 the income share of GNP of the top 20% of the population increased from 41.6% to 46.7%, whilst that of the middle 40% fell from 38.8% to 37.8%, and that of the lowest 40%, the band in which those selfsame women workers were located, fell even more substantially from 19.6% to 15.5% (CISJD 1980 and 1987). In a World Development Report published in 1981 by the World Bank, South Korea was credited with the highest rate of growth in manufacturing production and industrial exports of the 124 countries surveyed during the two decades 1960 - 1979, and was second only to Singapore in the highest rate of GNP growth *per capita*. In real terms, the value of exports from Korea increased from \$US41 million in 1961 to \$US10.23 billion in 1978 (World Bank, 1981).

The added irony behind these statistics was that the contribution made by the textile and garment industry to this extraordinarily rapid economic expansion was greater than any other single industry, with an annual growth rate between 1967 and 1971 of 28.5%; in 1972 36.2%, and in 1973 39.9%. Meanwhile, between 1970 and 1973 the price of rice increased by more than 62% (World Bank Economic Report, 1976). Chapter Seven will highlight the paucity of the wages paid to the women and young girls who comprised the majority of the workforce in the textile and garment industry and the ease with which employers could avoid paying even what was due, let alone contemplate wage increases. Against this backdrop of a booming economy; chronic low wages for those who contributed most to its achievement; an ever-widening gap between the rich minority and the poor majority, and a steep escalation in the price of staple domestic commodities, it is unsurprising that the rising level of expectation

among workers was matched by their increasing dissatisfaction. The combination of a low paid industrial workforce and a rapid expansion of employment had initiated the formation of a homogeneous, first generation, working-class, but it was one for which formal representation in the workplace had been almost completely emasculated by anti-labour legislation (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989). Nevertheless, the speed of economic growth and urbanisation was bound to create strains within Korean society; tensions which would inevitably raise the political expectations of the emerging working-class and undermine the traditional respect for authority. With the proper performance of trade union organisations reduced to virtually nil, an institutional vacuum ensued; a vacuum which would be filled by church groups, students, intellectuals and, most important of all not only in the context of this study but in the evolution of the Korean labour movement as a whole, young women workers in the textile and garment industry.

NOTES

¹ Rhee Seung-man was from an aristocratic (*'yangban'*) background and had been in political exile in the United States for more than thirty years. He was in his seventies when he returned to Korea after WWII. He had no experience of administering large-scale operations, and no interest in economic matters (Oh Kie-chiang, 1999).

² It is of interest to note that Park Chung-hee's fellow trainee-officers at the Academy included Chang To-yong (Army Chief of Staff at the time of the 1961 coup and, therefore, its 'nominal' leader in terms of military seniority), Chong Il-kwon (appointed Premier of the Third Republic by Park Chung-hee, and instrumental in the formulation of the Yushin Constitution), and Kim Jae-kyu, Park's assassin (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989).

³ This is by no means the only detail of Park's life which remains uncertain. Even the number of times he was married is shrouded in mystery, and ranges between one and three (Yang Sung-chul, 1981).

⁴ That the 1961 coup was actually planned prior to the fall of Rhee Seung-man renders spurious and opportunistic Park Chung-hee's claim that it was precipitated by socio-political unrest under Chang Myon (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989).

⁵ Chun Pyong is dealt with in more detail in Chapter Nine.

⁶ The latitude afforded by the Yushin Constitution to the Park administration is exemplified by the frequency with which admirable provisions; admirable, that is, from a liberal democratic perspective, are qualified with such caveats as: "within the scope defined by law" and "shall be determined by law". For example, Article 29(1) states:

The right to association, collective bargaining and collective action of workers shall be guaranteed *within the scope defined by law* (author's italics) (The Constitution of the Republic of Korea 1972, Laws and Documents, Korea Annual 1975).

⁷ It is of importance to note that, constitutionally, unification of North Korea and South Korea was not an 'optional extra' to be used as a bargaining chip on the whim of the president but was, instead, a fundamental tenet. Article 46 of The Constitution of the Republic of Korea 1972 states:

Before the President assumes his office, he shall take the following oath: I do solemnly swear before the people that, by observing the Constitution, defending the State, endeavouring to promote freedom and welfare of the people *and pursuing the peaceful unification of the fatherland* (author's italics), I shall faithfully execute the duties of the office of the President (Ibid.).

⁸ The degree to which this symbolic act brought the issues of labour to the forefront of South Korean debate, and galvanised the democratic movement into positive action is discussed in Chapter Eleven.

⁹ The precise nature and magnitude of these infringements is dealt with in detail in later chapters.

¹⁰ In July, 1974, poet Kim Chi-ha was sentenced to death for writing a poem critical of Park Chung-hee. When his defence lawyer, Kang Shin-ok, commented that justice in Korea was now more harsh than under Japanese colonial rule, he was awarded a ten year prison sentence and barred from practising law for twenty years (Kang Sug-won, 1977).

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONVENTIONAL VIEW OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE 1970's KOREAN LABOUR MOVEMENT

3.0 Introduction

As a discipline, industrial relations has never been very interested in the experiences of women, as workers or as trade unionists. The centre of attention has long been occupied by men. The workers, the organisers, the strikers; all have been men. One looks in vain for the contributions of women: their organising drives, their strikes, are 'missing' from the history books. Of women, we learn mostly that they were cheap, unskilled labour; potential strike-breakers who threatened to take away men's jobs (Forrest, 1993).

In the many accounts of trade unionism in Korea, there is a neglect of the role and place of women. It is argued that this neglect is part of a general outlook, reflected in public assessments of the society, that systematically ignores the social and political involvement and activity of women in the construction and development of the society. More specifically, it is submitted that the portrayal of the contribution of Korean women labour activists of the 1970's has fallen victim to precisely this type of analysis.

To present as a tangible account the 'conventional view' of the involvement of women in the 1970's labour movement, abstracts are taken from a selection of works which can be regarded as representative of this type of analysis (e.g. Choi Byung-soo, 1984; Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989; Choi Jang-jip, 1989; Kim Kum-soo, 1989). Although the majority of studies focusing upon this issue have been produced by men, there are distinctive feminist views which, despite being of lesser substance, are relevant and worthy of note. The account would be incomplete were this element to be omitted. The feminist perspectives emanate both from western disciplines (e.g. Karl, 1995; Heyzer,

1986; Enloe, 1983) and from within South Korea itself (e.g. Cho Wha-soon, 1988; Shin In-ryong, 1984 and 1985; Kim Sun-kyung, 1997; Soon Young Song Yoon, 1977). However, due to the shortage of material, the discussion will be relatively brief.

An exposition of the above perspectives in this chapter will, in effect, lay the groundwork for the construction of an alternative view. This alternative account is supported, not least, by evidence gained from women workers who were actively involved in the democratic trade union movement in the 1970's. The author subscribes unequivocally to the belief that a person with experience is never at the mercy of a person with an argument.

3.1 General Characteristics

It is accepted as given, by those who have contributed to, and systematically reinforced, the widely accepted image of industrial relations of the period in question, that in terms of union democracy, authoritarian leadership, labour aristocracy, union corruption and union legitimacy, there exists a clear bifurcation of South Korean trade union philosophy and activity. As defined in the work of Pang Yong-suk and Lee Mok-hee (1990), one strand of Korean unionism was the national-level union epitomised by the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), whose leaders were appointed either directly by the military government or by the managers of individual enterprises, thus seriously compromising any possibility of autonomy, and whose administrations and organisations were, as a consequence, largely characterised by a marked anti-labour ethos. One of the first acts undertaken by the Park Chung-hee regime following the military coup of 16 May, 1961 was the dissolution of all social and political institutions, including trade unions (Lee Jeong-taik, 1988; Deyo, 1987). Three months later, nine

Park Chung-hee placemen (Lee Kyu-chul (Chair of Reforming Committee), Han Ki-soo (Secretary and spokesperson), Lee Kang-cho (Organiser), Cho Chang-hwa (Financial Secretary), Kim Kang-soo, Cho Kyu-dong, An Kang-soo, Choi Jae-joon, Kim Joon-ho (Members), FKTU, 1979), re-formed and reorganised the FKTU. This was done in a manner that accorded with the 'special education' they had received from the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) over a period of one week immediately prior to the reformation (Lee Mok-hee, 1996). Under such circumstances it is difficult to reconcile the purpose and dynamic of the post-coup FKTU as one that provided advantageous representation of members' interests.

The second strand of philosophy and activism in the Korean labour sphere is commonly, and collectively, referred to as the 'democratic' trade union movement; that is, the informally-institutionalised, officially unrecognised, popular movement that developed outside the aegis and control of both the FKTU and the Ministry of Labour. Most of the branch unions which constituted the democratic movement were located within the light manufacturing sector; notably textiles, electronics, and garments, and were required by law to be affiliated with a national-level union (Deyo, 1987). In the case of garment and textile workers this was the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU). The national-level union was, in turn, compelled by legislation to affiliate with the FKTU. Although nominally and bureaucratically bound to the regime-prescribed Federation, the roots of the democratic movement lie in the refusal by local level union leaders, who were predominantly female, to accede either to FKTU control or manipulation by capital.

3.2 The Conventional View

When I was finally able to return to my home after two and a half years in hiding, from 1978 to 1981, I was deeply hurt to find that many unjustified labels had been hung on me. Apparently, I was a paternalist, an economic unionist, a pragmatist, a revisionist, and a romantic (Chung Myong-ja, 1998, executive member of the Dong-il Textile branch union throughout the 1970's).

The salient features of the allegedly minimal role played by women in the 1970's Korean trade union movement are held to be that it was purely economic in character, devoid of political perspective, with a wilful absence of solidarity with like-minded organisations, and that it was not grounded on any coherent ideology (Kim Kum-soo, 1989; Chang Myung-kuk, 1991). Endowed with such all-encompassing and fundamental defects, it is not surprising that the legacy bequeathed by the women activists of the 1970's to the labour movement as a whole is considered to be negligible.

3.2.1 Economic Unionism

At the core of the conventional assessment of the activities of Korean women labour activists in the 1970's lies the conviction that they were merely bargaining agents intent upon securing a larger slice of the economic cake. The scope of their collective ambition did not, it is contended, extend to the procurement of the entire cake, or to that of the factory in which it was produced. Male writers and commentators such as Min Young-sik, 1987; Park Hyun-chae, 1987; Kim Kum-soo, 1984, 1989; Her Sang-soo, 1990; Chang Myung-kuk, 1991; Choi Byung-soo, 1984; Chong In, 1987; and You Jong-il, 1996, share a common theme in the assertion that the principal characteristic of the 1970's women's labour movement was economic, and that the motivation for initial formation, and the singular goal of all ongoing union activities, was centred solely upon the imperative to improve working conditions. Furthermore, and underlining this

inward-looking trait, it is held that the simplistic and single-minded efforts to increase wages and improve fringe benefits were confined to individual enterprise unions; no efforts were made to combine with other branches, and no suggestion that there was any awareness of the added strength that solidarity would engender. References are frequently made to a statistic that of the 9,536 disputes recorded between 1971 and 1979 almost 75% were triggered by demands for wage increases, the payment for overtime work, or the payment of wages which were overdue (e.g. Park Hyun-chae, 1985). Often quoted are the examples of the Pagnim textile workers' strike in 1974 (see Chapter Eight), which centred upon the demand for the remittance of unpaid over-time, and the Hae-tae sweet factory workers' efforts in 1979 to have their working day reduced to eight hours (Soon Jum-soon, 1984). Neither of these individual enterprise actions can be regarded as achievements of major significance by themselves and, if analytical focus is centred almost exclusively on these, and similar incidents, the impression can indeed be gained of a concentration on the purely parochial and exclusively economic.

Whilst accepting that the issue of low wages was a powerful instrument in the efforts to mobilise workers during the period, Kim Kum-soo (1989) insists that the total absence of additional ideological underpinning or, indeed, any coherent structure whatsoever, detracted markedly from the practical effectiveness of the movement. Focusing on an agenda limited to wages and working conditions was strategically inappropriate in circumstances in which the real objectives were crystal clear. The economic policy of the Park regime, especially in the first years of the 1970's, was exclusively export-based and, as far as Park was concerned, crucial to the success of that protracted export drive was the imperative to establish and maintain comparative advantage in world markets by keeping labour costs as low as possible. Dissipating the

potential power and influence of mobilised labour on a fragmented scenario of isolated wage claims was not only a case of attacking the symptom rather than the illness, it was fundamentally naïve and ultimately futile.

Two complementary factors underlie these conventional and widespread criticisms, based on a view of trade union consciousness of the women workers. First, it is argued that the women did not understand the Marxist theory of economics wherein capitalism is, of necessity, a form of exploitation that can only be resolved by revolution and, second, they did not recognise the need for workers and intellectuals to come together in political alliance to remedy the ‘crisis of capitalism’. Because they had no awareness of the wider implications of the Yushin reforms, nor any knowledge of historical materialism, the women activists failed to recognise the magnitude of the change that was necessary or the means by which it could be brought about (Chong In, 1985; Kim Kum-soo, 1989; Chang Mong-kuk, 1991). In other words, and on a more practical level, there is the implied criticism that Korean women workers were narrowly focused because they did not consciously recognise that the fundamental tenet for the proper function of any trade union movement is to extend its strategic sphere of interest beyond a narrow focus on wages and conditions, and work towards the assertion of the power of organised labour in the formation and implementation of political and social policy.

Chong In (1985) elaborates this argument by suggesting that the economic unionism that characterised the women’s movement constituted a positive danger to the nascent labour movement as a whole. He submits the proposition that when confronted by a regime intent upon the repression of labour, a loosely bound organisation

motivated only by economic and self-regarding considerations would not possess either the confidence, the resolve, or the resilience to resist the gathering opposition to trade union development. Chong cites the events following the assassination of President Park Chung-hee in 1979 as both a confirmation of his viewpoint and a clear indication that labour activists in the 1980's benefited little, if at all, from any legacy bequeathed by their predecessors in the 1970's. The incoming military dictator, General Chun Doo-hwan, revised radically the labour legislation put in place by the previous administration and ordered the complete restructuring of trade union organisation from industrial level to enterprise level. Women activists in the democratically organised unions were dismissed from their employment under the terms of the new legislation, were sent to 're-education' camps, and some were imprisoned; all without any resistance whatsoever (Choi Byung-soo, 1985). They were, in effect, totally defeated almost by a single stroke of the dictator's pen, and the conventional assumption is that these events provided ample evidence that the activists of the 1980's had gained nothing of lasting value from the endeavours of the 1970's women trade unionists. They had inherited no ideological bedrock, no strategic awareness, and no political consciousness simply because those crucial elements were absent from the collective mind-set of their predecessors, who had been driven only by parochial self-interest. The accepted view is that, in their short-sighted attempts to achieve immediate, and localised, outcomes, the activists of the 1970's had developed no universal labour principles or long-term perspectives, and they had thus failed to create a coherent and adaptable basis that would translate across the decades and upon which responses to attacks by the state on the labour movement might be grounded.

3.2.2 Lack Of Political Perspective

It is clear that the criticisms contained within the previous section are inextricably linked with the accusation that the 1970's women activists were devoid of political perspective. Whilst accepting the validity of economic considerations, Chang Myung-kuk (1994) is unequivocal in his declaration that such considerations, and the activities they stimulate, must take second place to an all-encompassing and universally accepted political consciousness. In his 1984 study, Choi Byung-soo insists that although the 1970's women applied all their efforts to the achievement of purely economic ends, they lost the initiative even in that limited sphere simply because of their political immaturity and their inability to grasp the most fundamental socio-political realities. Throughout the 1960's and the 1970's, Park Chung-hee adapted and redrafted the South Korean Constitution and labour legislation virtually at will (Park Young-ki, 1986), and although each successive alteration and innovation invariably increased the repression of working people, according to these commentators there appeared to be no comprehension among women workers of the political process that was unfolding, of the serious consequences of allowing that process to go unchecked, or of any means by which it might be challenged.

In his critical assessment Kim Kum-soo (1986) finds an explanation for the perceived failure of the 1970's women to pass on a baton of any consequence to their counterparts in the 1980's: the concentration on working conditions at the expense of the development of a universal labour rationale and a sound political base resulted in an absence of influence with both the political opposition parties and, perhaps more crucially, the wider Korean society. He is saying, in effect, that beyond the narrow confines of individual factory walls, little, if any, impact was generated by the activities

of those women trade unionists inside the factories. Thus there is identified a duality of prerequisites for a mature, effective, and progressive trade union movement: to combine with intellectuals in order to formulate an all-encompassing theoretical and ideological base, and to align positively with the officially recognised political opposition in order to utilise a formally structured channel for dialogue between trade union and government; a channel that should have been, but was not, provided by the FKTU.

Despite recognition being afforded to the efforts of women to organise educational programmes for the purpose of encouraging union members to participate more comprehensively in union activities, sharp criticism is levelled against both the content of those programmes, and the fact that they were conducted, by and large, under the aegis of the church. During the 1970's, there were two pre-eminent religious organisations dedicated to the cause of Korean working people; the Protestant Urban Industrial Mission (UIM), and the Young Catholic Workers' Organisation (JOC, from the French *Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne*). According to Kim Kum-soo (1986), lectures and discussion groups instituted and directed by these religious bodies were restricted to such fundamentals as why trade unions were necessary; explanations of labour laws and how they affected individual workers; the gender inequalities explicit in the division of labour, and an introduction to the art of negotiation. What was notable by its absence was any reference to political matters. Thus, it is claimed, rank and file union members and leaders alike remained ignorant of the true nature of the obstacles which confronted them. Yet again, such a serious omission could only render inevitable the attenuation of meaningful labour movement development. MinYoung-sik (1987) lays the blame for the opportunism and revisionism that he detects in the 1970's women's labour movement firmly at the church's door, inasmuch as whatever degree of solidarity there

may have been among the women, the nature of the church's influence ensured that it existed between church groups, rather than between branch union groups. Women were encouraged to consider their own circumstances and to devise strategies for improving them in a very localised way. In so doing, they effectively reinterpreted and, at least in part, rejected the fundamental tenets of labour collectivism. Chang Myung-kuk's 1991 study picks up on the detail of church involvement in the education of workers and blames that for the development of a paternalistic and dependent ethos among the embryonic democratic unions. Chang's paternalism is evidently that less favourable interpretation of the concept whereby authority figures regard their subjects as being so helpless and childlike as to stand in the same need of control and guidance as children. This development led, in turn, to a diminution of self-confidence on the part of the young women, an over dependence upon influences originating outside the industrial sphere, and their inevitable failure to appreciate, and realise, their potential.

The alleged reluctance of church bodies to structure the education programmes around a political framework, and elect instead to focus on general and simplistic expositions of human rights and work entitlements, left the women workers bereft of the theoretical base essential for engendering and sustaining meaningful labour activism. It is argued that this lack of political consciousness and increasing dependence upon clerics who had infiltrated the workplace restrained women union leaders from taking initiatives themselves, and from recognising the importance of seeking solidarity with other democratic unions. Instead, they directed their efforts toward the survival of their own branches when they should have been linking up with like-minded organisations in order to protest from a position of collective strength against the government's anti-labour policies and the acquiescence of the national-level unions. Due to this failure to

observe the maxim: “United we stand, divided we fall”, the democratic unions formed by the women fell easy prey to the onslaught of the state machine, and were picked off one by one.

Choi Byung-soo (1985) makes much of an extract from a discussion paper drafted by the Chonggye Union in 1990 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the death of Chun Tae-il. When looking back to the 1970’s, the paper records:

We cannot help but confess our great mistake, even though we cannot go back and change events. Although we were deeply affected by the continuous oppression of the trade union movement and union activists by the government, we stood back and adopted very negative strategies aimed at the survival of our own organisation. We believed that Martial Law would eventually be repealed and that the atmosphere in society would begin to improve; then we would be able to recover from our suffering and begin to combine with other union organisations. It was distressing to see the Ban-do Union dissolved by the government, but it only made us feel fortunate that we were still surviving. We did not feel able to resist the government’s harsh labour policies because, like the remainder of Korean society, we were frightened. As full-time union officers we concentrated on day to day union activities and ignored the tribulations of our colleagues in other unions which were under greater pressure than ours. Our laziness and cowardliness were the main causes of the weakening of the labour movement. We deeply regret that we were unable to mobilise our members to resist at such a crucial moment (Choi Byung-soo, 1985).

In the event, the Chonggye Union was dissolved by the military regime of Chun Doo-hwan in January, 1981 and remained an underground movement until 1984. While the leadership of the Chonggye Union stand accused of not learning any lessons from events which were overtaking their fellow unions, organisations which succumbed subsequently were judged equally remiss in failing to respond to Chonggye’s fate. Choi Byung-soo (1985) goes further by stating that the failure of the 1970’s women workers to recognise the need for solidarity with other democratic unions was concomitant with the more pernicious failure to pursue a class-based solidarity. At a time when a unified democratic trade union could have acted as a catalyst for a much wider social

movement, its failure to materialise left a vacuum that was all too readily filled by ecclesiastical and/or radical student organisations, all of which had agendas of their own, and none of which conformed fully with the aspirations of the embryonic working class. The women activists of the 1970's must thereby accept a degree of responsibility for failing to seize an opportunity that, had it been taken, might have proved the precursor and progenitor of a popular movement that could have realigned the subsequent political, economic, and social history of South Korea.

Such is the range and depth of criticism levelled against the democratic endeavours which took place in the South Korea of the 1970's, that some commentators (for example Her Sang-soo, 1991) go so far as to suggest that there was, in fact, no such entity that could reasonably assume the nomenclature of 'trade union movement' at all during the decade in question. And even if such an entity did exist, its fragility and inadequacy condemned it to the status of an isolated and insignificant historical event. A labour movement worthy of the name cannot consist entirely of discrete and spontaneous actions limited to individual and gender specific workplaces, especially when those singular actions are so readily crushed by the vigorous application of governmental labour legislation. If an emergent social organisation fails to capture the imagination and commitment of successive generations, regardless of the magnitude and severity of obstacles placed in its path, it can only be regarded as, at best, a transient phenomenon.

Not only is the title 'trade union' denied, for those same critics also cast aspersions on the 'democratic' prefix insofar as it is submitted that the influence exerted over the women activists and leaders by church figures with their ecclesiastical agendas

effectively deprived those women of secular, universally applicable, and industry-focused autonomy. That distraction from the 'worker goal' was enhanced by the articulate and dedicated involvement of university student bodies whose exclusive objective was seen not to be that of improving the lives of oppressed workers, but the achievement of national reunification; an objective whose attainment would be greatly facilitated by utilising the labour movement merely as a convenient vehicle.

In his 1990 seminar, held at the Chun Tae-il Foundation, Yang Syung-cho (1990) included an element of cultural male chauvinism in his explanation of the democratic unions' lack of meaningful and lasting impact. He suggested that because the leading figures in those unions were, by and large, young single women employed in light manufacturing, male workers in the heavy engineering and chemical industries viewed it as being beneath their dignity to consider regarding those figures, and their aspirations, as paradigms. Yang quotes, as a case in point, the 1974 strike by male employees of Hyundai Shipbuilding; an industrial action that failed to develop either into unionisation or towards affiliation with the democratic movement and which, instead, petered out into obscurity. Hence, it can be surmised that, even had women leaders succeeded in coalescing the individual democratic branch unions into a fully functioning whole, the process of solidarity would have been halted at the gender boundary and the project would have foundered. Her Sang-soo (in Yang Syung-cho, 1990) also dwells briefly on this gender issue, and repeats an assumption that is deeply embedded in the conventional wisdom inasmuch as young women activists were by no means dedicated to the cause of democratic trade unionism, even had they fully comprehended its meaning, simply because the real focus of their ambition was to find a husband as soon as possible and immediately cease working in the factories. The

corollary is that the great majority of women workers were never really serious about the labour movement, they were merely *dilettantes* who regarded paid employment as a stepping-stone, and one that should be abandoned at the earliest opportunity.

3.2.3 Inequality Of Risk

Conventional wisdom does not limit its disparagement of the contribution made by women workers in the 1970's to the non-existence of theoretical framework or ill-conceived and incoherent collective actions. There is a further assertion that a variety of other considerations combined to place women in a much more favourable position from which to take a positive stand against both the state and the employers than was the case with their male counterparts (Shin In-ryong, 1985; Kim Young-ok, 1986; Lee Tae-ho, 1985; Interview, Im Myung-jin, February, 1999). The implication of this type of analysis is that the women workers failed to exploit the advantages they had in developing trade unionism.

The overwhelming majority of female workers did not have families which were dependent upon their income for survival. Male workers were regarded as the bread-winners, whilst women were considered to be working for 'pocket money', a little extra sum with which they could indulge themselves with small luxuries, or put away to increase their marriage dowry. If a woman did make a contribution to her paternal family, it would only be as a supplement to the income of the principal wage-earner. Women were, first and foremost, temporary workers who had neither the need nor the inclination to consider factory work as a career. If they were to get into open conflict with the authorities and have court action taken against them, they would not be overly affected by gaining a criminal record, whereas for a male worker to be so branded, the

impact upon his future employment opportunities could be catastrophic. Even if a prison sentence was awarded, the punishment would still be less for a woman than for a man; his incarceration could spell disaster for his family, while the woman would suffer a mere inconvenience (Lee Tae-ho, 1985; Shin Rhin-young, 1985). On the occasions when women workers were dismissed for taking industrial action, the penalty was ameliorated by the fact that they would not be homeless, as they always had a family home to return to, and from where they could await marriage or contemplate alternative job opportunities. Should a man lose his job, however, the immediate result would have been the loss of his home, and his family condemned to penury (Interview, Choi Jang-jip, March, 1999).

From the above circumstances it can be deduced that the failure of women workers in the 1970's, and especially of their leaders, to lay relevant and viable foundations for a flourishing labour movement is difficult to either excuse or explain. Even taking into account the harsh and unforgiving political and economic atmosphere of the time, in comparison with their male counterparts, the women had so much to gain and so little to lose.

3.3 Korean Views Of Feminism

As has been stated earlier, the feminist strand of conventional wisdom concerning the involvement of women in the 1970's labour movement is sparse; it also consists of two uncoordinated, and largely uncomplementary, elements. The body of work produced by Korean feminists is particularly insubstantial in its analysis of the events of the decade under review, whilst that emanating from the west tends to follow a stereotypical, and thus inappropriate, model.

As a backdrop to this brief section, and as an indication of what might be referred to as the state's view of gender difference when applied to the activities of the workforce, a phrase that entered common parlance in the latter part of the 1970's is worthy of mention. "You won't get a free lunch here, but you will get a free book" refers to a pamphlet written by Hong Ji-young (1977), a leading propagandist employed by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA). The objective of the booklet, which was produced in huge numbers and distributed free to male and female workers alike, was to spell out the dual message of why, on the one hand, young women were attracted to collective activities such as the UIM and JOC groups, and the labour movement as a whole, and why, on the other, they were temperamentally unsuited to such activities.

Hong Ji-young (1977) firstly declared that it was part of the female nature to be far more susceptible than men to the supposedly humanitarian appeal of communist and religion-based labour reform organisations. Lacking the capacity for logical thought and moral judgement, women were unable to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and falsehood; they were easy prey for articulate and persuasive demagogues. Second, the congenital sentimentality, especially of young girls, drew them inexorably toward group situations where they could find comfort in numbers, and precluded the development of individuality and self-respect. At the same time, women were far more vain than men, and were driven to seek higher wages simply by the desire to have more money to spend upon themselves and upon their appearance. Third, because they were dominated by their emotions, female workers were too easily excited and prone to reckless and precipitate action; forms of behaviour which employers, official union

leaders, and other administrators found very difficult to deal with. Fourth, women were cunning; when they caused trouble in the workplace, as they frequently did, their reaction to admonishment was to break down in tears and become hysterical, fully aware that their male supervisors would be embarrassed and discomfited, and that they would, more often than not, escape censure by means of this ruse.

There was much more on similar lines in the booklet, but it is submitted that sufficient has been reviewed above to provide a flavour of its tone and direction, as well as an idea of the nature of the social atmosphere in which it was promulgated. The gender-divisive impact it achieved within the Korean working population, and the reinforcement it lent to those opposed to the involvement of women in the labour movement, are not difficult to assess.

In what relatively little they do have to say on the matter, Korean feminists such as Chong Hyun-back (1990); Cho Soon-kyung (1990), and Park Kee-nam (1990), make much of what they regard as an absence of any degree of gender awareness on the part of the democratic unions' women leaders. This lack of awareness manifested itself in a failure to address and promote specific issues pertinent to women when they were engaged in negotiations with employers. Issues such as job discrimination, promotion discrimination, maternity leave, flexible working hours, and so on, were ignored, while demands centred upon wages were largely concerned with actually being paid sums that were overdue or which were owed for working overtime, rather than with the much more fundamental question of wage inequality. Blame for this lack of gender awareness is laid at the door of the women leaders themselves who, it is claimed, made no attempt

to introduce educational measures focused on a feminist agenda for the benefit of both themselves and their members.

An apparent paradox is revealed in research carried out by Park Kee-nam (1990), which suggests that working women were more aware of class and political issues and anomalies than they were of gender inequalities. This finding is, perhaps, not quite as contradistinctive to the male conventional view with regard to the accusation of a lack of political awareness as it might at first appear; to know more about Subject A than about Subject B could be indicative merely of knowing very little about Subject A and absolutely nothing about Subject B.

One of the most significant outcomes of this failure on the part of the women leaders to recognise and act upon gender specific issues was that employers were able to continue to populate their workforces with young, inexperienced single girls. Had the problems of combining marriage and running the family home with work in the factory been satisfactorily addressed, more women would have been able to remain in a wage-earning capacity. With the collective strength of their members behind them, it is argued that the women leaders could, and should, have negotiated such an outcome (Chung Hyun-back, 1990; Cho Soon-kyung, 1990). As it was, however, the errors of omission in collective bargaining practices perpetuated the disadvantages experienced by women at work, and played into the hands of the employers, who regarded more mature and self-assertive married women as constituting a disruptive and troublesome influence on the factory floor. Indeed, one of the major selling points publicised by the Park Chung-hee regime in its efforts to attract foreign investment into the economy was the

depiction of the Korean female workforce as young, docile, disciplined, nimble-fingered, hard-working, and cheap (Young, 1993).

Criticism levelled by Korean feminist writers is not targeted only at the women union leaders, and Kim Seung-kyung (1997) is especially scathing about the general attitude and level of job expectation which she believes to be representative of the women workers of the 1970's as a whole:

Women regard themselves as little more than temporary workers. They are willing to provide the low-paid unskilled labour needed for light industry, and their focus on family diverts their attention from labour issues and makes them more difficult to organise (Kim Seung-kyung, 1997).

Western feminist writers have also turned their attention to the circumstances of the Asian working woman of the 1970's and have elected to cast her firmly in the role of the victim (e.g. Karl, 1995; Young, 1989; Heyzer, 1986; Nam, 1994; Enloe, 1993). The victim of patriarchal and traditionally patrilineal social mores, the victim of state legislation, the victim of employer-generated occupational discrimination, the victim of oppression by male fellow-workers and, above all, the victim of her own socialised character. Asian women are portrayed as passive, obedient, and compliant; inherent characteristics which render them highly susceptible to exploitation in both the public and the private spheres, and which clearly run counter to the concept of active involvement in a trade union movement. Karl (1995) uses this model to explain why, when such a high proportion of the pan-Asian workforce is comprised of women, so few of them aspire to positions of leadership in trade unions and, instead, appear content with mere passive membership.

Most of the relevant western feminist literature focuses on analyses of the impact of women upon industrialisation in the Newly Industrialised Countries (NIC's) and Late Developing Countries (LDC's) and, within that focus, concentrate upon the universally exploitative nature of working conditions (Nash, et al, 1983; Lim, 1983). That such conditions can exist in the latter half of the twentieth century is ascribed to the contention that dutiful acceptance of one's lot is an intrinsic component of the Asian female character, in marked distinction to the character of the Asian male (Enloe, 1983)

The enormous influx of young women workers, with their aforementioned reluctance to participate in any form of collective activity, into the export-led industries of the NIC's has frequently been identified as the predominant reason for the general weakness of the trade union movement in the NIC's (Karl, 1995). By implication, Korean women have been included in the conventional western feminist analyses of the plight of working women throughout Asia and, by definition, theories on remedial measures are equally general in character.

3.4 Summary

Commentators of virtually all persuasions agree that the 'official' trade union structure as it existed in South Korea in the 1970's was representative of the great mass of the working population in name only. The FKTU was led by men who had been put in place by the Park Chung-hee regime, and whose sole purpose was to put the most favourable slant on government labour policy and relay it to the national workforce. In effect, they inverted the universally acknowledged function of a trade union organisation, and instead of representing the workers to the government, the FKTU represented government to workers. Token gestures, designed to give the impression

that the FKTU did, indeed, have the interests of the workforce as its guiding principle, were frequently made both in print and in public speeches, but few were convinced by such clearly orchestrated, and overtly bogus, manoeuvres.

The main opposition to the official structure sprang from democratically based branch unions located, primarily, in the light manufacturing sector. The membership and leadership of these branch unions was made up almost exclusively of women and, whilst there is widespread, albeit not unanimous, acceptance that, unlike the FKTU, the women's unions were, indeed, democratic, there is general agreement that their efforts were ill-conceived, inadequate, and of little, if any, lasting consequence.

Explanations for the failure of women workers to make any meaningful impact on the labour movement include the unsuitability of the female temperament; their lack of industrial relations knowledge and trade union theory; the fact that they were interested only in themselves as individuals and in their own wage and working conditions, and the total absence of political consciousness. The comparative unimportance to women of the, hopefully short, time they would spend working in the factories detracted from any enthusiasm to participate in labour movement activities, and rendered half-hearted, at best, any contribution they might be persuaded to make. By their nature, young women were particularly susceptible to the blandishments of religious organisations, and were easily diverted from labour issues to agendas which were at variance with those of a democratic trade union movement. Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, the traditional cultural gender divisions which were prevalent in the country at the time rendered it virtually impossible for women to win the support of the male workforce.

The principal objective of this dissertation is to critically examine these claims about trade unionism and women workers. In contrast with previous studies, the focus below is on the women workers themselves. As a first step towards this examination, the methodology of the research is presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“Truth is independent of facts always”

(Oscar Wilde)

4.0 Introduction

The research was conducted over a period of three years, involving the collection and analysis of published and unpublished materials; interviews with key informants, from the Peace Market, and elsewhere; many informal discussions with a wide range of people in Korea who provided insights into the events covered by the thesis, and reflection by the author on her own life and involvement with the Peace Market and trade unions. Taken together, this provides a rich body of material which constitutes the data for the report.

This chapter provides an introduction to, and reflection on, the different aspects of the research process followed by the author. In the first section the principal methods of data collection are presented. Two main sources are used: interviews with individuals and groups, and published/unpublished material, including dairies. These materials are informed by the author’s own biography, so some mention is made of the importance of this reference point. In the second section the problem of statistics in a Korean context is reviewed. The point of doing this is to locate the ambiguity of statistics and explain the cautions which should be invoked when considering Korean statistics on labour. Finally, in the last section, the process of doing research is reviewed. This provides the basis for the following chapters.

4.1 Methodology

In accordance with the author's declared preference for the experiential rather than the theoretical, this study is grounded predominantly upon evidence gained from direct contact with many of the major players in the events portrayed. The author's own involvement in the textile and garment industry in Seoul during the 1970's, allied with the high regard in which her mother and late brother are held in the South Korean labour movement, enabled unique access to the most pivotal sources, both personal and documentary (see biographical reference p.iv). That is what sets this thesis apart from any previous works on the subject. Other than the author's own life history, the bulk of evidence gathering took place during two field trips to Seoul; from October, 1997 to January, 1998 and from November, 1998 to April, 1999. Individual interviews and group discussions provided much of the recorded evidence but considerable use was also made of unpublished personal diaries kept during the period under examination and loaned to the author. In total, 79 individual interviews and four group discussions, involving 28 participants, were conducted and the oral evidence thus tape-recorded amounted to some 180 hours. Subsequent to completion of the second field research trip 27 additional interviews to clarify issues previously discussed, or to resolve new questions, have been conducted via telephone, e-mail, and facsimile.

The author subscribes to the view of Burgess (1988) insofar as the level of interaction between interviewer and interviewee enabled by informal conversation, as opposed to the technique of a formally structured interview, can be an invaluable adjunct to empirical social research, providing that the interviewer has drawn up, and adheres to, a concrete and predetermined plan. The intrinsic importance of biography is emphasised throughout this thesis, and it is submitted that the technique of

'knowledgeable conversation', especially if it is conducted in an atmosphere of mutual trust and shared experience, is the approach most likely to unlock fully comprehensive and relevant accounts. This view is complimentary to the assertion of Palmer (1928), as quoted in Burgess (1988), that the intersection of life history and social structure is one of the cornerstones of qualitative social research.

4.1.1 Interviews and Group Discussions

In the light of the importance placed upon the contributions made by individual personalities who were germane to the events portrayed; in preference, that is, to any degree of reliance upon the published works of writers whom may well not have been personally involved, it is essential to identify those individuals and indicate their relevance in the context of this study. To simplify this endeavour, interview subjects will be presented in tabular form.

Chonggye Garment Union

35 women workers from the 1970's, including:

- a. Worker in the Peace Market from the age of 16; founder member of the union; Vice-President of the union 1970; President 1971-1976.
- b. Worker in the Peace Market from the age of 15; founder member of the union; first head of the union women's section.
- c. Second head of the union women's section 1971-1974; President of the JOC (Young Catholic Workers) 1975-1977; current (2000) President of The Federation of Korean Women Workers Trade Unions; imprisoned in 1979.
- d. Two executive members active since 1972; each served 18 months imprisonment 1977-1979; both still working in the Peace Market.

Dong-il Textile Union

7 women workers from the 1970's, including:

- a. Last President of the union, dismissed in 1978;

served 1 year in prison. Currently (2000) member of the Incheon Regional Labour Committee.

b. Two executive members 1974-1978, one of whom was imprisoned in 1978.

YH Textile Union

3 women workers from the 1970's:

- a. First President of the union 1975-1979.
- b. General Secretary 1975-1979, imprisoned in 1979 and 1981. Currently (2000) leader of the Buchun Regional Office of the Korean Women Workers United.
- c. Vice-President of the union 1975-1979.

Lee Hee-ho

Wife of Kim Dae-jung, President of South Korea 1998- ; actively supportive of the women's labour movement in the 1970's. Kim Dae-jung and Lee Hee-ho have been friends of Yi So-sun, the mother of the author, for many years (see Chapter Nine).

Prior to the second field research trip it became apparent that concentration upon the main players in the emergence and development of democratic trade unions might result in a degree of distortion of the overall picture. For that reason interviews were arranged and conducted with individual activists from five other companies in which efforts were made to organise autonomous unions in the 1970's. Those companies were:

- i. Won-pung Textiles – 7 interviewees
- ii. Ban-do Textiles – 2 interviewees
- iii. Sam-won Textiles – 2 interviewees
- iv. So-tong Textiles – 1 interviewee
- v. Nam-a Garments – 1 interviewee (NB Workers at Nam-a attempted, but failed, to form a democratic union)

Although the focus of this study is essentially concerned with the role of women in the South Korean labour movement in the 1970's, and most of the above subjects are female, it was clearly imperative to consider the male perspective. Not least

because prior to the initiatives taken by women in the 1970's all the levers of power, whether they be social, political, economic, or cultural, lay in the hands of men. Thus it is that the ratio of female to male interview subjects included in this study is markedly in excess of the ratio of female to male employees in the textile and garment industry.

The 'male component' in the research includes:

Kim Young-sam President of South Korea 1992-1998; leader of the main opposition party during the Park Chung-hee era. (NB On completion of a lengthy interview Kim Young-sam said: "I am happy to talk for the first time about this matter, which was a turning point both in my political life and in Korean politics" (Interview, Kim Young-sam, December, 1998)

Lee Moon-young Professor, Koryo University, Seoul; expelled by Park Chung-hee. Close associate and advisor to President Kim Dae-jung (see Chapter Ten).

Ko Un Poet. Was imprisoned with Lee Moon-young and only released after the assassination of Park Chung-hee (see Chapter Ten).

Choi Jang-Jip Professor, Koryo University, Seoul.

Sohn Hak-kyu Politician; served as a minister in the Kim Young-sam administration.

(NB Both Choi and Sohn have written definitive works on South Korean politics, economics, and trade union history. They have provided invaluable source material for this thesis and are held in the highest regard by the author. However, their understatement of the contributions made by women to the Korean labour movement are vigorously challenged).

Lee Mok-hee Full-time officer in the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU) 1978-1980; writer on Korean labour affairs.

Kim Seung-ho Full-time officer in the NTWU 1978-1980.

Lee Yun-bo Full-time officer in the NTWU 1972-1992, responsible for union education policy.

Lee Tae-ho	Journalist and writer on Korean labour affairs; dismissed from Dong-a Ilbo daily newspaper in 1974 for organising a journalist's trade union at Dong-a Ilbo.
Hong Sung-woo	Lawyer in the 1970's.
Lee Don-myung	Lawyer in the 1970's.

(NB Both were dedicated to the legal defence of workers, students, and dissident political groups in the 1970's. They also acted as defence counsellors at the trials of Yi So-sun (see Chapter Nine), and the author's youngest brother, Chun Tae-sam, when he was arrested for participating in trade union activities in 1981. These two lawyers provided much valuable information concerning the attitudes of the state and the judiciary towards labour organisation).

Cho Syung-hyuk	Member of the Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) in the 1970's; Protestant priest.
Im Myong-jin	Member of the Urban Industrial Mission in the 1970's; Protestant priest; was arrested and imprisoned with Lee Moon-young and Ko Un (see above).
Fr Donal O'Keeffe	Society of St Columban; member of the JOC in the 1970's.
Chang Ki-pyo	Law student in the 1970's (see Chapter Nine).
Kim Young-dae	Cutter (<i>jaedansha</i>) in the Peace Market in the 1970's; became active member of Chonggye Union in early 1980's; President of the union 1985-1988; founder member and first General Secretary (1990) of the organisation that would subsequently become the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU); current (2000) Vice-President of the KCTU.
Kim Kum-soo	Full-time officer in the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) 1978-1979; writer on Korean labour affairs.
Hwang San-sung	Chief Labour Inspector at the Peace Market 1974-1978.
Choi Yong-gap	Owner of one of the factories in the Peace Market 1957-1992; represented the employers in the first

formal negotiations with the Chonggye Union (see Chapters Five and Ten).

Chung Dong-ho

President of the FKTU 1976-1979.

Kim Sae-kwun
Lee Kwang-taik

Both were involved with the Christian Academic Education Programme (CAEP) in the 1970's and were also closely associated with the Chonggye Union education programme (see Chapter Ten).

To facilitate the exploration of social issues, Kitzinger (1994) promotes the use of the discussion group as a means of concentrating collective attention upon a specific topic, and she asserts that one of its primary advantages is the potential to 'draw out' comprehensive contributions from otherwise reticent participants. In furtherance of this philosophy, the author engaged, whenever possible, in the practice of group discussion prior to individual interview in order both to 'break the ice' and to act as a stimulant to memory. One especially fruitful group discussion was conceived at the celebration of Yi So-sun's 70th birthday on 19 December, 1998. At the celebration, attended by more than five hundred leading political, labour movement, and academic figures, including Lee Hee-ho, the wife of the President of South Korea, a number of the most prominent and respected activists from the 1970's democratic labour movement agreed that they could contribute more to the current trade union scene if they acted collectively rather than merely as individuals. Thus, on 10 January, 1999, twelve 1970's trade union ex-presidents, nine women and three men, met on the premises of the Chun Tae-il Foundation in Seoul and formed a new organisation to be entitled The Commemorative Committee of the 1970's Democratic Labour Movement. The author was privileged to be invited to attend the preparatory meeting and, on completion of formal business, was permitted to focus the subsequent lengthy discussion upon issues central to the

objectives of this study. This was a unique opportunity; rarely, if ever, had there been such an assembly of personalities, each of whom had played pivotal roles in the struggle for democratic trade unionism, and each of whom was prepared, and had the opportunity, to exchange the minutiae of their experience. The value gained from this meeting, and the contribution it made to the fulfilment of this study, is inestimable. Three other discussion groups were also organised with the specific intention of exploring matters germane to this study, and each proved to be of great value. The first involved seven women workers from the Chonggye Garment Union; the second comprised six women workers from the Dong-il Textile Union, and the third was attended by three women workers from the Won-pung Textile Union.

4.1.2 Primary Sources

Every effort was made to be as meticulous with the selection and acceptance of primary source material as was the case with all other data. If there was the slightest element of doubt concerning the veracity of documentation, it was rejected unless corroborative evidence could be located.

Previously Published Material

- i. Official documents published by the Office of Labour Affairs; the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), and the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU);
- ii. Korea Annuals for the years 1970 – 1981;
- iii. Union histories published by the Chonggye Garment Union, Dong-il Textile Union, and YH Wig and Garment Union;
- iv. National daily newspapers;
- v. Periodicals and magazines;
- vi. Material from the international trade union and human rights communities.

Unpublished Material

- i. The diaries of Chun Tae-il, the author's eldest brother, which include his research into the employee establishment and working conditions in the Peace Market;

- ii. The personal archive of Yi So-sun, the author's mother, that has been accumulated since the death of her son, Chun Tae-il, in November, 1970. It includes minutes, memoranda, internal discussion papers, speeches, and statements concerning Chonggye Union matters, as well as a wealth of material dealing with the activities of other democratic unions and the state/labour interface;
- iii. A tape recording of part of the trial of Kim Jae-gyu, Park Chung-hee's assassin, and his written statement of appeal submitted to the Supreme Court on 28 January, 1980;
- iv. Diaries, letters, and photographs from the 1970's, loaned by individual women workers;
- v. Cho Kum-bun was a female president of the Ban-do Textile Union (see Chapter Nine) during the 1970's, until it was forcibly disbanded by President Chun Do-hwan in 1981. Throughout the lifetime of her union she collected assiduously every document produced and received. She felt that it was her duty to look after these records until the story they tell could be written down. Cho Kum-bun feels a deep emotional attachment to the two bags of papers she has protected for almost thirty years, and the author is privileged to have been entrusted with them.
- vi. Lee Yun-bo was a full-time officer in the government-sponsored NTWU (see above) who decided to keep his own private record of NTWU business during the 1970's. To this end, he photocopied every document of importance that passed through his hands. He generously agreed to allow the author full access to material that has never previously been available to researchers. It includes confidential internal memoranda and reports detailing the fraught relationships between the national-level textile and garment union and the local and regional-level unions in South Korea, as well as that which existed between the NTWU and the international trade union community (see Chapter Eight).

4.2 Statistical Ambiguities

Throughout the report references are made to the conviction that the main body of work devoted to South Korean industrial relations is marred by the use of inappropriate data. The data in question falls into two distinct categories: first, there is the misapplication to the South Korean case of stereotypical assumptions, especially those connected with gender and traditional social mores; and second, there is the quintessentially ambiguous nature inherent with statistics. The identification and rectification of stereotypical assumptions is addressed elsewhere; this section will consider the 'problem' of statistics, and will explain the reasons why statistical data plays little part in this work.

It is axiomatic that statistical data of comparable provenance can be used to both prove and refute the same point in any argument.¹ The reason for this intellectually debilitating circumstance is, in the view of the author, that the main determinants of outcome in the compilation of statistical evidence, especially on labour issues, are: i. the method by which the figures in question were originally obtained; ii. how they were interpreted; iii. the manner in which they were presented, and iv., the nature of the preferred conclusion. It is the author's submission that, in the Korean context, the last mentioned provision invariably takes precedence over the other three, and dictates the degree of selectivity employed. Unless the observer is cognisant of each of these factors, and is aware of all other postulates, the rational value of the tables, graphs, percentages and pie-charts which correctly constitute so great a part of much academic work, is negligible. Furthermore, by disputing the veracity and validity of the statistics presented as evidence for the counter-argument, usually the first tactic of refutation, tacit acceptance of the protean nature of statistics is, in effect, being granted by all sides in a given debate. Nevertheless, the proclivity of numbers to mask subjectivity, to a far greater degree than is possible with prose, explains, at least in part, why there remains a remarkable facility in virtually all areas of social discourse to continue to offer numbers not merely as corroboration, but frequently as the principal ground for theory and policy development.

It is actually quite rare, in the experience of the author, for social commentators to declare from the outset that there is, indeed, a potential for ambiguity in their use of statistical data. One relevant instance is worthy of note, however, and is illustrative of a wider dichotomy. Cho Hyung, a professor of sociology at the prestigious Ewha

University for Women in Seoul, produced an otherwise lucid and useful paper in 1986 that opened with the statement:

Reports of labour statistics in Korea, mostly from government sources, suffer from limitations imposed by the inadequacy of data in terms of the coverage of work and the way workers are aggregated and disaggregated. Recognising the limitation, this paper will try to show, *by reorganising the existing data*, the trends and the pattern of women's participation in the labour force in Korea (Cho Hyung, 1986) (author's italics).

The seductive power of statistics proved irresistible, and the principle of never using evidence that is known to be inadequate or inappropriate was circumvented. The 'reorganisation' of false or questionable data serves no useful purpose and, as in the example quoted above, can only result in intensifying the already dense obfuscation that exists in this particular field.

Giddens (1993) draws attention to the notion of the 'average' as a specific area of concern in research methodology, and indicates how misleading the term can be when it is used without amplification. This study will include a number of examples of works on South Korean economics and industrial relations; works which are integral to the 'conventional view', wherein averages are fundamental components of evidence, and where the definition of the term as 'median', 'mode', or 'mean' is absent. Failure to define what is meant by 'average' has rendered meaningful interpretation difficult, and has provided clear bases for distortion.

Problems associated with the integration of statistical data in social, political, and economic contexts, are exacerbated when access to evidence and method is restricted to agents of an oppressive and authoritarian regime; in such circumstances statistical data must be either taken at face value or discarded entirely. In the 1960's and

1970's it was imperative to President Park Chung-hee that the image of South Korea that he created in the minds of potential foreign investors was that of a rapidly expanding industrial economy blessed with a capable, contented, and compliant workforce, free from the corrosive influences of a radical labour movement. It was, therefore, essential that all performance data accessible to outside agencies reflected and reinforced this imperative. To this end, control exerted over the promulgation of performance related information in all forms of the mass media was such that any critical examination of the plethora of statistical data which emanated from government controlled institutions was precluded. Thus, volume upon volume of such information remained unchallenged, and in due course became part of common currency or, in other words, provided much of the foundation of 'the conventional view' (e.g. Korea Annuals, 1970-1979; Frank, 1975; Lim Young-il, 1981; Calverley, 1982; Kim Cae-one, 1986; Brown, 1973) . This was by no means the full extent of the problem; before they could be manipulated to advantage by the minions of Park Chung-hee, these mountains of statistics had to originate from somewhere. There is a case for construing that government departments did, on occasions, resort to simply plucking numbers out of thin air but, in the main, these 'performance' statistics had their origins in periodic returns which all employers were required by law to complete. It is known, and will be clearly demonstrated in this study, that falsification of information submitted regularly to government by employers was a routine practice. In order to evade many of the provisions of labour legislation in force at the time, and to secure allocation into the most advantageous tax category, it was seen as propitious by factory owners in the textile and garment industry to understate the actual establishment of their enterprises (see Chapter Five). After these already fictitious figures had been further 'creatively adjusted' by the state they were likely to bear little, if any, relation to the truth, and the

basis they provide for rational debate upon issues such as economic performance, wages, working conditions, working hours, health and safety, and profit, must be regarded as tenuous in the extreme.

In the event where establishment declarations submitted by employers to central government are understated, it follows logically that information regarding working hours must also be 'adjusted' to a commensurate extent, otherwise 'too few' people would be shown to be doing an impossible amount of work. A pertinent example of the outcome of this circumstance, and one that underscores and reinforces the author's dispute with conventional wisdom, can be found in the works of Cho Soon, one of South Korea's leading economists. In his 1994 publication *The Dynamics of Korean Economic Development* he quotes the 'average working hours per week in the Korean manufacturing industry in 1970' as being 52.5 hours, and notes that this figure is some ten hours greater than was the case in Japan. Cho Soon gives the sources of his statistics as the International Labour Organisation and the Korean Ministry of Labour. It may well be that in some industries in 1970 workers were, indeed, working between 8 and 9 hours per day, 6 days per week; however, this was certainly not the experience of women in the textile and garment factories. From the author's personal knowledge, from research conducted by the Chonggye Union and other democratic unions, and from all the interviews with workers of the period, it is indisputable that the 'normal' working day encompassed 16 hours, with only two days off per month. A working week in excess of 100 hours was by no means unusual, and places the notion of 'the average' in its proper perspective.

It is accepted that the expression of social truths in numerical form can, with certain caveats, be an efficient and scientifically valid strategy that can enhance the simplicity and clarity of exposition and contribute to the avoidance of prolixity. But if the conditions which must be met in order to fully legitimise the reliance upon statistics are not adhered to, the practice is, at best, of dubious value and may well be deliberately or accidentally misleading. This study will show that much of the literature intrinsic to the formulation of the ‘conventional view’ of the South Korean labour movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s has been based, to greater or lesser degrees, upon statistical data of doubtful provenance.

In cognisance of the foregoing reservations, the guiding principle adopted in the construction of this thesis has been that a statistic will not be included unless its ‘pedigree’ can withstand the most objective and robust scrutiny or unless, in quoting it, the factual circumstance is understated. In the context of the theme of this study, social truths find expression in the words and experiences of the individuals who were actually and personally involved. Regardless of what may have been promulgated by Park Chung-hee’s propaganda machinery, or what may have been recorded and repeated by commentators and academics since the 1970’s, the heartfelt and often bitter testaments of the women workers who struggled throughout that era are submitted as representing the closest it is possible to get to the truth.

4.3 Research Circumstances And Process

The combination of working in one of the sweat-shop factories in the Peace Market; as the sister of Chun Tae-il and the daughter of Yi So-sun, the ‘father’ and ‘mother’ of democratic trade unionism in South Korea, and being immersed in South

Korean industrial relations affairs since earliest childhood, has placed the author in a unique and fortuitous position. The family home has always been a regular meeting place for democratic trade union activists, where the main topic of conversation has centred upon the travails and vicissitudes of beleaguered and exploited workers, and the ambitions, the achievements, and the failures, of those pledged to restructure the trade union movement. The author has first-hand knowledge of many of the events recorded in this thesis, and few of the named individuals in the study are not known intimately by the author and/or her mother.

One of the problems that bedevils research based upon inter-personal dialogue is the difficulty in ascertaining whether or not the truth is being told. At the core of both the problem and its resolution there lies the concept of the bond of mutual trust. For reasons which are enunciated elsewhere, academic researchers and other intellectuals whose origins are outside the sphere of manual labour tend to be regarded with a degree of reserve, if not antipathy, by many of the textile and garment workers from the 1960's and 1970's. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that research handicapped by this circumstance may be inaccurate or incomplete. The author's 'privileged' position, evinced by personal history and shared experience, has enabled access to material undisclosed heretofore; has facilitated frank and honest dialogue between all players involved, and has made possible a more fully informed assessment of the adequacy of relevant data already in the public domain.²

While South Korea is the principle site for data collection, supplementary research was conducted in the United Kingdom, almost exclusively at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, or at two of its dependent libraries, the Oriental Institute and the

Japanese Library. Facilities at these institutions are unparalleled in the author's experience, and their collections of 'Korea-specific' works, written both in English and in *Hangul*, are as extensive and comprehensive as any to be found in Korean universities. Had access to the Bodleian Library not been afforded, this study would have been difficult, if not impossible, to complete.

Systematic research focused specifically upon the compilation of this thesis began in January, 1997, and the original timetable programmed completion and submission by mid-2000. Elements intrinsic to the schedule included development of the physical structure and base argument, two field research trips to South Korea, and one year allocated to writing-up the study. The over-run of some six months was due to three unanticipated factors. Firstly, problems were experienced with establishing contact with some contributors crucial to the research during the second field trip to Seoul. Furthermore, it frequently transpired that, when contacts were arranged, new evidence emerged which pointed to additional personalities whose testimonies would prove of value. Thus, instead of the twelve weeks scheduled, the second field trip lasted for five months. Secondly, locating and arranging mutually convenient appointments with the individuals who participated in the 27 interviews conducted by telephone, e-mail, and facsimile subsequent to the second field trip proved more time-consuming than expected. Finally, and despite much generous assistance from colleagues, the transcription and systematic collation of the 180 hours of tape-recorded material accumulated during both research trips demanded considerably more time than had been forecast.

Throughout the entire period of research and writing, regular and frequent supervisory contact has been maintained on a bimonthly level. This support and

guidance has, typically, consisted of prearranged personal tutorials, supplemented by telephone calls, and the exchange of e-mails. During periods of absence from the United Kingdom, however, total reliance was placed upon e-mail contact: this restriction did not prove inhibiting in any way.

As a final comment, it should be noted that submission of this dissertation does not represent the full realisation of its objectives. In attempting to recover the history of one particular social group of Korean women, it is hoped that the evidence and arguments presented will provide a stimulus for further debate, not only upon the contribution of women workers in the 1970's, but upon the wider and more fundamental issues of gender relations in South Korean society.

4.4 Summary

The primary evidence for the report has been gained via extensive field work in Korea, principally during 1998 and 1999. It has been complemented by information and data provided by colleagues and key informants in the form of published and unpublished material, telephone calls, e-mails, letters, and diaries. The result is an extensive body of material which provides the base of the research report.

This approach has enabled the critical assessment of official statistics and reports, and the development of a critical assessment of the events involving women workers and trade unions in the 1970's, and subsequently. Further, it allows a critical evaluation of many of the histories and accounts of trade unions in South Korea. In particular, it provides the base for arguing that any adequate history of trade unionism and the politics of labour conflict in South Korea must foreground the struggles by the

women textile and garment workers in the 1970's. These events are crucial for an understanding of the way unionism developed during, and subsequent to, this period. The remainder of the thesis will develop this theme, beginning with an examination of the evolution of the Korean textile and garment industry.

NOTES

¹ The extent to which the use of statistics can be instrumental in both proving and disproving the same point is both interesting and worrying. In the United Kingdom, for example, it has been seen in recent years how the government of the day will use statistical evidence to demonstrate conclusively that the National Health Service waiting lists are decreasing, the number of policemen on the streets is increasing, the burden of taxation is reducing, the homeless are getting fewer, and participation in a common European currency would be beneficial. Coincident with each of these claims, opposition parties will summon equally well researched data to 'prove' the diametric cases. The list of apparently blatant contradictions is almost endless, and the disquieting fact is that, in virtually every instance, all assertions are equally valid, or equally otiose, dependent upon the observer's point of view.

² The suspicion with which political and social researchers are regarded by many of the women activists of the 1960's and 1970's was constantly reiterated during the author's meetings with her old colleagues and friends. Stated simply, they were tired of being interviewed by people with whom they shared no common ground, and whose motives and agendas were unclear. There was a general feeling that these 'outsiders' arrived with preconceived theories and, far from representing accurately and fairly the workers' accounts, they preferred to adjust what was said in order to support those preconceptions.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TEXTILE AND GARMENT INDUSTRY : HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

“What experience and history teach is this – that people and governments never have learnt anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it”.

(G W Hegel)

5.0 Introduction

Although the focus of this study is centred upon the vicissitudes of the Korean textile and garment industry during the decade of the 1970's, it would be a misconception to assume that this period marked the nadir in the fortunes of those who laboured in spinning, weaving, and clothing manufacture. For centuries this industry, above all others, has suffered from the incursions, the manipulations, the duplicity, and the opportunism of external forces. Textile and garment workers have borne the brunt of colonial oppression, and have illustrated with the utmost clarity the typically tripartite segmentation of global capitalism into core, middle, and peripheral economies (Cumings,1987). What differentiates the 1970's from the more extended time span reviewed in this section is the harsh reality that during the 1970's the seeds of exploitation were sown from within rather than from without.

The very brief historical précis presented in this section will afford but a flavour of the inequitable and punitive circumstances with which Korean textile workers have been forced to contend since well before the beginning of the 19th century. It will also provide an insight into the means by which Korea has found herself forced into the role of a catspaw in the wider, acquisitive machinations of more powerful and more belligerent nations.

5.1 Pre-Colonial Period

(NB It should be noted that the Korean Peninsula was not divided into two discrete nations until 1948; therefore, all references to 'Korea' in this section pertain to the entire peninsula unless specifically identified otherwise).

Although Korea became what may be referred to as a 'tributary' state of the Chinese Empire in 1637, it was also, from very early on, the fulcrum of intrigue and rivalry between China and Japan. The Korean cotton textile industry, and the potential market for imported raw materials and finished garments that the Korean population represented, were the linchpins of this external rivalry. In 1876 a treaty was signed by the two competing nations, without consideration being afforded to the interests of the Korean people, the terms of which forced the opening up of Korean seaports for international trade. In the initial stages the textiles imported into Korea originated predominantly in Great Britain but were actually shipped by Chinese and Japanese merchant companies. Although the fabrics imported from Britain were of finer quality than those produced domestically, they were not of immediate threat to the Korean industry because their fineness was achieved at the expense of durability; a factor of great importance to manual labourers, who were prepared to sacrifice style and relative luxury for apparel that was hard-wearing. Nevertheless, by 1894 foreign textiles constituted approximately 80% of total Korean imports (Kajimura, 1983).

The concessions gained from the 1876 treaty did not assuage Japan's expansionist ambitions, however, and eighteen years after its signing, in August 1894, the first Sino-Japanese War broke out, primarily on the issue of who was to 'control' Korea (Palmer, 1962). Chinese forces proved no match against the army and navy of Japan, each of which had been modelled along European lines, and after a mere eight

months of conflict the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed. Although the treaty formally established Korea's independence, this was simply a device used by the Japanese to negate Chinese interests in the peninsula and leave the way clear for subsequent annexation. From the time of the war settlement, China was excluded from involvement in the shipping of foreign-sourced material into Korea.

From 1898 to 1904 the Russians penetrated deeper into the northern part of Korea, securing commercial concessions along the Yalu River, and thereby threatening Japan's dominance of the region. Japan's Korean intentions were not to be thwarted, however, and this Russian adventure precipitated the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, during which the Japanese inflicted a series of heavy defeats in land battles fought along the Yalu River, and in Manchuria. After the Russian Baltic Fleet was virtually destroyed by Admiral Togo off Tsushima, an island lying between Korea and Japan, in May 1905, the Russians were forced to sue for peace. It is interesting to note that the substantial loss of prestige on the part of the Russians in their rebuffed incursion into Korea contributed to the outbreak of the Revolution of 1905 (Palmer, 1962). Indeed, whether it be the Chinese, the Japanese, the Russians, the British, or the Americans, history has shown that coveting the diverse spoils of the Korean Peninsula has proved, and is, indeed, continuing to prove, a costly and often dangerous endeavour for foreign adventurers.

Prior to the signing of the 1876 treaty, the textile industry in Korea equalled that of agriculture in the national economy. Cotton was the dominant indigenous raw material and was grown by a large proportion of Korean farmers. This was especially true in the south of the country, where the climate is more amenable, but it was also

applicable to some of the less harsh, and more protected, areas in the north. In addition to cotton growing and processing, there was also a lesser diversification on many farms into the production of silk.

The common pattern of the pre-colonial industry was one in which each farmer grew and harvested his cotton crop which was then spun and woven by the women and girls of his immediate family. After the clothing needs of the family had been met, most of the remaining output was used locally as barter-goods, but there was normally a limited surplus for market sale. At least half of the pre-colonisation Korean farms followed this basic model. There is also evidence of a more formally organised industrial structure in many rural areas, especially in the warmer south, in which 'entrepreneurs' recruited networks of female 'out-workers' who were, thus, enabled to further supplement their household agricultural income by spinning and weaving full-time at home. It is of interest, and relevance, to note that, very much in line with the ever-pervading Confucian ethos, the remuneration awarded to these female out-workers never reached even one half of that afforded to other, male, labourers but was, more conventionally, about one-fifth (Kajimura, 1983). The common thread running through all of Korean history of the exploitation of the Korean female, in all aspects of life, is a very long one indeed.

Internal trade in the cotton textile produce of these out-worker networks thrived up until 1876 and was, for reasons alluded to above, characterised almost exclusively by a 'south to north' pattern. Also prior to 1876, trade in cotton and finished textile goods beyond the boundaries of the peninsula was, to all intents and purposes, negligible.

Once the involvement of Chinese merchants had been forcibly curtailed, Japan could turn its attention to ‘correcting’ the predominance of British textiles and finished garments appearing on the Korean market. In this objective, Japan was to employ the ‘imitate to dominate’ policy that was subsequently to prove so successful in many other industries, and in many other markets, all over the world (Cho Ki-joon, 1982). Appreciating the proclivity of the Korean people to prefer their own unique fabrics to those of other producer nations, even though in many cases the foreign product was cheaper, the Japanese commandeered many of the best Korean spinners and weavers and transported them to Japan. Using Japanese raw cotton, these workers, and eventually the Japanese themselves, were able to reproduce a very close approximation of the Korean material which was then shipped to the peninsula. Whilst this ruse was in its infancy, and the counterfeit product not difficult to discern by the moderately knowledgeable, the bulk of exports went to the north, where cotton growing and processing was less prevalent and where consumer awareness was less acute. No chances were taken, however, and in order to minimise the possibility of detection the fabrics and finished garments were not shipped directly to the north, but were routed, instead, via the port of Pusan, in the south. There the Japanese labels on the garments were removed and Korean labels attached in their place. These inferior articles were then transported to the north to be purchased by the more gullible, and more needy, consumers resident there. This duplicity not only helped to line the pockets of the Japanese, and some Korean, producers and merchants, it also accelerated the decline of the ‘genuine’ domestic industry (Cho Ki-joon, 1982). Thus, between 1876 and 1894 the bulk of textiles imported into Korea were of British origin; between 1895 and 1904 Japan had cornered approximately half of this import trade, and from 1905 onwards

materials arriving at Korean ports were almost exclusively of Japanese manufacture (Kajimura, 1983). The commensurate atrophy of the indigenous textile industry was virtually assured.

The crucial lesson that inferior imitation is doomed to eventual failure if no further development is put in hand was well learned by the Japanese. The design and implementation of increasingly more sophisticated mechanisation processes led to a steady improvement in the quality of Japanese textiles, and a concomitant reduction in the price of the finished articles. The fruits of this development signalled the beginning of a major invasion of the nation-wide Korean direct manufacturing sector, and the beginning of the end of the Korean 'home weaving' industry (Lee Ok-jie, 1990). The smaller farmers were forbidden to continue to plant their traditional cotton crop and were, instead, required to adopt a new variety that originated in the United States: this imposition cleverly facilitated the eradication of the familiar, and eased the introduction and, more importantly, the acceptance, of substitution. Furthermore, the Japanese colonial authorities directed to whom, and for how much, their crops had to be sold. In truth, the greatest value of these farming communities to the Japanese was merely as consumers of finished goods (Kajimura, 1983). Thus, by 1905, when the colonisation of Korea was virtually complete, Japanese capital had overwhelmed the Korean textile industry, other foreign interests had been discouraged and, apart from the 'self-sufficiency' endeavours of the very largest farming households, the industry was dominated by the external, capitalist power of Japan.

It is important to note that throughout the process outlined above, the Japanese textile industry had been the beneficiary of substantial support and protection from the

government in Tokyo, whereas the Korean government, subjected as it was to increasing diplomatic pressure and military threat by Japan, was in no position to offer any help whatsoever to its own spinners, weavers, and manufacturers.

5.2 Colonial Period: 1905-1945

As has been discussed above, the question of who controlled Korea had been a bone of contention between China, Japan, and Russia for a protracted period throughout which Korea itself was little more than a pawn. Largely by dint of its greater military might and, perhaps, its more tightly focused foreign policy, Japan had gained supremacy over the other competing external powers. Following the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, Japan assumed formal responsibility for Korean foreign relations and was, to all intents and purposes, the ruling authority. Although internationally recognised annexation did not take effect until 1910, Korea's colonial era can be said to have begun in 1905 because, by that date, its role in the Japanese scheme of things had been clearly delineated and was largely unchallenged.

To achieve their prescribed ends, the Japanese were quite ruthless in their social and industrial reconstruction; the essence of which was to ensure that Korean cotton growing and processing became entirely dependent upon external direction in order to secure the eradication of competition in the Korean consumer market. The farming household production capacity was systematically destroyed by the police, who confiscated all domestic spinning and weaving tools, looms, and other accoutrements, and burned all stocks of home-produced fabrics. The strong arm of the new colonial law was applied directly, and terminally, to the indigenous textile industry (Cho Youngbum, 1983). Thus, the earliest years of colonisation witnessed the prohibition of all

home weaving, and the rural self-sufficiency in clothing that had been so much a part of Korean social tradition was brought to an end.

That such radical social, cultural, and industrial transformations were accomplished in so brief a period serves to underline the relative dominance of the Japanese military capability of the time, the fragility and vulnerability of the Korean monarchical social structure, and the single-mindedness with which Japan set about turning theory into practice. By 1928 almost 70% of the textile market in Korea was reliant upon imported materials and, furthermore, well in excess of 80% of the cotton grown in Korea – the American variety forcibly introduced by the Japanese – was exported to Japan for processing into finished garments (Lee Ok-jie, 1990). Whilst it may be comforting for liberal philosophers to espouse the conviction that ‘might’ is not necessarily ‘right’, the harsh lessons of history suggest that, in this life at least, the meek, or the weak, inherit very little.

It is ironic to reflect that whilst severe restrictions upon Korean industrial development were imposed, from the very beginning, by the Japanese, one of the few industries that did enjoy significant growth was that involved in the distillation of alcohol from rice and potatoes. This was not, however, a response to any change in the social habits of the Korean people, but merely reflected the increased demand for such luxuries that resulted from the growing number of Japanese nationals arriving on the peninsula (Cho Ki-joon, 1982).

Although the occupation of Korea by the Japanese was characterised pre-eminently by an overt policy of enforced industrial and social deconstruction followed

by restructuring in accordance with Japanese preference and advantage, the colonial administration was not unaware of the imperative to contain any labour reactions which might prove destabilising. As it was considered likely that the mass of Korean workers would react unfavourably to their total domination by foreign employers, a number of small and medium-sized, Korean-owned, enterprises were tolerated. Two important caveats ameliorated the commercial effects of this governmental policy. First, circumstances imposed by the Japanese guaranteed that working conditions in these relatively insubstantial establishments would be much harsher than in the well-equipped, modern, Japanese-owned factories; and second, the smaller enterprises could never compete with their Japanese counterparts either on price or on quality (Lee Ok-jie, 1990). Thus, by making this concession, the overall profits accrued by Japanese-owned textile companies were very little affected, if at all, and, more importantly, the relatively high number of workers employed in the labour intensive and ill-equipped Korean establishments would regard Japanese employers and working conditions in a more favourable, even desirable, light. In this way, any resentment that might be fomented in the workplace would, more likely, be directed against their own, Korean, bosses rather than against the colonial authority (Grajdanzev, 1944).

All societies have what Evelyn Waugh referred to as ‘grey faced men who did well out of the war’ (Waugh, 1961), and the Korean experience under the yoke of the Japanese added credence to that sentiment. By co-operating enthusiastically with their colonial masters, some Korean businessmen were permitted to invest their capital in modern textile factories equipped with the most up to date Japanese machinery. Such preferment required them to use only Japanese spun yarn and to sell only to prescribed outlets at strictly regulated prices. Despite these restrictions, however, the foundations

of some of Korea's largest textile corporations were laid during those early years of occupation, as was the hard core of wealthy Korean textile barons who would, in the 1960's and 1970's, collude with Park Chung-hee and continue the pattern of exploitation that had been set in train during the colonial period.

During the eight years after 1929 the number of textile factories in Korea increased from 241 to 426, and by 1938 there were six very large-scale spinning and weaving companies, all but one of which were Japanese-owned. As a measure of the degree of imbalance that existed between Japanese-owned and Korean-owned textile factories, in 1939 68% of factories employing fewer than thirty workers were Korean-owned and were attributed a mere 5.9% of total textile production, whereas the 7% of factories employing in excess of two hundred workers were almost exclusively Japanese-owned and contributed 85.8% of total production (Grajdanzev, 1944).

From as early as 1931 Japan had been manoeuvring for another war with China, and although one did not materialise until the summer of 1937, Japan's increasingly bellicose stance in Manchuria in the early 1930's heightened the importance of Korea's potential as a 'war workshop' (Palmer, 1962). Major investment of Japanese capital took place not only in the textile industry but also in heavy mechanical and chemical engineering. Textile production capacity tends to be quantified by the number of yarn spindles in operation: in 1934 there were 15,000 spindles in Korean factories; by the end of the colonial period in 1945 that number had risen to 213,776; the overwhelming majority, 89%, of which were owned by the Japanese. Between 1930 and 1943 the value of Korean industrial output increased by

over 700%. At the heart of this dramatic upsurge lay the perennial third-world curse of low wages (KTITL, 1985).

As a measure of the comparative advantage emanating from a low-wage, peripheral, economy, during the colonial period wages paid by the Japanese to Korean textile workers were less than half those paid to their equivalents in mainland Japan. Whilst in both countries the earnings of female workers were considerably less than the earnings of males, Japanese women still received more than Korean males (Lee Ok-jie, 1990). A survey conducted in 1929 by the government in Tokyo confirmed that Korean male earnings were barely above what the government assessed to be subsistence level; it did not comment upon the implicit financial plight of Korean women workers (Grajdanzev, 1944).

The question of how many hours were worked each day under the Japanese is one that cannot be answered with any degree of reliability. The practice of textile factory owners falsifying returns is one that has a long history in Korea, and is a matter addressed in more detail elsewhere in this study. The fact that official records for 1933 indicate that in excess of 80% of Korean textile workers were working more than twelve hours per day, and that almost three-quarters of them averaged only ten rest days per year (Kang Dong-jin, 1983), suggests that the reality was somewhat less equitable. Much in accord with the traditional Confucian ethic, women worked longer hours than men for less than half the male rate of pay under the Japanese: the exploitative conditions of employment that were to be the inheritance of the women workers of the 1970's were thereby reinforced during the period of colonial rule (Lee Ok-jie, 1990).

Thus it is clear that, from a Japanese perspective, the restructuring of the textile industry in Korea proved to be a richly rewarding exercise. It was the industry, above all others, that returned the largest profit on capital invested. The seductive combination of low wages, long working hours, preferential fiscal arrangements, and generous government subsidy attracted a return on capital in excess of 42% in the latter years of the 1930's and early years of the 1940's, compared with a 13.8% return on capital in the chemical industry and 28.6% in the metal and machine sectors (Ahn Byung-jik, 1981).

An even more poignant presage of the 1970's was the fact that the labour movement in the textile industry, which had been active during the early years of Japanese occupation, was branded as a subversive and communist inspired organisation and, as such, was savagely repressed and driven underground during the 1930's (Grajdanzev, 1944). Freedoms of speech, assembly, and association were denied, and the only means by which worker activists could communicate with each other was under the protective aegis of the Christian church. Many of the western missionaries resident in Korea at the time were American and, as it was much in Japan's trade interest to maintain good relations with the United States, those church figures were able to offer support to the beleaguered members of the labour movement without fear of retribution (Kim Yun-hwan, 1982). Never was the dictum of Alphonse Karr more apposite: "*plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose*".

No country can occupy another for the length of time that Japan dominated the Korean Peninsula without leaving an enduring legacy. It is true that for more than a decade after World War II anti-Japanese feelings ran very high and, indeed, many Koreans still retain a degree of antipathy towards their erstwhile masters. Nevertheless,

the undeniable influence of Japan on Korea's economic development, especially during the 1960's and 1970's, is germane to this study and should, therefore, not go unremarked. Many senior policymakers in 'modern', post-war, Korea received much of their formal education from the Japanese and internalised many Japanese social and commercial mores. Many Koreans who were subsequently to become 'movers and shakers' in Seoul were deeply impressed by Japanese history, particularly the Meiji era, during which a small group of oligarchs guided Japan towards the achievement of the twin goals of mercantile enrichment and military strength. It may be considered ironic that although many Korean political leaders overtly resented the oligarchs who colonised Korea, they did not shy away from using them as role models (Kim Kihwan and Leipziger, 1993).

5.3 The American Military Government And Rhee Seung-man : 1945 – 1960

We have seen that the focus of Japanese policy in Korea during the colonial period was to deconstruct the industrial fabric of the country and then rebuild it along lines geared specifically to the maximisation of profit, with all the spoils thus accrued in the peripheral economy being directed back to the seat of colonial power. From a purely Japanese point of view, the exercise had proved highly successful. After Japan's unconditional surrender on 15 August, 1945 and the imposition of an American Military Government (AMG) on the peninsula, policy emphases shifted, and although the accumulation of profit no longer held the position of main motive, the core objectives of the AMG's Korean policy meant that Korea continued to serve the whim and the interest of a foreign player.

The primary goals of the AMG were to secure a pro-US regime in the south of Korea that would, by definition, be strongly anti-communist, and to engineer social stability. The achievement of the first goal effectively marginalised and alienated most of the Korean nationalist leaders and their followers, whilst achievement of the second led to the administrative authorities invariably throwing their weight behind the employers in subsequent labour disputes, and suppressing emergent worker organisations which were seeking a democratic voice in what they fervently hoped would now be a more liberated workplace.

The occupation of the Korean south by the Americans was not as well-planned or as efficiently conducted as was the case with their occupation of Japan. All indications suggest that the US regarded the circumstances in Korea as being essentially the same as those in that other Asian country a few miles to the east. What worked in Japan would, by definition, be equally effective in Korea. It was to transpire, however, that whilst their social, cultural, political, and economic intelligence concerning Japan was accurate, and a comprehensive policy based upon that intelligence well thought through, the Americans were to find that the Japanese template simply did not fit the circumstances in Korea. In contradistinction to their counterparts in Tokyo, the AMG in Seoul did not have any 'Korean experts' among its number, and locating reliable sources of advice, of a kind that would accord with US preconditions, on matters Korean was to prove problematic. One of the major stumbling blocks was that all the political factions in the south, with the exception of that led by Rhee Seung-man, had expressed willingness to negotiate with the communist north over the question of national unification; a stance that was anathema to the US (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). As a consequence, the AMG moved in a direction virtually guaranteed to enrage the majority

of the Korean population by seeking guidance from the very bureaucrats and individuals who had collaborated and held high office during the time of subjugation by Japan. The old colonial bureaucratic structure was maintained and even the colonial police force, the members of which had gone into hiding, was reinstated in the same uniforms that had been issued by the Japanese (Lee Ok-jie, 1990). History is littered with revolutions of one sort or another which, contrary to contemporary rhetoric, not only fail to sweep clean the Augean stables but, on the contrary, succeed only in adding to the corruption that was one of the main causes of the revolt in the first place. Every change of national administration that has taken place in Korea, including that of the present day, has reinforced this apparent paradox. The same faces seem to float to the top no matter what the complexion happens to be of the political and social regimes holding sway at any given time. The mishandling of the textile industry by the AMG was a classic case in point.

As has been indicated previously, the overwhelming majority of the most productive textile companies in Korea were owned by the Japanese. When these 'enemy holdings' fell into the hands of the Americans a decision clearly had to be made as to the means of their disposal. Much against the wishes of the nationalists and the workers, the AMG opted for a process of what can only be referred to as 'privatisation'. Valued at some three billion *won* in 1947, the component parts of the spinning and weaving industry – which was the largest single manufacturing sector to be disposed of – were virtually given away to selected recipients for a mere one-tenth of that amount (Kang Man-gil, 1985). What is more, the new owners were afforded preferential loans by the AMG and were given fifteen years in which to pay off the purchase price. As this all occurred during a time of rampant inflation, the actual cost was considerably below

even the paltry nominal amount. To add insult to injury, at least from the point of view of Korean workers, even the textile factories which had been taken over immediately after the departure of the Japanese and were being run by 'People's Committees' were taken out of worker control by the AMG and added to the booty to be handed over to a list of dubious new owners (Kang Man-gil, 1985). The fortunate beneficiaries of this most favourable of business opportunities turned out to be the very same Korean capitalists who had enjoyed similar patronage under the Japanese, and who now found little difficulty in convincing the AMG of their loyalty to the new administration and their desire to further the goals of the United States.

In 1948 the AMG transferred political control of South Korea to their placeman, Rhee Seung-man, and the new administration's largesse toward the favoured few continued as before, with many financial privileges and tariff exemptions being awarded to those industrialists with close political connections (Hamilton, 1986). However, irrespective of the establishment of textile conglomerates in South Korea following the defeat of Japan, and the huge individual fortunes which were amassed under the incumbencies of the Japanese, the AMG, and Rhee Seung-man, the wider characterisation of the South Korean textile industry between 1945 and 1960 was one of decline. The truth of the matter is that the USA, unlike Japan some forty-odd years previously, was not overly interested in South Korea's economic reorganisation. It had no coherent and informed policy geared to the construction of a self-supporting economy and, as far as textiles were concerned, appeared content merely to facilitate the import of cheap raw cotton from the US and allow Korean farmers to look elsewhere for a worthwhile crop into which to diversify (Park Chan-il, 1981). Furthermore, and very much in line with the ethos of preferment, the allocation of that imported raw material

was entirely within the gift of the government, whether the AMG or, later, that of Rhee Seung-man. Thus, those firms with political connections rapidly assumed monopoly status while the smaller, unfavoured, factories which had to scrape by on what little raw materials they could get, either went out of business or were reduced to the role of subcontractors. Purely by default, the opportunity to re-establish the link between agriculture and industry; the connection crucial to self-sufficiency, was missed. As had been the case during the colonial period, the Korean textile industry was, yet again, destined to become dependent upon external supply.

The Korean War (1950-53) between North and South not only devastated the entire infrastructure in South Korea, but its aftermath witnessed a further diminution of the possibilities for national industrial self-sufficiency, and a reinforcement of the dependency culture. Foreign aid, mostly from the United States, in the form of consumption goods was traded to produce counterpart funds that were taken up, in the main, by military expenditure. Aid in the form of cheap raw materials was preferentially allocated to the favoured and well-connected large enterprises, while much of the grant aid found its way into the same accounts in the shape of low interest loans (Kang Man-gil, 1985).

In its dealings with 'organised' labour, the Rhee administration followed closely the pattern set by the AMG and thereby emphasised, if emphasis was needed, the closeness of the bond that had developed between industrialists and government. Although in 1945 the AMG had repealed the labour laws which had been put in place by the Japanese, and enacted instead legislation identical to that which it had introduced into occupied Japan, the South Korean statutes were characterised more by their

avoidance than by their observance (Lee Ok-jie, 1990). No matter to what extent, or how blatantly, the Korean employers violated the provisions of the law during the late 1940's, the US administration would make token gestures of issuing repeated warnings to the employers when workers protested against the exploitative conditions under which they were living, before taking action; but in order to avoid putting the convenient, stabilising, government/employer relationship in jeopardy, such action was invariably directed against the labour force (FKTU, 1979). During the Rhee Seung-man incumbency, precisely the same inverted logic was applied, albeit for a different, and far more corrupt, motive. Most of the owners of the largest textile companies were either related to, or were close associates of, Rhee himself: for example, Rhee's adopted son was the head of the Chosun Spinning and Weaving Company, and the financial director of Rhee's Liberal Party was the owner of Daehan Spinning and Weaving. In both companies, Chosun in 1951 and Daehan in 1955, major disputes were suppressed with vigour (Kim Yun-hwan, 1982).

In April, 1960 the reign, and the corruption, of Rhee Seung-man's First Republic was brought to an abrupt end by student-led popular revolution. The Second Republic of Chang Myon's Democratic Party was to last for just one year before General Park Chung-hee appeared centre-stage. Despite the 'revolutionary pledges' sworn by the new military regime, the trials and the tribulations of the Korean textile and garment industry were far from over.

5.4 The Wider Perspective

As we have seen, the low wage potential of Korea has proved a powerful magnet to foreign, capitalist 'carpetbagger' enterprises since the 19th century and, as a

consequence, the textile industry, in particular, was dominated and manipulated by external forces. However, after the expulsion of the Japanese, and the handover of power by the AMG to a Korean administration, it might reasonably have been assumed that South Korea would be in a position to regain full responsibility for, and full benefit from, its 'own' textile and garment industries. This was not to be. What appeared to many as a golden opportunity for a new beginning was lost and, bearing in mind the richly merited antipathy felt by most Koreans for their erstwhile colonial masters, it is difficult to contain surprise at the speed with which Japanese influence was, once again, to be felt in the mills and sweat-shop factories of Seoul.

As Bolton (1976) explains, by the second half of the 1970's the major segment of world textile production was under the control of a mere 38 companies functioning along an organised and collective policy line. Thus, whether it was by means of company management interconnection, cartel, or share ownership arrangements, the relationship that was forged between these major players effectively prevented free competition in the global market. Furthermore, and by extension, decisions which impinged upon the living and working conditions of countless labourers around the world rested in the hands of a very few, foreign-based, individuals. What is particularly pertinent is the fact that when we look at the locations of the head-offices of these 38 companies, we find that there were just seven countries of origin; five western European nations, as well as the United States and Japan. As each of these countries had been, or remained, colonial powers, it was not easy for developing countries to disassociate routine economic decisions from the actual presence of imperialism. Of those 38 dominant companies in the global scene of the 1970's, eight were Japanese; all but one of which occupied positions in the top half of the overall league table. An important part

of the collective arrangements agreed by the major international players was the allocation of 'areas of influence' (Bolton, 1976). In the case of South Korea, that influence was exerted inevitably, and ironically, by Japan, whose investment in Korean textile manufacturing grew rapidly during the 1960's. Indeed, by 1978, there were at least 57 joint venture companies in Korea, and out of the leading twenty Korean textile companies, eight were fully controlled by Japanese capital (Bolton, 1976).

Thus, from the position of a comprehensively defeated nation in 1946, and driven by the imperative to secure and take advantage of a low wage workforce, Japan had manoeuvred into a situation whereby the Korean textile industry was, once again, little more than an extension and an expansion of the Japanese economy. What might have appeared inconceivable less than a generation previously; that the ex-colonial power could ever again play a significant part in directing the Korean economy, was now actually taking place. Japanese involvement was not restricted to the input of capital, but rapidly diversified into the supply of raw materials, especially in the synthetic fibre sector, the sourcing of more advanced technology, and the development of a sophisticated marketing network.

One of the numerous reasons why it was crucial for Park Chung-hee to maintain good relations with the United States was that America constituted the main market for Korean textile products. In 1975, 39% of output went to the US (UN Statistics of Commodities, 1975), and by 1977, 9.5% of all clothing and textiles on the American market was of South Korean origin. 30% of output in 1975 was exported to EC countries, while 16.5% was destined for Japan (Lee Ok-jie, 1990).

It must be reiterated that the Korean textile industry was not only of great interest to Japan but was, in fact, the pre-eminent component of Park Chung-hee's industrial development programme at least until the mid-1970's, when the emphasis began to shift towards the heavy and chemical sectors. In 1976, for example, textiles occupied the first rank, constituting 35.4% of South Korea's total exports. The magnitude of this performance can only be fully appreciated when it is recalled that whilst total exports in 1961 were \$US 41 million, by 1978 they had escalated to \$US 10.23 billion (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989). The growth rate of the textile and clothing industry was equally remarkable; while the growth of manufacturing as a whole increased by 230.3% between 1970 and 1974, that of the clothing industry during the same period reached 516.4%. Commensurate with this dramatic upsurge in output, the number of workers employed in the industry increased by more than 52% in the two years from 1973 to 1975; that was from just over 190,000 to almost 290,000 (Korean Economy Annual, 1976).

According to the Park regime's Fourth Five-Year Plan (1977-1981), cut short by Park's assassination in 1979, the textile sector would continue to grow, albeit at a slightly reduced rate, and the predicted textile exports for the final year of the plan were a little short of \$US 4 billion. This constituted 26.4 % of total exports in 1981 and would maintain textiles in the vanguard of the export-oriented programme. To be the major contributor in such an extraordinary economic explosion is indicative of the efficacy of the US-Japan-South Korea tripartite relationship. It revealed the extent of the stranglehold attained over Korean industry by external forces, and the degree of exploitation suffered by Korean workers at the hands of their own national administration.

The garment sector of the textile industry consisted, in the main, of small companies concentrated within the Seoul metropolitan region and epitomised by the Peace Market, in central Seoul. It was within this infamous establishment that hundreds of separate owners employed thousands of young women and girls; the suffering and the achievements of whom form the core and the *raison d'être* of this study.

5.5 Seoul: The Development Of A Capital City

For most South Koreans, Seoul represents much more than merely the capital city of their nation; the collective concept of Seoul being, in many ways, far removed from that of London held by the British, Washington by the Americans, or Beijing by the Chinese. In the Korean psyche Seoul is not only the hub of government, commerce, and education, but is also the spiritual heart of the country, almost the personification of what it is to be South Korean and, as such, the 'idea' of Seoul exerts a powerful, almost magnetic, attraction over South Koreans of all shades of the social spectrum (Kim Joo-chul, 1997). When residents opine that 'Seoul has lost its soul' because of the ever-increasing overcrowding, pollution, traffic congestion, crime, and other assorted urban ills, their concern is not directed at the capital in isolation, but is a harbinger of their disquiet about the future of South Korea as a whole.

The events which unfolded during the 1960's and 1970's, and which are the focus of this study, all took place within the Seoul metropolitan region and it is, therefore, considered appropriate to take a brief overview of the origin and evolution of this fascinating, complex, and troubled city. Although Korea has a well recorded history extending for more than five thousand years, Seoul did not acquire the status of capital

city until the emergence of the Yi Dynasty in 1394; during which period it was known as Hanyang. Situated, as it is, in the centre of the peninsula, close to an ice-free seaport, and on the major trade artery of the Han river, Seoul was a natural choice, and an ideal location, from which a king could oversee his nation. However, twentieth century geopolitics were to devalue the choice somewhat, for the division of the peninsula after the Second World War resulted in Seoul being a mere 35 kilometres south of the 38th parallel of latitude, the arbitrary border-line between North and South Korea. The vulnerability that such an outcome lent to South Korea's seat of government was amply demonstrated when Seoul was occupied by communist forces on two occasions during the Korean War, necessitating the temporary transfer of administrative functions to Pusan.

Built along traditional lines as a walled city, the original Seoul had four gates, one at each of the compass cardinal-points, with the area that was enclosed by the wall forming what is now referred to as 'central' Seoul. The spiritual quality that plays so great a part in Seoul's appeal to Koreans was inculcated from the beginning insofar as all the early development was based strictly on the disciplines of geomancy, or *feng shui* (Kim Joo-chul, 1997). This set of principles dictated both the precise location of the centre of development, and the orientation of buildings and streets, in order to achieve an aura and a mood of harmony and peace.

Constrained by its physical enclosure, which limited its size to no more than 16 square kilometres, and in the light of a strict closed-door policy, deeply rooted in Confucianism, that was adhered to by the rulers of Korea prior to the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1876 (see above), it is not surprising to find that, for the

greater part of its 600 year history, Seoul maintained a comparatively stable population. The inhabitants were not culturally predisposed toward commercialism or industrial expansion and their numbers fluctuated only between 100,000 – 120,000 (Kim Joo-chul, 1997). What structural expansion that did take place was linked largely to the growth of administrative, educational, and religious facilities. It was this controlled and exclusive characteristic that gave rise to the sobriquet 'the hermit kingdom'.

The process of annexation and colonisation by the Japanese in the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century witnessed a radical upheaval in all aspects of Korean life. Not only were industrialisation and a bureaucratic system of government forcibly introduced, but a clear and deliberate policy to dismantle Korean identity was undertaken. Seoul was renamed Kyongsong and its walled-city character and geomantic ethos were modified almost beyond recognition. By 1936, the city had gained a population approaching one million, and because Japanese residents and military personnel had commandeered the central areas, pushing Koreans to the periphery, Seoul's physical size expanded to encompass 134 square kilometres (Kim Joo-chul, 1997). Most importantly, it was under the influence of the Japanese that Seoul not only enhanced its role as the centre for national administration, but it also rapidly assumed a position of dominance in business and finance.

After the Second World War, with the Japanese defeated and colonial rule supposedly at an end, the next phase in the capital's troubled history began. Large numbers of ex-patriots returning from Manchuria, China and, of course, Japan, swelled the masses of migrants from rural areas who gravitated towards Seoul during the period of ideological conflict that was sweeping the peninsula. By 1949 the population had

increased to 1.6 million and the size of the city had more than doubled since 1936 (Kim Joo-chul, 1997). The post-war infrastructure could not cope with such an influx, however, and great swathes of makeshift squatter encampments began to spring up in many parts of the city. This was the beginning of a planning and housing trauma that was to bedevil Seoul for more than a generation, and one which the author was to experience at first hand.

By the time the armistice was signed at the end of the Korean War in July 1953, some 47% of all buildings in Korea had been destroyed (Kim Joo-chul, 1997), and a great surge of what were, in effect, refugees flooded into Seoul in search of employment and a place in which to try to rebuild some sort of a life. With legitimate employment opportunities virtually non-existent, it was almost inevitable that a 'black economy' would blossom in the city during this period. Necessity resulted in small, unregulated, one-man, or one-family, businesses springing up throughout the city. As is the way, different craft specialisations tended to group together in particular districts. For example, the textile and garment producing enterprises gravitated to the Chonggye-chun district in the very centre of Seoul where, as will be described in the following section, the myriad of ramshackle huts in which tailors and seamstresses plied their trade would be swept away to be replaced by the Peace Market and other, similar, 'establishments of ill-repute' (Hart-Landsberg, 1993).

Confronted by the level of devastation wrought by the war, and with minimal financial resources at its disposal, the city administration was ill-equipped to formulate any coherent development policy. Whether by accident or intent, the practical outcome of this incapacity on the part of the authorities was an overly harsh and insensitive

attempt at 'slum clearance': a determination that was frequently manifested in the simple expedient of driving bulldozers through the aggregations of tin and plywood shacks, each of which housed up to three entire families (Interview, ex-Peace Market factory owner, December, 1998). At a time of civil and political instability, such abuse of an already deeply wounded and impoverished population; one that had only recently emerged from an agonising civil war, was likely to foment unrest.

Ostensibly in order to rectify what were perceived to be the root causes of this social disenchantment and mismanagement, the military coup of Park Chung-hee and his accomplices took place in May, 1961. Unlike his American and Korean predecessors, but much in common with the Japanese colonialists, Park had a clear vision of exactly the direction South Korea should take. Park wasted no time in shifting the national agenda from disorganised agrarianism to one focused upon state controlled export-oriented industrialisation. Park Chung-hee followed the pattern set by the Japanese whereby the growth of Seoul was closely tied to the economic development of the nation as a whole. Thus, one of the spin-offs of his radical policy shift was an explosive expansion of the capital city. While other areas in the south of the country were targeted as the sites for the development of heavier industries such as steel production and fabrication, and the building of automobiles, the capital and its surrounding region was identified as the locus for light manufacturing and high-tech enterprises. Factories in their hundreds appeared almost overnight. During the first year alone of the military regime's incumbency the number of 'legitimate' and, therefore, 'recordable', light manufacturing establishments in Seoul increased by more than 120% (Kim Joo-chul, 1997). The migration of workers from the countryside to the city accelerated in concert, and by 1969 the city occupied over 600 square kilometres and

held a population in excess of 5 million. The rate of increase continued throughout the 1970's, and during that decade an average of 300,000 new residents arrived each year (Kim Joo-chul, 1997).

The city administration, dictated as it was by the Park philosophy, was confronted with a dichotomy: on the one hand, there was a requirement to foster the highly labour-intensive new industries which were blossoming within the city limits and, on the other, the problem of accommodating the ever-expanding army of essential labourers became more and more pressing. In 1971, for example, it was estimated that in excess of one million Koreans were living in 'unauthorised' temporary dwellings in Seoul (Hart-Landsberg, 1993). Thus, it was during this period that a series of building projects were undertaken which exhibited a singular lack of imagination and a concentration solely upon the utilitarian. Whereas, north of the Han River there was still a preponderance of single-storey houses which reflected traditional Korean architectural preference, the region south of the river exhibited a departure from such norms and, instead, suffered the development of US-style grid street patterns accessing endless, monotonous, high-rise apartment blocks which dominate the cityscape to this day. To the older residents these blocks are constant reminders of the 'loss of soul' of Seoul. Despite numerous 'decentralisation' measures enacted by the Park regime, the 'magnetic' attraction of their capital continued to draw hopeful immigrants from the farms and villages until well into the 1980's (Kim Joo-chul, 1997).

The briefest glance at the most recent census figures is sufficient to drive home the enormity of the expansion that has occurred in Seoul over a period of little more than one generation. In 1997, the population of the city exceeded 11 million people,

more than 80% of whom have lived there for less than thirty years. The city boundaries enclose an area in excess of 605 square kilometres, which affords a density of some 16,000 inhabitants per square kilometre. Furthermore, the Seoul metropolitan region, which includes surrounding satellite towns and industrial complexes, contains 46% of the entire population of South Korea. By the end of the current year, 2000, it has been estimated that it will constitute the third most populated region in the world, behind only Mexico City and Sao Paulo (Kim Joo-chul, 1997). From its beginning as a walled city of peace and harmony, Seoul has become a gigantic urban sprawl that an increasing number of commentators are forecasting will witness extreme environmental degradation and a massive upsurge of crime unless drastic corrective measures are formulated and adopted. Whether Seoul has, indeed, 'lost its soul' is clearly arguable; the proposition that it has lost its Korean identity is indisputable.

5.6 The Peace Market

Cutting through the middle of Seoul city, and running in an east-west direction, is a four-lane highway that was constructed in the early seventies by the Park Chung-hee regime. Seoul sports stadium lies some two-and-a-half kilometres east of City Hall, and the highway passes approximately four hundred metres to the north of the stadium. The area between the stadium and the highway, which at this point takes the form of an extended flyover, is the Chonggye-chun district, and is dominated by the group of buildings which, collectively, are known as the Peace Market.¹

The Peace Market was at the root of so many problems for Park Chung-hee in the 1970's because, from the very beginning of the decade, his opponents used it as a focus for anti-government protest. But the unwelcome attention paid to the wider implications of conditions in the Peace Market was not limited to South Korean resistance groups and student organisations; the North Korean government and other foreigners also elected to make it an issue of substance from 1970 onwards.² For example, in 1972, when there was a summit conference to pave the way for unification between the South and the North,³ the North Korean delegation gave notice that they would

like to see the Peace Market whilst they were in Seoul. Although this was a highly sensitive matter for Park Chung-hee, he felt compelled to accede to the request, and was coerced into granting state approval for the allocation of 20 million *won* [approximately \$US40,000 at the 1972 exchange rate] to be spent on the external decoration of the Peace Market buildings. After the event, Park was even more unhappy with the Peace Market, especially the union activity that was taking place there. It was difficult not to see the Peace Market as a volcano waiting to erupt (Interview, Head of the Labour Inspectorate at the Peace Market 1974-1978, February 1999).

Throughout the 1970's, the 'collective' Peace Market was the epicentre of the production and wholesale distribution of ready-made garments in South Korea. The Peace, Dong-hwa, and Tong-il markets together constituted a production and sales system wherein each of the many small factories was complemented by a wholesale and/or retail outlet. The architectural pattern was identical in each of the buildings, with factories located on the first and second floors and shops occupying the entirety of the ground floors. However, by the end of the decade, and for reasons which will be explained in detail in a later chapter, the factories had begun to relocate to other areas, and the business ethos of the Peace Market shifted from a combination of production and sales to one focused entirely upon marketing. Indeed, by the beginning of the 1990's, the Seoul Peace Market had acquired an international reputation as the place to go in order to purchase high quality, ready made garments in bulk and at a good price. It attracted, and continues to attract, retailers, large and small, from China, Japan, Taiwan, the former Soviet Union, and many other countries whose merchants and traders are ever on the lookout for quality and value.

5.6.1 Historical Development

As has been explained previously, one of the salient characteristics of the aftermath of the Korean War was the veritable flood of refugees that poured into the capital city. In the absence of any coherent planning or control mechanisms, this tide of

impoverished humanity was left to its own devices to find somewhere to live and, hopefully, some form of remunerative employment. For their part, those who had some expertise, or ambition, in the garment and textile field tended to congregate in the Chonggye-chun district, where they constituted, in effect, a raw material of enormous potential for any likely entrepreneur. One such enterprising individual was Ko Dal-soo, the owner of a Seoul construction company, who was quick to identify the possibilities for profit that the thousands of displaced persons who had arrived in the city represented (Interview, ex-Peace Market factory owner, December, 1998).

Having gained 'temporary building approval' from City Hall, Ko Dal-soo began to construct a large number of rudimentary wooden shacks, each about six square metres in size, which he then rented out at exorbitant rates. This 'development', which rapidly became what could only be described as a stench-ridden slum, was the beginning of the Peace Market. By 1957, four years after the formal cessation of hostilities between North and South Korea, the tenants of this myriad of workshops had benefited to such an extent from the huge demand for clothing that the most successful of them could afford to join together and fund a clearance and rebuilding programme. An observer in the 1960's, driving west on the aforementioned new flyover towards City Hall, would have been able to overlook the first manifestations of this programme. Two long, narrow, three-storey buildings, connected by a bridge over an alley-way, had been erected to replace the original ramshackle workshops, which had been demolished. These connected buildings, running parallel with the highway and extending over some six hundred metres, were the 'new' Peace Market, and the great majority of their occupants were the former tenants of the slum workshops.

The ground floors of the new buildings were divided into cubicles which were used as wholesale or retail outlets for the garments being produced in the factories on the first and second floors. The nature of these garments varied from season to season: in the autumn and winter, jackets, overcoats, and sweaters predominated, whereas in the summer, lightweight jackets, trousers, and shirts made up the bulk of the output. Because most of the really skilled machinists had gravitated to the Peace Market, the area acquired a reputation for quality among consumers; 'Made in Seoul' was a mark of distinction and, as a consequence, it became increasingly difficult for provincial manufacturers to compete. They either went bankrupt, or relocated to the Chonggye-chun area. The Peace Market increased in capacity almost daily, and it was not long before the district had cornered the nation-wide commercial market in ready-made garments.

Day-to-day administration of the Peace Market buildings was in the hands of the Peace Market Corporation; a body made up of representatives of the owners of individual factories. Bearing in mind the nature of the main interest of the members of the board; that is, the maximisation of profit, it is not surprising that although the Corporation was legally mandated to assume responsibility only for the security, maintenance, and cleaning of the buildings, it was not long before its primary function became that of 'mouthpiece' for employers, and protector of employers' rights (Diary, Chun Tae-il, 1969). By the end of 1968, the two smaller market buildings, Dong-hwa and Tong-il, had been completed. They were both to the south of, and close to, the Peace Market, and were administered along identical lines.

5.6.2 Employee Establishment

Attention is drawn elsewhere in this study to the difficulty in ascertaining precisely how many workers were employed in the 'collective' Peace Market. Although notable more for its evasion than for its observance, the Labour Standard Law did make clear prescription in regard to the number of persons who could be employed in workplaces of a given size. Whilst this provision was largely concerned with the question of health and safety; considerations rarely at the forefront of Korean employer consciousness, the number of workers on a factory's payroll also had a fundamental impact upon tax liability; a factor of somewhat more pressing urgency. It was, therefore, very much in the interest of a factory owner's balance sheet that he understate the number in his employ in all the returns made to the Ministry of Labour Affairs. This common, if not universal, practice renders many industrial relations statistics of the period virtually useless.

For example, according to figures released by the Ministry in 1970, the number of factories in operation in the three markets discussed in this section was 428, and the total number of workers employed in those factories was approximately 7,600 (Ministry of Labour Affairs Annual Report, 1970). After allowing for acceptable fluctuations, the figures provided convenient confirmation that the maximum number of employees per factory did not exceed the legal limit of sixteen. These claims did not accord with Chun Tae-il's experience and so, in the same year, he conducted his own protracted and painstaking survey of employment patterns in the three markets.⁴ The results of his research demonstrated all too clearly the magnitude of the corporate deception that had become commonplace. Having affirmed a distrust of labour statistics, the author does, nevertheless, submit that the evidence provided by Chun Tae-il bears a

relationship to the actuality that is closer than can be claimed for any alternative that is likely to become available. According to his research, the true number of factories in the three markets was 860, almost exactly double the officially declared number, whilst the total of those employed was, at 26,800, more than three times greater than the official amount (Diary, Chun Tae-il, 1970). A simple calculation confirms that, far from remaining within the legal maximum of sixteen employees per factory, the truth was that, on average, the number employed was approximately twice the maximum required by law.

Chun Tae-il's breakdown of the figures he had obtained showed that Donghwa Market consisted of 160 factories employing 4,800 workers (an average of 30 workers per factory), Tong-il Market had 200 factories employing 8,000 workers (an average of 40 workers per factory), and the Peace Market was made up of 500 factories employing 14,000 workers (an average of 28 workers per factory). Of the 26,800 workers, 85.9 percent were women between the ages of 14 to 24, and more than half of them were below the age of 18 (Diary, Chun Tae-il, 1970)

Taking a closer scrutiny at the Peace Market, Chun Tae-il found that of the 14,000 employees, 5,000 were either *oya* or *bocho-machinists* (all female), an equivalent number of *shidas*, or machinists' helpers (all female), and 500 cutters, each of whom had an assistant (all male). The balance was made up of approximately 500 female *madomes*, 500 *shiaggas* (mostly male) plus managers (all male), shop assistants, and associated staff.⁵ Thus, between 85 and 90 percent of all those employed in the Peace Market were women or young girls (Diary, Chun Tae-il, 1970).

5.6.3 Peace Market Employers

In an interview in December, 1998 with a Peace Market factory owner who had been involved in the Peace Market development from the beginning, the author was informed that approximately 50 percent of the 860 original factory owners were refugees from North Korea, and some 10 percent of those had been anti-communist prisoners of war. The remaining 50 percent of owners were from the countryside in the South and had been drawn to Seoul after the devastation wreaked by the Korean War. Few, if any, of the employers were educated, and their manner tended to be rough and uncultured. They were driven by a single-minded determination to make a success of their businesses and, in most cases, their entire family would be involved, in one way or another, in the production and sales process.

The factory I worked in was owned by a North Korean family. The wife looked after the factory while her husband took charge of sales down in the shop. We had no electric iron and I had to use one that was heated by charcoal. It was quite dangerous with sparks flying around and it was so easy to damage the fabrics or the finished clothes. I tried hard to be careful, but whenever I made a mistake they used very common and abusive language. They often hit me and threatened me with dismissal. They had no tolerance at all towards the workers. But that sort of behaviour was quite normal in those days. Despite all the violence and humiliation I did not have any alternative and I begged them to let me stay in my job. It was the only chance I had to learn how to be a machinist (Interview, Peace Market woman worker⁶, February 1999).

Most of the owners had started out with very little capital; in many cases just sufficient to buy three or four, often second-hand, sewing machines and their first batch of fabric. Such was the demand for clothing of all descriptions, however, that it was by no means uncommon for these very small-scale entrepreneurs to have increased their establishments tenfold within the space of two or three years. The saying among them in the 1970's was: "What is made, is sold", and this maxim was never more true than during the periods leading up to the major national holidays at Harvest Festival and

New Year, when retailers would be lining up, laden with cash, and eager to secure as much stock as the wholesaler could produce (Interview, ex-Peace Market factory owner, December, 1998).

The retired factory owner mentioned above, who was interviewed in an hotel close to his home in the exclusive Sheo Chodong district of Seoul, provided a flavour of the business atmosphere of the period, and an indication of how relatively easy it was to accumulate wealth in the garment industry. A précis of his comments was noted:

I started a small garment factory in the Chonggye-chun district in 1954, shortly after the end of the Korean War. By 1963 I had made a huge fortune and decided to leave the Peace Market and invest my capital, about 3 billion *won*, in the transportation business – a bus and taxi company. But because I had no experience in that line of work I went bankrupt in less than two years. I was deeply depressed and had no alternative but to go back to the Peace Market. On 5 May, 1966 I began again with just 150,000 *won*, which was all I had. I acquired five Japanese motor sewing machines on a half-lease arrangement and started to make women's blouses. After three years I had fully recovered my business. I invested some of my capital, and bought two wholesale stores in the Dongdae-moon Market, and I also bought the house where I now live. I joined the consortium that built the Dong-hwa Market in 1968 and became a manager. In the 1980's I was the senior manager of Dong-hwa, and I retired in April, 1992 (Interview, ex-Peace Market factory owner, December, 1998).

5.7 Summary

It is not for reasons of sentimentality or romanticism that Korea is known as the 'Land of the Morning Calm'. Its people are industrious, peace loving, spiritual, and placid, and war as an instrument of national policy has not featured in the lexicon of Korean governance. The Confucian ethic that flatly rejects militarism as a degrading form of human endeavour has generated a deep-seated public antipathy to all things bellicose, and has manifested itself in the total absence of internal armed conquest throughout much of Korea's long history. But this absence of institutionalised internal

aggression was complemented by subjugation and exploitation at the hands of external forces, extending back over thousands of years. Nowhere was this all-consuming ethos of manipulation and plunder more prevalent than in the textile and garment industry which, from the very earliest of times until late into the twentieth century, has borne the brunt of systematic spoliation.

The bitter irony was that when occupation administrations and foreign adventurers finally left the divided peninsula, and the opportunity for indigenous independent self-government was at hand, and almost as though the habit of centuries was too deeply ingrained to break, the exploitation, suppression, corruption, and brutality continued unabated. Indeed, in many ways this pattern of aggression actually gained in ferocity. The facility to accumulate enormous sums of money, as has been illustrated in this chapter, was the rule rather than the exception for those Koreans fortunate enough to be in a position to take advantage of the opportunities on offer during the 1960's and 1970's. What must never be overlooked, however, is that such personal and corporate fortunes were possible only because thousands upon thousands of downtrodden and impoverished women and young girls who toiled in the sweatshops of the Peace Market had no protection whatsoever against the combined forces of a ruthless state and predatory capital.

NOTES

¹ The name 'Peace Market' is both specific and general. It can be used to refer to the Peace Market buildings themselves, or as a collective reference to the Peace Market and the Dong-hwa and Tong-il markets, all of which are adjacent.

² After Chun Tae-il's death in November, 1970, the tour itineraries of visiting luminaries and academic researchers increasingly featured, at their instigation, a visit to the Peace Market (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989).

³ 20 May-1 June, 1970, Park Sung-chul, second Vice-Premier of North Korea, returned the secret visit paid in the preceding May to Pyongyang by Yi Hoo-rak, Director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989).

⁴ Chun Tae-il and a small group of colleagues visited each factory during the summer of 1970 to collect employment data. Results of the survey were submitted to the Ministry of Labour Affairs, and were subsequently published in the Kyunghang national daily newspaper on 23 October, 1970.

⁵ Job titles derive from the Japanese colonial era and are explained in Chapter Seven.

⁶ Park Myong-ok became Vice-President of the Chonggye Union 1972-1974, and Secretary of the Women's Section of the union 1974-1977. She started work in the Peace Market in 1958.

CHAPTER SIX

A FEMALE LABOUR FORCE: THE PAST MEETS THE FUTURE

“One is not born a woman, one becomes one”.

(Simone de Beauvoir)

6.0 Introduction

Whether women were of the 1960's, the 1970's, or the 1980's generations, their mission in the urban area remained constant. While a few may have migrated to the city simply to escape from the confines of the family, for the most part, young females went to the city to obtain employment so that they could send part of their wages back home to help their family survive economically. Frequently, their primary responsibility was to pay for the education of siblings, especially their younger brothers (Abstract, group discussions, female garment workers, December, 1998 – January, 1999).

Explicit in this study is an exploration of the participation of women in the social and economic development of South Korea during the first two decades immediately following the military coup of May, 1961. That is to say, the period which may be characterised primarily as that of ‘modern’ industrialisation; the era which began with the abrupt and undemocratic assumption of power by General Park Chung-hee, and which ended with his assassination on 26 October, 1979. Those two decades witnessed a cataclysmic national metamorphosis that reverberated throughout every facet of human life in South Korea, and no sector was more affected, or played a greater part in determining the eventual outcomes, than young women workers. It is, therefore, vital to the achievement of the goals of this study to look closely at the development of female wage labour participation in that industrial revolutionary period. To that end, this chapter will draw upon evidence gained from empirical research to examine some of the pre-eminent issues concerning the female labour force, and their social, political, and cultural ramifications.

The chapter comprises two sections. The first section offers a discussion of the historical origins of the relevant Korean cultural patterns; origins which were much influenced by Confucian ideology. In so doing, the rationale that underpinned the structures and processes within Korean society facilitating the systematic oppression of women is examined. The second section considers the demographic trends of the period which reflected the mass-migration of girls and young women from the countryside to the city. The family backgrounds and circumstances of these young migrants are described, in concert with their reasons for seeking employment in the urban areas, and the methods of recruitment they experienced.

6.1 Culture And Gender: Women's Participation

In all aspects of social activity, including access to resources for production, rewards or remuneration for work, distribution or consumption, income or goods, exercise of authoritarian power, and participation in cultural and religious activity, gender is important in establishing people's behaviour and the outcome of any social interaction (Pearson, 1992).

A reasoned argument could be constructed in support of the assertion that life for Korean women underwent a far greater degree of change during the 1960's and 1970's than had occurred throughout the preceding thousand years. The changes have included a dramatic growth of women's social and economic activity concomitant with the explosive expansion of Korean industrialisation across its many constituent disciplines. To place the magnitude and pace of the structural transformation that took place in Korea between 1961 and 1979 in a global context, it can be equated with similar developments which required at least forty years in Japan and more than half a century in Sweden (Dore, 1975). In common with many, if not all, developed or developing countries, however, the issues surrounding gender relations remain

problematic and the subject of protracted debate (Park Kyung-ae, 1995; Chang Pil-hwa, et al, 1994; Nam Jeong-lim, 1991). In South Korea's case, the sheer speed of change magnified the effects of social distortions rooted in the gender conflict.

What appears to have been overlooked, or discounted, in much published 'gender literature' is the crucial nature of the role played by geo-disparate social and cultural norms; influences which assume fundamental significance in the case of South Korea (Adkins, 1995; Barrett, 1988; Humphrey, 1987; Miles, 1986; Kaplinsky, 1984). As in many other sociological arenas, the imperative to apply a western model, or ideal type, to circumstances where such a model is inappropriate, is frequently and clearly evident.

In addition to the pivotal effect of cultural uniqueness on the character of gender relations, two other factors can be considered to have a bearing on the Korean case. Firstly, it is reasonable to suppose that the question of gender relations is more likely to be neglected in a non-democratic society, in which absolute power is invested in the hands of one man, than it would in a liberal democratic society in which every citizen had a political voice. As has been explained, the era of Park Chung-hee was unequivocally one that was marked by male authoritarianism. Secondly, although General Park Chung-hee was overtly disparaging on the question of Confucian orthodoxy (Park Chung-hee, 1962), not least because the Korean variant of Confucianism held the image of the soldier in supercilious contempt (Cumings, 1997), there is no doubt that, as Lee Hyo-jae (1978) points out, the military regime under Park laid great emphasis on Confucian mores and disciplines and, by implication, on

the Confucian view of the role of women, in its exhortations and directives to the Korean people in the concerted drive for economic expansion.

6.2 Confucian Ideology And Its Impact On Women

Confucius based his whole teaching about human society upon the patriarchal family, ancestor worship, and the duty of filial piety. The function of the woman within this system was simple and clear. It could be summed-up in one four-letter word: “obey”. Woman is a creature born to obedience (Mace, 1959).

There are, perhaps, five predominant factors which have influenced the development of South Korea as an independent nation, and which are unique to it: (i) the role of the United States, (ii) the role of Japan, (iii) the devastating effects of the Korean War, (iv) the ever-present shadow cast by the North-South division, and (v), the ingrained and pervasive influence of Confucianism. When considering the way in which individual and collective behaviour patterns have evolved, as well as in any attempt to unravel and explain the nature of Korean thought and the ‘Korean character’, it is submitted that it is the influence of Confucianism, above all else, that provides the key. Whilst Chapter Two includes some of the implications of the ongoing influence of the Confucian ethic as they impinge upon general hierarchical relationships, this chapter will consider the more specific applications of Confucian philosophy to the lives of Korean working women. Some of its salient features will be discussed, and it is anticipated that such an exposition will provide a flavour of the deeply rooted social atmosphere in which Korean women have existed for more than five hundred years.

The teachings of Confucius were first introduced into Korea from China during the Yi Dynasty in the 14th century, and although it ceased to be the official,

state-endorsed, creed in 1894, its tenets had so permeated Korean society that its influence remains strong to this day (Kim Kihwan and Leipziger, 1993; Janelli, 1993). In broad terms, it can be said that Confucianism is centred upon a code of strict discipline based on a clear-cut social hierarchy. The king, or ruler, has absolute power and any rights or privileges enjoyed by his subjects are gifts which can be arbitrarily withdrawn. Below the 'wise dictator' are teachers for, in Korean eyes at least, education is an essential prerequisite for effective government. Teachers merit respect from their students, whereas parents can demand only obedience. Further examination of the Confucian 'pecking-order' reveals an interesting paradox in the context of modern, capitalist development and its relationship with Confucian ideals. For after scholars and scholar-bureaucrats, the next most senior position in society is occupied by farmers; they are followed by artisans who work with their hands to produce artifacts necessary for the conduct of normal life, and it is only then that we arrive at the rung of the social ladder allocated to merchants and tradesmen. Little, if any, respect is apportioned to the business class; indeed, Confucianism maintains a distinct anti-business bias; and yet, as has been indicated above, the Park regime found it expeditious to use Confucian teaching selectively in order to invigorate the component parts of economic expansion.

Confucianism places great stress on the importance of the family, and although such an emphasis has much to recommend it, it has also been a major contributor to the ethos of institutionalised corruption that continues to bedevil commercial and political life in Korea. The reason for this is that the Korean interpretation of familial loyalty finds its natural extension in the overt encouragement of nepotism in both government and business. There is also a tension between the

essential ingredients for modern industrial development and the Confucian concept of education. The traditional focus has been on improving personal character in order to fit the individual for public service, rather than on the acquisition and enhancement of specialist knowledge in the sciences and in technology.

But what of women? Where do they fit into the Confucian scheme of things? The simple answer is that, to all intents and purposes, they barely fit in at all. Indeed, as we shall see, in Confucian philosophy women were effectively 'non-persons'. From the moment they were born, girls were located on the very periphery of family and society, and were left in no doubt how little they were valued. Whereas boys went through naming and age-grade ceremonies, girls did not. Until the beginning of the 20th century, and especially in rural areas, girls were not considered of sufficient social standing even to merit being given formal names at all, but were referred to by what in the west is known as a nickname. For example, prior to marriage a young woman might be called '*sopunne*' ('regrettable' or 'disappointing'), '*koptani*' ('pretty'), or '*kunnyon*' ('big one') (Sunoo H K and Kim D S, 1978). As recently as seventy years ago, whenever women were required to appear in court for legal purposes they were allocated convenient and completely arbitrary names by court officials in order to facilitate the judicial process (Kim Helen, 1968). The anthropologist Soon Young Song Yoon (1977) relates an incident experienced in North Chungchong province when male interviewees could not recall either the names or the ages of their own sisters, and appeared somewhat surprised that such information should be of the slightest interest to anyone. It remains the custom to this day for Korean women to be identified nominally by their relationship to a man. Rather than use a given, or familiar, name; or even, as is customary in the west, assume the family name of her

husband and, thereby, retain at least a modicum of individuality, a married woman in Korea continues to be referred to as 'the wife of so-and-so', while an unmarried woman will merit the sobriquet 'daughter of' or 'sister of'.

In both sociological and psychological terms, the insidious effect of this apparent 'namelessness' cannot be overestimated. The name lies at the very core of identity; it is the first response to the question: "Who are you"? If that question cannot be answered without the need for a reference point in the form of another person, and especially if that 'reference' person must be of a gender other than that of oneself, that is, male, the regard for self, and the value of self, must inevitably diminish. Even convicted criminals are granted the privilege of having a unique identifying number.

Patrilineal descent, whereby the eldest son inherits all the family wealth and property, and patrilocal residence, which requires a woman to move to her husband's town or village immediately upon marriage, are powerful means of both withholding economic security from women, and of inhibiting women's social participation. Not only can a daughter be disbarred from ever inheriting money or property from her parents but, immediately after her marriage, the Korean form of registration erases her completely from membership of her own family: in effect, she now 'belongs' to her in-laws. It is worth noting that, as a further illustration of the 'cultural uniqueness' of Korea, Soon Young Song Yoon (1977) records that although patriarchy was not a Korean invention, Korea's rigid kinship ideals were, and it came as some surprise to sinologists to find that those ideals were 'more Confucian' in practice than their Chinese origins.

We have already seen that from the time of her birth, every Korean woman remained obligated to serve three males; her father until she married, her husband after her marriage and, in the event of her husband's death, her son. This was far from being the full extent of cultural prescription, however, for the Confucian tradition laid down five 'codes of conduct' for women (*'Pu-haeng-pyon Myongsimpo 'gam'*), and seven 'evil conducts' (*'Chil-ko-ji-ak'*), contravention of any one of which would provide legitimate grounds for divorce. (Sunoo H K and Kim D S, 1978). The codes were:-

- i. Women must keep their chastity and be obedient;
- ii. Women must not expect anything other than their assigned identity;
- iii. Women must not go outside their own houses for social activities after reaching adulthood;
- iv. Women must have pleasure only in cooking food and making wine and clothing for men;
- v. Women must not become interested in political or social affairs, but only in family activities inside the house.

The seven grounds for divorce were:-

- i. Disobedience of parents-in-law;
- ii. Failure to produce a son;
- iii. Adultery (NB. The touching of hands could be construed as adultery);
- iv. Jealousy;
- v. Serious illness;
- vi. Talkativeness and gossiping;
- vii. Theft.

The fact that, both as children and as married adults, tradition required Korean women to remain for most of their lives within the confines of the home, makes it clear that opportunities for education were limited to the point of non-existence. To this day, there are few, if any, countries that can match the Korean respect for education; but until very recently, this enthusiasm was confined to education for boys, not girls. Furthermore, not only were young girls and women denied the benefits of a formal academic education, they were also discouraged from developing any natural ability or talent that might be of value outside the domestic

sphere. Should a girl be audacious enough to reveal ambition beyond the home, she would be reproved with well-worn maxims such as: “A woman’s lack of talent is in itself a virtue”, or: “If a hen crows, the household crumbles” (Sunoo H K and Kim D S, 1978).

The subject of education provides a useful example of how long a deeply ingrained social assumption can remain potent within a collective psyche decades and even generations after it has been formally discounted. One of the common themes which emerged from the many interviews conducted by the author, and greater attention will be afforded to these themes as this study unfolds, were the sacrifices made by young women workers in order that their brothers might receive a good education. What was most remarkable, however, was that, almost without exception, the women had been culturally conditioned to not only accept such an onerous and protracted imposition without protest, but to genuinely believe that it was right and proper for their brothers to go to school while they, themselves, were deprived of such opportunities. It is, of course, by no means unusual to find cultures and societies throughout the world and throughout history in which formal academic educational structures are designed solely for the benefit and betterment of males. What is less common, however, is the degree to which young, ‘modern’ Korean women, in the latter half of the 20th century, willingly assumed the duty of provider. After all, it would not have been difficult for a young woman from the countryside, who had gone to the city to work in a garment factory, to keep her wages entirely to herself; it is unlikely that her parents would have been able to coerce her to do otherwise. The fact of the matter is that in not a single instance among all the subjects interviewed by the author was such a course of action ever contemplated.

Thus it can be deduced that Confucian philosophy, as adapted and practised by Korean male society, and as imposed upon the females in Korean society until well into the 20th century, denied absolutely any degree of individual or intellectual autonomy to women. Their value was measured only in regard to their ability to produce sons. All ritual, political, and economic power was lodged firmly in the hands of men. Women in Korea were to be neither seen nor heard; they were, in effect, invisible.

World history has demonstrated all too often how easy it is for one sector of society to justify and even legitimise the systematic oppression of another sector of the same society if, *a priori*, the 'victimised' sector is classified or categorised as a 'sub-species'. A classic example is provided by the social history of Germany and the Nazis:

... the whole Nazi programme against the Jews and other 'people of inferior worth' depended on the constant reiteration of the monstrous doctrine that there are certain sub-humans, 'Untermenschen', who have forfeited the right to be treated as human beings (Grunfeld, 1974).

Whilst the distorted ideology of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party and its regard for all 'non-Aryans' is illustrative of, perhaps, the very extreme to which mankind can degenerate, the manifestations of that ideology are, nevertheless, proof positive of the underlying assertion being made here.

Korean history has further reinforced the notion that once a set of social norms and values, which disproportionately favour one sector; in this case the male sex, become culturally and politically entrenched, the only means whereby any degree

of gender impartiality may be restored is when the 'unfavoured' sector feels sufficiently empowered to take collective initiative. What should also be appreciated, and this carries particular resonance in the Korean case, is that when traditional norms are so deeply embedded and all-encompassing, there is likely to be no established 'opposition party' or 'radical entity' to which women can pledge their allegiance, and thereby manifest their aspirations in what might be regarded as a 'constitutional' manner. Therefore, and much in line with Marx's concept of the historical process, any confrontation between cultural mores and progressive ambition is destined almost inevitably to be militant and revolutionary. The value of this observation is revealed by the part played in South Korean politics by the women workers from the Peace Market.

6.2.1 Cultural Impact On Women's Status Within The Labour Force

The fact that the status of women workers in Korea during the period under consideration did not keep pace with the nation's economic development and, indeed, bore virtually no relation to it, is very much in keeping with the cultural circumstances described in the previous section. The role in society that women had been required to play for centuries rendered them almost 'tailor-made' as participants in a male-dominated industrial labour force, and the Park regime was not slow to recognise the advantages to be gained by exploiting traditional notions of gender demarcation.

One of the dominant principles which proved most expedient to apply to the workplace was that of familism. We have seen that the position of girls and young women within the traditional Korean family was on the very lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder. They had no voice either in matters affecting the family as a whole

or in the factors which pertained to their own lives. They were expected to remain silent and subservient, and show respectful gratitude for any concession they were granted, no matter how insubstantial. Such an ethos translated conveniently and comfortably, for men, into the delineation of the woman's role in the 20th century industrial workplace. Furthermore, the fact that the patrilocal tradition had, over centuries, 'acclimatised' Korean women to being forced into adopting a new family in a new location, made it relatively easy for employers to represent themselves as the heads of new, patriarchal families. Imbued, as they were, with such ideals, it is understandable that, initially, young women workers were not surprised to meet similar familial circumstances when they started work in the factory. Ownership, management, and supervision of the factory, as in the family, was almost exclusively the domain of men, and those authoritative positions were, more likely than not, passed from father to son. The males concerned regarded it as nothing short of their birthright to demand the absolute obedience and acquiescence from their female underlings that was due to every father from his daughters (Kearney, 1991). Such expectations were quite explicit, and it was common for young girls from the countryside to arrive at their factory and be confronted with slogans like: "The Company Is Your Family, You Must Be Loyal To Your Family, Work For Your Family" (Janelli, 1993).

There are, of course, subtle differences in both atmosphere and outcome between a societal group that assumes a set of traditional privileges, and one that focuses attention on actively enforcing, and reinforcing, those inherited advantages. In the case of Korean males in the textile and garment industry during the 1970's, attempts to perpetuate superior status and privilege were excessive.

6.3 Growth Trends Of Female Wage Labour

To leave family and home community was by no means an easy step. It implied cutting one's self off from the supportive, highly protective and tightly-knit family so vital in the earlier years and moving to a world far away and threatening. The anxieties at the thought of being alone and the anticipation of homesickness, even if relatives are present in the metropolis, places a heavy emotional burden. Even the thought that the situation is temporary, that it will one day be possible to return, is tempered with the ultimate prospect of marriage, meaning that for most girls the move means a virtual final separation (Spencer, 1988).

I must go,
don't cry, I must go
on the hard road to Seoul,
climbing the white and black parched hills to sell my chastity.
Without a promise of when I'll return,
or if I will come back with brightly blooming smiles,
and without the humble promise of untying the ribbon.
I must go,
however hard and miserable life may be.
How can I ever forget the hills covered with
green-bean flowers and the smell of wheat
growing in the fields surrounding the village
where I was born.
I will not forget, but will cherish them deeply in my heart.
I might come back in tearful dreams,
I might return with starlight in the night.
I must go,
don't cry, I must go
on the painful road to Seoul,
climbing the many hills which make even the sky weary,
to sell my labour (Kim Ji-ha, 1980).

Despite the traditional behavioural norms rooted in Confucianism which define the virtuous woman as one who remains within the home, and is obedient and subservient to her personal male hierarchy, the 1960's and 1970's witnessed a marked increase in the number of young women who not only left their homes prior to marriage but whom, in most cases, left their localities, to enter the labour market. In 1970 there were some 600,000 female workers in the light manufacturing sector, most

of whom were employed in the textile and garment industry; by 1980 this figure had risen to well over one and half million (Ogle, 1990). Research conducted by the author, and reproduced below, confirms that the majority of these recruits to the factory floor were not city or town girls, but came instead from rural agricultural backgrounds. Land division and ownership in Korea had been characterised for centuries by a polarisation between wealthy, elite family dynasties who owned huge swathes of the most productive farming land, and small, impoverished tenant farmers who worked what were, in effect, little more than smallholdings of some two or three acres (Spencer, 1988). It was from the latter that so many young girls were forced by circumstances to make the journey to Seoul, or one of the other industrial centres, to find work in a totally alien environment. It is important to bear in mind, when we come to examine their subsequent actions, the sheltered and restricted nature of these girls' backgrounds and culture, and the fact that when they made that traumatic journey to the city they were, in effect, to become strangers in a strange land. Such recognition will, it is submitted, place in even more admirable perspective both the bravery and the magnitude of their social endeavours.

An interesting and novel source of family tension can be seen to emerge during this 'modernisation' period. It has been shown that, until the advent of Park Chung-hee and his single-minded determination to generate phenomenal growth in exports, the conventional template for Korean female upbringing, especially in the countryside, was quite clearly enunciated. Daughters remained under the closest possible parental supervision and restriction until 'suitable' marriage partners had been found for them. Immediately after marriage, the daughter would relocate to the environs of her in-laws; she would almost cease to exist as far as her natal family was

concerned, and responsibility for her would have been transferred absolutely. Her parents would have, in effect, completed their duty in accordance with tradition. In the 1960's and 1970's, however, economic expansion presaged cultural upheaval.

Life for the small-scale tenant farmer and the even more impecunious landless farm labourer had been harsh and unrewarding for centuries. Many of them were laden with debt, and the advent of the Park Chung-hee era served only to exacerbate what was already a dire situation. The economic ambitions of the Park regime had serious repercussions on the farming community during the 1960's and 1970's, most crucially in the determination to maintain a low-wage competitive advantage in the international market. If the remuneration of workers in the export sector was to be kept at a minimum, there was a clear imperative to ensure that the living costs of those workers were also kept at a minimum. With food being the most essential staple commodity, steps were taken both to restrict the level of costly imports and to engineer the availability of cheap domestic produce. In order to preclude an imbalance between the earnings of workers in the export manufacturing sector and those whose output was destined for domestic sale, a downward pressure was exerted on domestic manufacturing earnings. This was, of course, to avoid the potential problem of export zone workers being able to improve their income by seeking employment in the domestic production sphere and thus pose a threat to the success of the drive for exports. A major component in Park's prices policy portfolio was the strict control of the cost of rice, the main food staple in Korea. The effect of this initiative was to render the continued existence of the myriad of small rice-farmers virtually untenable.¹ As a further indicator of the depressed state of the agricultural community in Korea during the 1960's and 1970's, male unemployment levels in the

countryside were extremely high, especially in the middle-aged generational sector. According to research conducted by Suk Sang-mok (1980), 20% of the heads of rural families (that is to say, the ostensible main bread-winners) were out of work in 1974.

In other societies, the first option available for these impoverished families might well have been to send the sons off to search for employment. In Korea, however, the enduring legacy of the Confucian ethic still dictated that the males of the family must be educated. Thus, according to tradition, and with debts to meet and sons to educate, there was no perceived alternative for poverty-stricken farmers and farm labourers other than to send their daughters to the factories. So, here we see a community torn between the reassuring certainties of tradition and the pragmatic imperatives of modernisation. The agrarian family is driven to desperate poverty and is forced to consider options previously inconceivable: should the male offspring be taken from school and sent to find work, or should it be the daughters? Both options would fly in the face of the Confucian ethic, but which would carry the greater penalty? It will come as no surprise to any student of Korean affairs that the all-consuming concepts of male domination, patriarchy, and primogeniture held the day: the daughters would be 'sacrificed'. Even so, such a resolution required a major shift in social thinking, and it is difficult to imagine the level of concern that rural parents must have felt at the prospect of allowing their young, unmarried daughters to set off to face the unknown dangers of the city. We will see the extent to which this parental concern was used to advantage by factory owners ever on the lookout for cheap and compliant labour.

I was born into a peasant family background and had three brothers and one sister. My parents were tenant farmers who worked extremely hard, but it was impossible for them to support us all. So every year we had to

borrow money from the Agricultural Co-operative Association, but it became too much and we were not able to pay it back, so they refused to lend us any more money. My older brother was in the army so it was left to me to do whatever I could to support my family and provide for the education of my younger brothers. After I finished at my primary school, there was no choice for me but to go to Seoul to find work. I was fourteen years old (Interview, women worker, February, 1999).

Of the 79 interviews conducted for this area of the study, 60 of the women had come from rural backgrounds; the majority of them were aged between 14 and 18 years when they left home, and 9 had not even reached their teens when they set out to find work.

6.4 Recruitment Methods And Employment

A variety of recruitment strategies was used by employers in the textile and garment industry during the 1970's in order to ensure that the output from their factories was never placed in jeopardy by a lack of labour. To some extent the particular method used depended upon the size of the factory concerned. In the Peace Market which, as we have seen, consisted of a myriad of very small factories, three contributory elements were in evidence. First, there was word of mouth, whereby girls and young women already employed in the Peace Market would become aware of a vacancy in their own place of work and would relay the information to friends or relatives. Second, there was what came to be known as the 'human market'; an open area close to the Peace Market buildings where hundreds of young workers and those looking for work would gather during the lunch break. Information about job vacancies and wages and conditions would be exchanged, and introductions arranged. The third method was the simple expedient of pinning a 'Helpers Wanted' notice on the door of the factory.

Recruitment methods were not without their hazards, however, as one interviewee describes:

When I was fifteen years old and helping my parents on our small farm, a female cousin came home for New Year's holiday. She told me about her job in a factory in Seoul and she painted a very attractive picture about what her life was like. When the holiday was over, three other cousins and a friend, five of us, went to Seoul and got jobs in the Peace Market. Our parents allowed us to go to the city because they believed that the owner of the factory would look after us. What we didn't know was that the factory owner had told my cousin that he would give her money for every girl she succeeded in recruiting. We lived in a dormitory built into the roof of the factory and called 'the upper room'. Conditions there were inhuman, and nothing like the story we had been told (Interview, woman worker, January, 1999).

Larger companies, like Dong-il Textiles and YH Wig and Garment, developed a more sophisticated and systematic recruitment strategy whereby ongoing relationships were established between the company and an extensive network of rural middle and high schools. In return for *per capita* payments, school staff were encouraged to present young girls and their parents with glowing descriptions of the conditions and career prospects awaiting at the particular factory. The students were told that they would be well paid and that they would be issued with smart uniforms, whilst their parents were reassured that their daughters would be protected and cared for in exactly the same way as they were at home. As soon as their time at middle school was completed, the fifteen and sixteen year old girls would be taken off to the city in company buses. Reality rarely, if ever, matched the promises, however:

I was sixteen in 1974 and in my second year at high school. Some people from the Sam-jin Garment Company visited the school and told us about the wonderful opportunities in their factory for girls who wanted a career in the clothing industry. My family thought that I should apply so that I could send them some money, so with about fifty other girls I was taken by company bus all the way to Seoul. It was the first time I had left my village. What we found when we arrived at the factory came as a great shock, but by then it was too late to change our minds. The dormitory room I lived in with ten other girls who I didn't know was dirty and small. The food was horrible, but the worst thing of all was how little money we were able to earn even

though I had to work harder and longer than I had ever done before. It was the unhappiest time (Interview, woman worker, December 1998).

For significant periods during the 1970's the number of girls and young women looking for work was greater than the number of job vacancies, a circumstance that placed even more power in the hands of the employers, and one of which they were not reticent to take advantage. Research for this study revealed numerous examples when a job seeker was given a position only on condition that she agreed to give the factory manager her first month's wage. A variation on this theme was when girls were promised a job providing they demonstrated that they merited such a consideration by working as housemaid and cleaner at the manager's home, without pay, for periods of anything up to six months

It is clear that the overriding atmosphere surrounding the recruitment of workers into light manufacturing during the period under consideration was one wherein young women, over 60% of whom were between the ages of fourteen to twenty-four (Chun Tae-il, 1969; Choi Jang-jip, 1983; Lee Tae-ho, 1984; Ogle, 1990; Landsberg, 1993; Kim Young-ok, 1985), were ripe for exploitation by the 'big city' employers. Those girls and young women who were to become the 'fuel' for their country's dramatic entry onto the world's industrial stage were, by dint of their upbringing, innocent and gullible. They had been nurtured in a cultural environment that guaranteed low self-esteem for all females; they had no concept of 'rights', and they were socialised to obey and comply. Unscrupulous factory owners could ask for little more.

As an indication of the extent to which the textile and garment industry of the

1970's relied upon the contributions made by women workers, the following table enumerates the gender imbalance of employees in a random selection of companies of varying size:

Table 6.1: Gender Composition of the Work Force in the Textile and Garment Industry in the 1970's:

<u>Factories</u>	<u>Number of workers</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female ratio</u>
Chonggye Garments	27,000	24,000	3,000	85.1%
Panlim Textiles	6,000	5,874	126	97.9%
Y.H. Wigs	4,000	3,500	500	87.5%
Won-pung	2,000	1,800	200	90%
Seotong Garments	1,800	1,700	100	95%
Ban-do	2,000	1,800	200	95%
Dong-il Textiles	1,300	1,200	100	92.3%
<u>Nam-a Garments</u>	<u>800</u>	<u>782</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>97.8%</u>

Source 1: Interviews with workers at these factories and with leaders of their unions.

Source 2: Union records and year books.

Thus it can be seen that female workers in this sector outnumbered males by a ratio in excess of 9:1. Had there been a more equal distribution, subsequent militant activism among textile and garment workers might have been more easily explained and more readily anticipated. After all, Korean males had been imbued for aeons with the conscious certainty of their superiority and would, it might be supposed, be much better equipped to demand and, indeed, merit, working and living conditions commensurate with their social and cultural status. Bearing in mind the fact that Korean women had long been used to merely accepting their lot and being grateful for small mercies, the speed with which these young innocents shed their centuries-old cultural trappings and restrictions adds further testimony both to the strength of their characters and the harshness of the life circumstances which precipitated them into militant activism.

6.5 Summary

The cultural and social upheaval generated by the conflict between tradition, largely defined by Confucian prerogatives, and the industrial modernisation imperatives of Park Chung-hee's drive for economic expansion, was no more apparent than in the absorption of tens of thousands of girls and young women into the South Korean textile and garment industry during the 1960's and 1970's. Confucianism, selectively applied, and especially in its more 'concentrated', Korean form, translated conveniently from the family context into that of the industrial workplace, and provided an expedient vehicle for the exploitation of women workers. Park Chung-hee's military concept of the 'disembodied' human being (see Chapter Two) was readily adopted by equally opportunist employers and entrepreneurs to embrace the 'disembodied' female garment worker. At the same time, the phenomenon of unmarried daughters leaving the family home and migrating from the countryside to the city *en masse* constituted a major shift in traditional social behaviour; the repercussions of which are yet to be fully realised.

The standard and salient characteristics of working and living conditions are clearly intrinsic to any analysis of the degree to which a workforce is exploited by its employers and government. By implication, they are also crucial indicators of the extent to which workers' grievances, and any subsequent co-operative industrial action, may be explained and justified. The following chapter examines in detail the circumstances in which naive and poorly educated young women, who were to become instrumental in their country's rapid ascent of the world's economic league-table, were forced to live and labour.

NOTES

¹ In practice, however, the downward pressure on the price of rice impacted only upon the rice-farming community. In the urban market place the retail price of rice rose by more than 62% during the period 1970-1973 (World Bank Economic Report, 1976)

CHAPTER SEVEN

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS, PRODUCTION PROCESS, WAGES, AND LIFE CIRCUMSTANCE

Which of us is to do the hard and dirty work for the rest -- and for what pay? Who is to do the pleasant and clean work -- and for what pay?

(John Ruskin)

7.0 Introduction

Detailed descriptions elsewhere in this study reinforce the seminal importance to the evolution of the Korean labour movement of the large body of workers employed in the vast warren of ‘sweat-shop’ factories located in what is ironically named the Peace Market. It was, after all, the working conditions in the Peace Market and the intransigence of the Peace Market employers which so saddened and enraged Chun Tae-il, “the father of the Korean labour movement” (Lee Nam-hee, 1991) and which finally drove him to make the ultimate sacrifice on 13 November, 1970.

Having examined the methods of recruitment, largely from the countryside, of the girls and young women who were destined to contribute so much both to the explosive growth of Korean light manufacturing during the 1970’s, and to the birth of the democratic labour movement, the next logical step is to consider the work environment that lay in wait for the new recruits when they arrived in the capital. To that end, this chapter draws upon three sources of first-hand experience of women workers. They are: (i) circumstances as described by them to the author in one-to-one interviews and in group seminars; (ii) contemporary recollections as detailed in personal diaries which were made available to the author and, (iii) reflections of the

author's own experience as a teenage worker in the Peace Market during the period under consideration.

With the objective of illustrating the diverse influences and pressures, both personal and vocational, which the female workers in the Peace Market were subject to, the first sections in this chapter describe the precise nature of the jobs they undertook, and the conditions, both material and supervisory, under which they were conducted. The production process and management relations are considered, as are some of the tensions between the workers themselves, which arose as a direct result of those relations. Attention then turns to the question of the standard of domestic accommodation, especially with regard to the hundreds of young *shidas* who laboured in the Peace Market and whose plight so incensed Chun Tae-il. The health implications of these combined influences is then discussed, as are their impact upon the traditional Korean concept of marriage. The final section in the chapter details the wages earned by the women workers in the Peace Market; a factual record gained not from contemporary government statistics or academic tomes, but from the personal recollections of the women themselves. They, and only they, know with certainty the sums of money they had at their disposal at the end of each month. The question of the purchasing power of that remuneration which, in the view of the author, is by far the most pertinent, if not the only, meaningful criterion of income assessment, is also addressed.¹

This examination of the working and living conditions endured by those thousands of young country girls will not only suffice to explain their misery, it will also serve as confirmation of the extent and the ease by which human dignity can be

sacrificed at the altar of unbridled capitalist expansion. What emerges from this chapter is a 'holistic' picture of the drab environment, the meagre facilities, the gross exploitation, and the stifling repression, within and beyond the workplace, which formed the backdrop to the lives of so many of the youngest and most vulnerable Korean women during the 1970's.

7.1 Job Descriptions And Production Process

A typical Peace Market factory,² equipped with fourteen sewing machines, had a total establishment of thirty-five personnel: two cutters, or *jaedanshas*, fourteen *machinists*, fourteen *shidas*, one or two *madomes*, one *shiaggae*, one *obaroku* (a man responsible for the maintenance and repair of the over-lock sewing-machines), and a man in overall charge of the factory who was either the owner, or a friend or relative of the owner. Chun Tae-il's painstaking personal survey of the workers in one building of the Peace Market, conducted in 1970, showed that of the 10,000 persons accounted for, between 80% and 90% were women.

In the typical Peace Market garment factory the apex of the employee hierarchy was occupied by the *jaedansha*, the cutter, who was invariably male. As the title suggests, the cutter was responsible for cutting out of the bulk cloth each separate component part of a garment. Many layers of fabric would be placed on a large table, or cutting board, and with the aid of electric shears and pattern templates the *jaedansha* would produce the required shapes ready for assembly. In many instances, the cutter would have an assistant, a *jaedan-bocho*, who would, also invariably, be male. Although this first stage in the production process was clearly of intrinsic importance, as

well as requiring considerable skill, it will be shown below that this aspect was by no means the most crucial one in the role of the cutter.

Next to the cutter in order of seniority was the fully-skilled machinist, the *oya-machinist*, who achieved the required level of expertise only after a minimum of four years training. Half of a factory's establishment of Japanese-made, high-speed electric over-lock sewing machines would be occupied by *oya-machinists*, who were tasked with the most intricate of the garment assembly operations, such as the construction of collars, the insertion of sleeves, and the locating of zip fasteners. The remaining machines were allocated to assistant machinists, the *bocho-machinists*, who hoped to accrue the skills and experience necessary for promotion to *oya-machinist*, by executing the less demanding tasks involving pockets and linings. It should be noted that although the sewing-machines were the most up-to-date available at the time, they still required the use of both hands and both feet: the hands to position and manipulate the cloth, and one foot to control the speed of stitching while the other selected either forward or reverse.

One imperative of the piece-work remuneration system in effect at the factories was to keep to an absolute minimum the time when the sewing-machines were not actually in productive operation. It was, therefore, essential for both *oya* and *bocho-machinists* to be kept continually supplied with new work. One of the many and various duties of the *shida*, or helper, was to ensure that her machinist was never left with insufficient material from the cutter's table.

Once the machinists had completed their part of the production process the almost finished garments were taken over by the *madomes*, who were usually relatively mature married women, to have all the tacking seams ripped out and buttons sewn on. The final stage of manufacture, conducted by male *shiaggæes*, was the ironing and folding of the garments ready for delivery to the retail and wholesale shops on the ground floor of the Peace Market, or for shipping direct to locations elsewhere. The reason why men were allocated the ostensibly menial task of ironing and folding the completed garments was simply that the industrial steam-ironing equipment as used at the time was both relatively antiquated and extremely cumbersome, the efficient use of which was beyond the physical capability of young girls.

The production process that brought these individual skills and responsibilities together can be described as follows. After the person in overall charge of the factory had instructed the cutter on the type of garment to be produced on one particular day, the *jaedansha*, with the help of the *shidas* and his assistant, would unroll layers of the appropriate material onto the cutting table. Having arranged the most economical disposition of the pattern templates, the cutter would cut out the required shapes. Using irons lighter and more manageable than those used by the *shiaggæes*, the *shidas* would turn over and press any hems before taking all the pieces to the *oya-machinist*. The *oya-machinist* would decide which tasks she would undertake herself, and which were within the capabilities of her assistant, and the *shida* would distribute the material accordingly. As each separate component emerged from the sewing machine, the *shida* would cut the threads and, if necessary, press in further hems ready for the next stage in the production process. This routine would continue virtually non-stop. When all the machining of a single garment was completed, the *shida* would take that garment to the

madome for final tidying-up and the sewing on of buttons. The *shiaggae* would then take over for the final pressing and folding and, with the help of the *shidas*, would either stack and bale the garments or pack them in packets or boxes, depending upon type and quality. Early the following morning the cutter would supervise the *shidas* as they carried the previous day's output down to the various outlets on the ground floor of the Peace Market building. The process would then begin all over again.

A contemporary diary entry made by one of the *oya-machinists* interviewed by the author evokes an idea of the factory atmosphere:

When the sun begins to go down, our voices are lost in the sound of the machines. This is the busiest time of the day. The completed clothes take all the space and make it impossible to walk around. The *shidas* are working in mountains of material; sometimes it is difficult to tell which is *shida* and which is material. My eyes are blurry and I do not even want to look up and down at the needle. My nerves are doing the work, I just move my hands and feet automatically. This is the moment when we physically strain ourselves. Fatigue attacks us. I want to stop working when this happens, but I can't. There are four more hours to go. Even birds can go back to their nests when it gets dark. What a condition we live in. Man is supposed to be the Lord of Creation, so why are we doing this until late into the night? (Diary, female Peace Market worker, who would later become a Chonggye Union activist, 1974).

Chun Tae-il himself recalls an early visit to the Peace Market:

The place of work is no bigger than eight *pyung* (four and a half square metres), which means that there are four workers in every *pyung*. The space is so cramped, with tools, fixtures, and sewing equipment taking up so much room that there was none remaining for workers to stretch freely in their chairs. The height of the ceiling from the floor was so low; it was the infamous 'attic'. The smell of formalin from the fabrics piled up in the corner was enough to suffocate anyone. Not only that, but there is so much ravel [fibres] and dust from the fabric that the workers' hair becomes coated almost as soon as they begin to work. There were fourteen sewing machines, ironing boards, cutting boards, and some more tables where the *shidas* do their work. In the midst of all this were thirty-two pale and haggard workers (Quoted in Cho Young-rae, 1984)

7.2 Working Conditions

After a one hour ride, the bus arrived at the Peace Market. The factory is a brick building with few windows. It looks like a jail.³ Our workplace was a big hall divided into many sections by thin wooden partitions. On the hall side there are no windows, maybe the owner doesn't want people to be able to look in. The large messy room smells of dust and is full of sewing machines, material, and people. The *shidas* have already started their work; either preparing the material for today's work or taking care of the dresses we finished the night before. Poor girls, only fourteen years old they should be at home being spoiled by their parents but, instead, they have to get up even earlier than me (Diary, female Peace Market worker, 1974).

Each of the Peace Market factories consisted of a room just large enough to accommodate the number of sewing-machines alluded to previously. The rooms were some three metres high and generally had windows on two sides. The windows in the external walls were always kept closed and covered with paper in order to preclude the intrusion of the prying eyes of passers-by on the nearby fly-over, while those windows in the internal wall faced only a darkened corridor. Space was clearly at a premium, and in order to maximise what little there was, it became common practice for factory owners to build a false ceiling that extended over approximately two-thirds of the room. This false ceiling divided the available space into an upper and a lower room, each of one-and-a-half metres in height, and connected by ladder. Even allowing for the relatively diminutive stature of most Korean girls, few, if any, of them could stand upright at any time throughout their working day. During work time the upper room was used by the *madomes* to complete the finishing of the garments; when work was over for the day, the upper room became the dormitory for the young *shidas*. If ever there was a manifestation of the maximisation of production assuming absolute dominance over any concept of an employer's duty of care for his employees, this was surely it.

Obscuring the outside windows of the factories not only resulted in a substantial reduction in the amount of natural light admitted to the workplace, the practice also had the effect of negating any possibility of adequate ventilation. The Peace Market building had been constructed with minimum cost as a primary objective, and no extractor fans were included in the specification. Despite the fact that thousands of souls were destined to work and, in the case of so many of the *shidas*, live there, it was assumed that windows would suffice to ventilate the entire structure. This was, of course, predicated upon the assumption that the windows would be opened. When the enormous amount of fabric dust and other small particles that were so much an integral part of the production process, and the heat generated by the huge body of workers, the machines, and the electric lighting, are all taken into account, the filthy and foetid atmosphere, especially in summer, is not difficult to imagine. On the subject of lighting, each machine was fitted with a bright white bulb attached immediately in front of the machinist: the combination of this close proximity light-source and the dust-laden air assured that machinists could easily be recognised by the distinctive prevalence of bloodshot eyes, and the perpetual symptoms of conjunctivitis or associated eye infections.

On the face of it, and to the untutored observer, sitting at a sewing machine might not appear to be the most arduous of occupations but, in his diaries, Chun Tae-il showed greater perception:

The *oya-machinists* and *bocho-machinists* sit all day on hard wooden chairs, nobody stands up to take a rest. They sit there with their backs bent and their eyes focused on the needle of the sewing-machine while pressing the fabric taut with their fingers and operating the pedals with their feet. They never rest. Sometimes the machinist will find her fingers bleeding because of the pressure necessary on heavy material. Their necks and shoulders become unendurably stiff and even the most highly skilled

women cannot avoid severe back pain after working like this for several hours (Diary, Chun Tae-il, 1969).

The ‘lunch break’ provided little, if any, real respite, as one *ex-oya-machinist* interviewee recorded:

Lunchtime has come, I have been sitting here since eight o'clock this morning. But no-one feels like moving. It would be pleasant if we could eat lunch in a circle together, but I must eat sitting at my own machine and my lunch is covered in dust before the first mouthful. No-one bothers to even shake off the dust from their bodies. Usually, we have rice and *kimchi*.⁴ After eating, the workers hurry to the toilet where so many are waiting in long lines. The toilets are for the use of both men and women and there are so few of them – there were only three for over two thousand workers. The water supply is also inadequate, there are only three outlets for every four hundred work places in the Peace Market; hardly enough to allow us to have a drink, let alone wash our hands. We know that if we did not have to spend so much time queuing for the toilet we would be able to rest after lunch and even mix socially with our co-workers. But this is not a choice open to us, and we must hurry back to our work (Diary, Peace Market woman worker, 1974).

7.3 Management And Supervision

The ever-present influence of Confucianism pervaded the entire work arena, and the stamp of paternalism and patriarchy translated, almost without modification, from the traditional agrarian society that had developed over centuries, to the burgeoning industrial nation of Park Chung-hee's Third Republic (Kim Kihwan and Leipziger, 1993). Moreover, it could be argued that the transposition of Confucian mores from agrarian to industrial actually magnified and exacerbated the effects of class difference and economic inequality. For what emerged in growing numbers from the hiatus of ‘modernisation’ was the class of the ‘entrepreneur’; individuals and families who came to wield as much, if not a great deal more, power over subordinates as had the aristocratic ‘*yangban*’ class of yesteryear. The crucial difference, of course, was that whereas the aristocratic families of ‘old’ Korea had long been accustomed to what they

regarded as their divinely-ordained superiority, most of the new class of entrepreneurs were, to all intents and purposes, peasants one day and possessors of enormous power over their erstwhile peers the next. The experiences of the women and young girls who toiled in the sweat-shop factories in the Peace Market bear ample testimony to the received stereotype of the individual who is suddenly thrust into a position of unaccustomed influence behaving in an excessively authoritarian manner. Whereas the dominance of the *yangban* class was maintained by a combination of deeply ingrained tradition and the force of arms, the entrepreneurial 'lever' was largely defined in economic terms; although, as will be shown, a propensity to physical violence as a tool to subjugate workers was by no means absent.

The skill and experience required by a fully qualified cutter has already been alluded to, but of equal, if not greater, importance to the factory owner was the degree of loyalty demonstrated by his *jaedansha*, and the extent to which he was prepared to represent exclusively the interest of the employer in his day-to-day conduct. Whenever the owner was away from the factory on business, or enjoying his wealth in other ways, the *jaedansha* was in absolute charge. Not only was he responsible for ensuring that daily production targets were met, he also had the delegated power to 'hire and fire'. During the protracted periods when job vacancies were hard to find, this latter element of the cutter's authority was an extremely effective instrument, and the mere possibility of instant dismissal at the discretion of the cutter meant that he was regarded with trepidation by all the employees in the factory. Even when alternative employment opportunities were available, and accepting the fact that first-grade machinists could, theoretically, change their place of work whenever they chose, this did not constitute a realistic choice in practice. For one reason, it was more than likely that conditions in a

different factory would be no more amenable or rewarding than in the current place of work, and for another, none of the women could afford to be out of employment even for the few days it might take to secure a new position (Group discussion, Peace Market women workers, January, 1999).

The distribution of work was also entirely at the whim of the *jaedansha*, and if he took a dislike to a particular machinist or *shida* it was but a trifle for him to restrict the amount of work, and thus the potential for earnings, assigned to that unfortunate individual. It will be shown in the following section how this personal discrimination contributed significantly to inter-worker tension.

The majority of cutters appeared singularly lacking in any feelings of compassion or understanding of the plight of their young subordinates, and it is unclear whether or not this can also be ascribed to the aforementioned trait evinced by many of those who assume wide-reaching and unaccustomed authority. Whatever the explanation, all the evidence and experience drawn upon by the author confirms that, as a group, the cutters in the Peace Market contributed at least as much as the owners themselves to the alienation of the female workers. One of the cutters from the 1970's made the following revealing, and uncharacteristically frank, statement during an interview with the author:

As far as we were concerned, and as far as the workers were concerned, the *jaedanshas* were the bosses. We certainly had the same authority as the employer. I could give jobs to people I wanted to, and I could fire anyone I wanted to. It was all in my hands. Perhaps we did exceed our authority in practice. I did insult the women and used abusive language, but that was quite normal. I did use violence as well, especially against the young *shidas*. But actually I was used by the employer as much as the workers were. I was promised a share of the profits if I was loyal and made the women work as hard as possible, but in the end I got nothing (Interview, Peace Market male worker, December, 1998).

A woman who began work in the Peace Market as a young girl in 1964, and who continued there into the 1970's, picks up on the 'management style' of the cutters and also highlights a specific practice that the workers found degrading:

The management behaviour towards the women in the factory was always the same, very rough and very insulting. The *jaedansha* would never refer to us by name, it seemed that it would be humiliating for them to do so; it was always "Number Three Machinist", or "Number Five Shida". I felt that I had no dignity, no identity. I was treated as though I were not human at all, but a 'thing'. There was no difference between me as a person and the sewing machine that I was attached to. How well I could understand the last words spoken by Chun Tae-il before he died: "Do not mistreat these young girls. They are not machines. They are human beings (Interview, Peace Market woman worker, January, 1999).

The economic power of the employers over the employees was most typically encapsulated in the system of wage determination and hinged, to a large extent, on an element of uncertainty. It is one thing to be remunerated on a piece-work basis, whereby a given amount is paid for each completed garment and the individual employee can not only exercise a degree of control over the size of her wage packet but can also calculate precisely the return on her work.⁵ It is an entirely different circumstance when the employee has no idea how much she will receive for each item. The situation is further complicated by the wide variety of garments required to be produced and the concomitant diversity of skills and work-time which each garment may demand.

A Peace Market machinist explains:

When a new design of garment was required, depending on the season or the fashion, we were never consulted about the rate per garment. It made no difference to the employer how difficult the work was, or how time consuming. It was only after our work was completed that the boss would make a sly deal with the cutter and we would find out just how little they were going to give us (Interview, Peace Market women worker, January, 1999).

An arrangement such as this would be unsatisfactory and inequitable if the worker had only herself to consider. It posed far more of a problem for the *oya-machinists* in the Peace Market because of the ‘team working’ principle that was adopted. Whatever money was earned each month was paid to the *oya-machinist*, the leader of the team, who would then have to calculate how much of the total was to be allotted to her *bocho-machinist* and how much remained for the two *shidas*. It is clear that this shifting of responsibility from employer to *oya-machinist*, insofar as the determination of the wages of the *shidas* was concerned, not only deflected the manifestations of the *shidas*’ dissatisfaction away from the owner and focused them instead on the *oya-machinists*, but it also greatly increased the pressures on all employees and tended to mitigate against the easy formation of a united worker combination. Whether by design or accident, one of the outcomes of the wage arrangement operated in the Peace Market was confirmation of the classic ‘divide and rule’ axiom. One interviewee who bore the brunt of this system noted in her diary:

The Peace Market will only live up to its name when relations between the workers and the owners are based on human love and trust. This hard driving exploitation and suppression in the workplace must end. It is so difficult for me to contain my strong feelings about what is happening to us, and when my *shida* asks me why life is so bad and her wage is so small, I do not know how to answer her (Diary, Peace Market woman worker, 1974).

Uncertainty was not only prevalent in the matter of ‘the rate for the job’, for it was also a feature in regard to the length of the working day and the remuneration that would be gained from overtime work. In these, as in all other areas of management-employee relations, the format was unilateral and unidirectional, and the concept of consultation was recognisable only by its absence.

Although it is, perhaps understandably, difficult to gain access to ex-owners of factories in the Peace Market for interview purposes, the author did manage to establish contact with one owner in whose factory, coincidentally, the author had, herself, worked in 1976.⁶ His general attitude to employer-employee relations during the period of the 1970's mirrored precisely the traditional mores as described above. By dint of his position as an owner he had, in his eyes, become the equivalent of a member of the *yangban* class and, thus, his employees were the equivalent of serfs or tenant farmers. The fact that the relationship had been transposed into an industrial setting was immaterial, and the assumption of 'rights' on the part of his workers was, to him, a contradiction in terms. This owner, self-admittedly typical of his ilk, had no awareness of 'modern' industrial relations, and had scant, if any, knowledge of the Labour Standard Law (see Chapter Two). Furthermore, he considered that such a posture was entirely appropriate, and he had no reservations whatsoever with regard to the state's manifest willingness to allow him free rein to run his business exactly as he saw fit (Interview, ex-owner of Peace Market factory, December, 1998). It was not only expedient for the centre of gravity of power to be always located on the side of the employer, it was also 'right'. Thus, it is little wonder that concerted, combined, and effective action on the part of the workers was to prove so difficult and dangerous to organise.

7.4 Worker Vulnerability

The nature of the work system operated in the Peace Market encouraged competition between machinists and *shidas*, whilst the oppressive working conditions precluded any relaxed social interaction. Add to these the fact that, for most of the time, all the young women employees were tired, hungry, unhappy, and in physical and

mental pain, and it will be readily appreciated how easy it was for patience to become exhausted and internecine friction to develop.

But tension between workers was not restricted to spontaneous and quickly forgotten squabbles; it was also actively generated by the owners and cutters whenever the spectre of employee combination reared its head. Fear of losing one's job was a most effective tool when used to isolate perceived troublemakers, and an occurrence in one of the Peace Market factories in 1974 casts light upon both the problems of initiating united action and the way owners and cutters would respond to the threat of such action.⁷

The factory in question was producing jackets for which the previous year's rate had been set at 160 *won* per garment.⁸ The 1974 jackets were of a more complicated style and it was possible to produce only twenty per day, per team, as opposed to the thirty per day that had been achieved with the old style. The rumour in the factory was that the rate for the new model would only be increased to 180 *won*. The machinists agreed that anything less than 200 *won* would not provide enough to enable them to survive. A simple calculation confirms that, even 200 *won* per jacket represents a substantial decrease in wages when compared with the previous year. After a hasty meeting outside the factory, there was unanimous agreement among the machinists that the owner should be approached with the 200 *won* request and that if he did not concede they would all stop work.

Upon their return to the factory, the machinists were confronted by the *jaedansha* and the owner's son, who had clearly got wind of what was afoot. After

demanding to know who was the instigator of the rebellion, the owner's son affirmed to Kim Hae-soo, an *oya-machinist* who had somewhat reluctantly agreed to be the spokeswoman, that the new rate would not be set at a figure as high as 200 *won* per garment. Having made clear that this was unacceptable, the women returned to their machines and waited to see what would happen.

Within a very short space of time the owner himself appeared and demanded that two of the *oya-machinists* accompany him to his office in order to discuss the matter. Yet again, timidity overcame the women and, as no-one else was prepared to volunteer, Kim Hae-soo felt duty-bound to continue with the lead position that she had initially assumed. One other machinist also agreed to go, but only on the condition that she would not be required to speak.

When the group arrived in the owner's office, he immediately launched into a tirade and demanded to know by what right the women were taking this action, insisting that it was the duty of the senior employees to prevent petty complaints from the juniors from developing into major disputes. Plucking up her courage, the spokeswoman explained to the owner that the workers were not only asking for an increase in the rate for the job but that, in future, all rates should be fixed before the work began so that they would be able to ascertain exactly how much they were earning. At this point, the owner turned from bluster to wheedle, and described with a pained expression how bad business had been lately and how much his taxes had risen. He begged the two women to try to understand his difficult position, asked them not to complain anymore, and to keep on working. As soon as business improved, he promised, the wages would be looked at again. Until such time, however, the new rate

must be set at 180 *won* per jacket. But Kim Hae-soo stood firm, she had heard this response from the owner too many times before and, knowing that she had all the other machinists behind her, informed the owner that all work would cease until their reasonable requests were met in full.

While the two women had been absent from the factory, however, the cutter and the owner's son had wasted no time in exercising every means of intimidation at their disposal: 'divide and rule' was, once again, the watchword. By the time the two representatives returned, the workers who had remained in the factory had been 'persuaded' to forget their grievances and get on with their work.

As the two re-entered the factory none of the other machinists could look them in the eyes, they just kept their heads down and appeared to be focusing upon their work with absolute concentration. For our spokeswoman's part, she could hardly believe what she was seeing:

What had happened to our decision to stand firm and united? Why are we so ignorant? What has made these young girls so cowardly; don't they realise that we are playing into the hands of the owner? I began to cry, but I did not have any bitterness against them, my anger and hard feelings are directed against the system. If we could only have stood together for one day, we could have won. We will overcome this barrier somehow (Diary, Kim Hae-soo, 1974).

Subsequent chapters will deal in detail with the achievements of the Chonggye Union in the textile and garment industry but, *apropos* the case highlighted above, one factor is particularly pertinent. Although the Chonggye Union was formed in late 1970, and the incident retold above occurred in 1974, it is all too apparent that the women concerned still had no recourse to the fullest support or assistance from 'their' trade union. In the instances where a factory owner determinedly set his face against union

recognition, as was the case with this particular owner, there was very little that Chonggye could do. Even after years of struggle the union remained powerless to intervene in every instance of injustice. For reasons which are described at length in this study it would certainly have been an exercise in futility to appeal to the NTWU or the FKTU. What the union had been able to achieve in the earlier years of its existence, however, was the enlightenment of women like Kim Hae-soo, via the labour education programme, and the awakening of their consciousness with regard to what was potentially possible by the act of combination. Within a few months of the Kim Hae-soo 'incident' an embryonic negotiation structure would be driven through by the Chonggye activists that would change the face of industrial relations in Korea, and mark one of the crowning achievements of Korean working women (discussed in more detail in Chapter Ten). The second, and somewhat ironic, factor worthy of note here, and yet another illustration of the magnitude of the obstacles with which the Chonggye Union would continue to be confronted, is that when the structure for negotiation between employers and workers was finally established, the spokesperson for the Peace Market employers was none other than the owner of the factory in which the above incident took place (Chonggye Union records, 1975).

Mention was made in the previous section of the degree to which the *jaedanshas* could foment antagonism between workers by adopting a discriminatory work allocation system. What was frequently the case was that the cutter would have a particular favourite *shida* or machinist and would take every opportunity to direct the relatively easy pieces of work toward those individuals, and consistently leave the more onerous and time-consuming tasks to the less-favoured. As time was always at a premium in the Peace Market factories, with all the machinists' teams trying as hard as

they could to finish their day's quota as early as possible, any element of discrimination or favouritism was bound to lead to animosity. Even if the cutter did not have personal attachments but, instead, disliked everyone equally, the time-based competition was still prevalent, and was the source of much anguish for the young *shidas*. For if they were not quick enough to secure the easiest cuts of material, their machinists took longer to complete the more difficult work and directed their frustration and anger at the *shidas*. An added disadvantage was that the problem was cumulative insofar as the teams which finished early were in a position to appropriate the most favourable cuts for use the following morning; whilst for those who finished late, it was very difficult to regain lost ground (Group discussion, Peace Market women workers, December, 1998).

There were so many different ways in which the owners and *jaedanshas* could capitalise upon the fragility of the over-stretched physiques and psychological susceptibility of the girls and young women under their control. The encouragement of animosity and the playing-off of one girl against another, were just two strategies which were used to great effect.

7.5 Accommodation Patterns And Conditions

We have seen that the overwhelming majority of young women who worked in the textile and garment industry came from the countryside and, as a consequence, needed to find somewhere to live in the city. There was neither the time nor the finances for them to consider the possibility of commuting between home and factory. An added provision, as discussed earlier, was the serious parental concern at the possible consequences of this drastic, yet unavoidable, breach of traditional behaviour, and the accompanying imperative that their daughters be protected from the untold

dangers which lurked in the city. The ideal solution, of course, was if the young girl had relatives already resident in the city who would be prepared to accommodate her. But, apart from the Peace Market (see below), this eventuality was rare and so, during the initial period of their employment at least, the vast majority of girls were destined to occupy the company dormitory.

Male workers did not usually live in company dormitories primarily because the traditional upbringing of Korean men does not equip them to look after themselves in the domestic arena. From their earliest days they have grown used to the womenfolk in the family cooking, cleaning, and washing for them and, to this day, the Korean male is both reluctant and, in many cases, incapable of participating in such mundane and routine chores. In most instances, therefore, the comparatively few male workers in the garment and textile industry were either married or lodged with a female relative. Where neither of these options were available, the fact that male wages were more than 78% greater than those of female workers meant that they could afford to rent accommodation that included meals and laundry (Bauer and Shin Young-soo, 1987).

From the employers perspective the parental concern for the welfare and protection of young single girls offered numerous advantages that far outweighed any cost penalties that the provision of dormitory space might incur. The manner in which the dormitory system was practised meant that protection equated with control, and welfare with exploitation. Knowing, and having access to, the location of the greater part of the workforce at any time of the day or night made it relatively simple to 'persuade' young girls to work overtime without advance notice when rush orders came in at the last minute. Such a strategy was greatly facilitated in the Peace Market where

the workplace itself actually doubled up as living quarters.

When we come to consider the arduous working conditions endured by female workers it will be readily appreciated that when they were not actually at work, the women were too tired to do anything as strenuous as socialise in what otherwise would be the normal way. Thus, women who lived in the company dormitory rarely met with workers from other companies. They did not have the opportunity to exchange information about jobs, vacancies, and conditions in other locations and they were unable to compare their lot with that of others. It is not difficult to conceive that, in the minds of many of these naïve and unsophisticated girls, there was no alternative to the miserable lives they were living. Whether they were asleep or awake, their own company was all they knew. The outcome was that employers were able to keep employee turnover very low. The dormitory system was also an aid to keeping wage levels at the absolute minimum. From their cynical standpoint, employers adopted the rationale that the longer they were able to keep their workers ‘captive’ within the confines of the factory and the dormitory, the less opportunity they would have to spend money, therefore the less money they needed to be paid (Group discussion, Peace Market women workers, January, 1999).

Because the individual factories in the Peace Market were so small, the owners of those factories were ill-equipped to provide dormitory accommodation, in the conventional sense, as was the case with some of the larger organisations. For this reason, it was necessary to recruit as many workers as possible from the local, urban area, an endeavour that was largely successful as far as cutters and machinists were concerned. However, the sheer number of unskilled *shidas* that was required rendered it

imperative to extend the recruiting net into the countryside. This, in turn, made it necessary for the Peace Market employers to reassure the parents of the new recruits that their offspring would be provided with adequate accommodation and appropriate facilities.

The practice of owners dividing their factories into an upper and a lower room has already been described, and it has also been noted that when work was finished for the day, the upper room, or 'attic', became home for the *shidas*. Dust from the fabric used in the manufacturing process was prevalent throughout all the Peace Market factories and, as we will see, constituted a major health hazard. Not only were windows left closed, but there was no provision for any alternative form of ventilation. The atmosphere was, therefore, an extremely oppressive and uncomfortable one in which to work; for the *shidas* it was also the environment in which they ate and slept.

By the time the cutters and machinists had finished work for the day, and the *shidas* had cleaned up the mess that remained, it would normally be one or two o'clock in the morning before the girls could contemplate making themselves something to eat. Bearing in mind that their ages ranged from barely twelve to fifteen or sixteen years, it is not surprising that they were frequently too tired to bother. Instead, they would each simply unroll a thin mattress on the floor, and fall asleep under a light coverlet.

Toilet facilities available to these young girls were meagre, to say the least. Somewhere in the building there would be a cold water tap that had to be shared by hundreds of people. This was where they washed their faces and hands, with more extensive ablutions being out of the question. If they were lucky, and could afford it

(see below), girls would be able to visit the public baths once every month; more often than not, however, that period was nearer once every six months. During the day, workers would have access to a small and rudimentary lavatory that was used by both men and women. During the night, when most factory owners preferred to lock the young *shidas* inside the workshop, the girls would have the benefit of a bucket in the corner of the room.

Four or five hours, at the most, after the *shidas* had unrolled their mattresses they would be awoken, usually by the cutter, so that he could arrange for the previous day's production to be delivered to the wholesale and retail outlets on the ground floor of the building. Having completed this chore, the girls would stow away their bedding and begin to prepare the food that would have to last them for the day. This food normally consisted of rice⁹ and *kimchi* and perhaps some salted shrimps or bean soup.

Cooking facilities were as rudimentary as those available for personal hygiene and consisted of a primitive paraffin stove, a bucket of clean water that had to be carried from the distant tap, and one for waste. One of the sewing machines would be pressed into service as a makeshift dining table and it was, therefore, inevitable that the pervading dust became part of the regular diet. Food was purchased out of pitifully low wages, and the dual problems of inadequate bulk and poor nutritional value added significantly to the drab existence of these young girls; children who, in other circumstances, would still have been in the care of their parents and attending school.

After breakfast, everything had to be cleared away by eight o'clock when the machinists would arrive and the day's work begin. No interruptions for drinks or snacks

were permitted while work was in progress and there would be a break of, perhaps, thirty minutes shortly after midday during which some of the food that had been prepared earlier in the morning could be consumed. That short break also offered the only opportunity to get outside the factory into the comparatively fresh, albeit still highly polluted, air of central Seoul for a few minutes. More often than not, the greater part of that respite would likely be spent queuing for the toilet.

7.6 Effects On Health

The image of a huge concentration of girls barely into their teens, or a tightly-packed mass of young woman, working excessively long hours in an odious and polluted atmosphere for grossly inadequate wages is a compelling icon of suffering. Even so, the extent of the wretchedness endured by Korean textile and garment workers in the 1960's and 1970's extended beyond the primitive working conditions themselves. The damage they wreaked upon both short and long-term physical and psychological health is readily imaginable. Even the most dispassionate observer would recognise that a diet inadequate in both bulk and nutrition, allied with the imperative to eat quickly, on the occasions when there was something to eat, and return immediately to work, was likely to result in digestive and gastric disorders and fatigue, if such a lifestyle were to become routine. Likewise it is reasonable to anticipate that the poor quality of the air inhaled throughout the working day and, in the case of many of the *shidas*, throughout the night as well, was highly conducive to the contraction of respiratory diseases such as emphysema and tuberculosis. The intricate nature of the work and the speed with which it had to be completed, the harsh lighting, and the dust-laden atmosphere, also virtually guaranteed that eye infections such as conjunctivitis and retinitis became accepted as occupational norms. Add to these the final ingredients of lack of sleep, physical and

verbal abuse from supervisory staff, loneliness and homesickness, and an almost total absence of opportunity for exercise and relaxation in unpolluted air, and the recipe for utter misery is complete.

In the admittedly rudimentary, yet totally trustworthy, research they conducted in 1970, Chun Tae-il and his Society of Fools (see Chapter Ten) concluded that for a woman to have her health intact after five years employment in the Peace Market was little short of miraculous:

The strange thing is that most of the workers don't actually seem to realise that they are ill at all. If all of their colleagues are constantly coughing and bringing up blood, it is almost as though it is normal, and acceptable, for them to do the same. The real sadness is that, even if they did understand the seriousness of their condition, there is nothing they can do about it. They have no money for treatment, and they have no time for treatment. All they can do is keep on going for as long as they can, and when they are too sick to work, they will be fired (Diary, Chun Tae-il, September, 1970).

An interview with a now seriously incapacitated woman who had worked at the Ban-do factory in the 1970's supported this sentiment:

After one and a half years working in the leather jacket section I found that my health was getting very bad. The company gave us an X-ray every year¹⁰ and one day the manager told me that I had tuberculosis and that I would have to stop work until I was cured. I had no money for treatment and the manager told me that it was not the company's business. I knew that I needed rest and medical treatment, but what could I do? I insisted on continuing to work in the hope that I could save some money for treatment before my health got too bad. I worked for a few more days but then I was fired. I didn't get any compensation (Interview, ex-Ban-do worker, January, 1999).

A later entry in Chun Tae-il's diary records verbatim the response of another female worker in the Peace Market:

I would be so happy if I could get four days off each month instead of only two. Instead of regularly working from 8am to 11pm every day, and then doing overtime, I would really like to work only from 8am to 5pm. Because of the way I am forced to live my health is in a terrible state. I cannot eat

because there is something wrong with my stomach. I cannot open my eyes in sunlight and I am suffering from neuralgia at the moment. The employer refuses to help me with treatment or even get me a medical examination. I cannot sleep, my body is aching and all my joints are so painful that it is difficult to walk (Diary, Chun Tae-il, September, 1970).

To offset the possibility that Chun Tae-il and the author, his sister, might be regarded as being ‘too close’ to the Peace Market workers to be truly objective in the matter of the conditions under which they worked, an extract from Shin Donghwa monthly magazine¹¹ is included as a fitting postscript to this section:

Miss Bae informs us that she works until late into the night because there is a high demand. This was not unusual when new designs are being introduced at the beginning of a season, and winter clothes take longer to produce than spring or summer ones. She was in front of her sewing-machine before eight o’clock in the morning and did not leave until eleven-thirty p.m. at the earliest. She claims that it is better than last year when, very often, she stayed up several nights straight. When she rose to take a break, even though her mind was clear, she could not hold her balance and collapsed on the floor, spitting out blood. Even nowadays, Miss Bae says that her body feels like a ton weight every morning when she wakes up. She also feels dizzy; her head feels as though it is going to split open whenever she tries to blow her nose, and she is constantly coughing out black phlegm (Shin Donghwa, January, 1971).

7.7 Women Workers And Marriage

Before looking in closer detail at the financial circumstances of women workers in the Peace Market in the 1970’s, and the dreariness of the lifestyle they were able to afford, it is important to highlight a factor that dominated, and continues to dominate, the consciousness of all Korean females. The crucial importance of marriage in Korean culture cannot be overstated and, if anything, that importance was magnified when young, single women entered the factory environment. Magnified, that is, insofar as the failure to marry at the prescribed age brought with it far greater economic repercussions than had previously been the case for a young woman already branded with a serious cultural stigma.

Although it was by no means unusual for women to marry at a very early age, if they were still spinsters by the time they reached the age of twenty-six they were not only regarded as being ‘on the shelf’ but were also subject to extreme social contempt if they tried to remain at work. It was considered shameful for a young woman to be unmarried by the time she reached that critical age and she would become the butt of concerted abuse from employers and male co-workers. The reason why she was still single, they would assert, was that she was not only inadequate but she was also ugly.

A woman who worked in the Peace Market in the 1970’s, and who still works in a garment factory in Seoul, was interviewed by the author in 1998 and showed her this extract from her diary:

My *shida*, Young-hee, calls me ‘*Ajumoni*’ (aunt). I’d rather be called ‘sister’, but I don’t get angry because it is natural to be called ‘aunt’ at the age of thirty - a woman of thirty usually had two or three children. My younger sister married in 1977 at twenty-eight, she used to complain to me “Why don’t you marry? You care about our family too much!” I believe that her complaint was a strong expression of her love and sympathy for me - one who has got old earning money for her family’s livelihood. I had been working at the factory since I was fifteen, the same age as Young-hee. One day my younger sister said to me: “Shall I give my boyfriend to you?” I knew that would be impossible, but I felt her love toward me and thanked her. Until I had reached 28 or 29 years old some people had wanted to arrange a marriage for me, but when I reached thirty no-one suggested marriage anymore (Diary, Peace Market woman worker, 1974).

So, there were two forces motivating young women workers towards marriage as they approached their mid-twenties: first, it meant that they would escape the humiliation and deprecation that would inevitably be heaped upon them if they remained single and, second, they would escape from the awful circumstances in which they lived and worked. The fact that such hopes did not always come to fruition is

illustrated in an interview with a fifty-eight year old woman who still works from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. in the same garment factory that she entered as a young girl:

From the time I reached my 23rd birthday it was important for me to get married. Social pressures were great, and I believed that if I had a husband I would not have to work in the factory anymore. But I could not find a husband until I was thirty-one and, even then, his wages were not enough to cover our family needs so I could not leave work. I am still working in that small garment factory, and now I also have parents-in-law and brothers and sisters-in-law to support (Interview, Peace Market woman worker, November 1997).

Thus, taking all the above into account, we can get some idea of the multi-directional and multi-faceted pressures which dominated and directed the lives of countless thousands of young women in Korea during the 1960's and 1970's. Culturally, socially, economically, and domestically they were forced into subservient and, in many instances, inhuman, roles from which it was clearly a task of monumental proportions to break free. The fact that the women workers of the 1970's did, eventually, manage to establish a collective and cohesive identity in the workplace, and thereby lay the foundations for Korean women as a whole to develop individual and progressive identities, bears testimony to their courage, their stoicism, and their humanity.

7. 8 Earnings And Purchasing Power

There has been no shortage of professional economists, or commentators upon global economic affairs, who have theorised at length on the monetary, fiscal, political, and social explanations for what came to be known as the 'Korean economic miracle'; the phenomenal development, engineered by Park Chung-hee, that transformed a shattered and disorganised 'third world agrarian' society into one of the world's leading industrial nations in less than one generation (Among the many works considered by the

author are: Bello (1990); Frank (1975); Jacobs (1985); Kim and Roemer (1979); Mason (1980); Michell (1988); Pae Sung-moon (1992); Sipos (1988); Song Byung-nak (1990); Steinberg (1989); Woo Jung-en (1991). Macro and micro-economic theories are rarely uncontested, however, and it is open to conjecture whether one of the reasons why so many works on the subject have been published is that there are as many differing opinions on the multifarious contributory factors. There is, therefore, no complete and undisputed explanation of how and why the South Korean metamorphosis actually occurred, and it does not fall within the remit of this study to add to the theoretical debate.

Beyond the truism that the 'miracle' did, indeed, take place, however, there are two fundamental elements upon which all commentators are agreed. First, growth was rapid and sustained, as John Calverley records:

Under Park Chung-hee Korea enjoyed 17 years of economic growth averaging 10% per annum and became a model for development, analysed and admired everywhere. International banks lent more than \$US15 billion for development and financed Korean companies world-wide while multi-national companies were attracted to Korea by its rapid growth industries, industrious workforce and political stability (Calverley, 1982).

Second, the role played by exports in the explosive success of the Korean economy was crucial:

Exports emerged as the strongest driving force for growth and were directly linked to the business boom at home..... Korea established a world record by achieving an annual export growth rate of nearly 40% for 12 years from the early 1960's and advanced to the status of a newly industrialising country thanks to her export-oriented growth strategy..... Export performances in 1971 and 1972 even surpassed targets by 2 to 2.5 times and in 1973 exports registered a 98.6% increase over the previous year (Kim Cae-one, 1986).

This section will set out to demonstrate that there is a third contributory component to Korea's 'miracle' that is equally beyond dispute: the extreme and inhumane magnitude of the disparity between the national wealth being accrued via the spectacular performances identified in the two extracts above, and the real term rewards gained by those manufacturing workers who contributed most to that success. The textile and garment industry, as the leading exporter during the 1960's and 1970's, was central to this 'miracle' (Kim Cae-one, 1986).

Whilst the author's 'problem with averages' is documented in the methodology chapter of this study, there are two further, and connected, perceived weaknesses evident in the body of literature concerned with the economic circumstances in Korea during the Park Chung-hee era. They are, first, the sources of statistical evidence and, second, the extent to which individual factors such as wages are 'over-generalised' and are, thus, rendered nugatory for the purposes of any in-depth analysis in specific areas. Those works, for example, which deal with the question of wage levels, appear to abstract their evidence primarily from contemporary government publications such as those emanating from the Office of Labour Affairs, or from 'quasi-governmental' sources such as the Bank of Korea and the Korea Annual.¹² In such publications wage levels and wage movements are categorised under the headings of 'industrial field', 'mining field', and 'manufacturing field', and so on (e.g. Korea Annual, 1979), with the textile and garment industry falling somewhere within the latter. Taking into account the enormous diversity of both conditions and commodities which are encompassed by the term 'manufacturing field', it is but a simple step to appreciate the arrant futility of attempting to draw meaningful conclusions about conditions in specific areas from such broadly based, and suspect, records.

The extent to which workers in the textile and garment industry, the majority of whom were women and young girls, were denied a share of the fruits of industrial prosperity is not evident from aggregate data. To provide such evidence, the amounts of money they were actually paid for the work they did, and the way those earnings were spent, is itemised in detail. From this simple process the clearest picture of the quality of the lives these women were forced to live emerges. The evidence has been gathered from lengthy interviews and group discussions, conducted over a period of years, which involved a wide representation of women who spent the 1960's and 1970's working as *oya-machinists*, *bocho-machinists*, and *shidas* in the Peace Market. Utilising diaries, confirmed by the most acute and painful recollections of a time that is deeply etched in their memories, a clear picture of wage levels is built up. Most of the sources are long-time and trusted friends and colleagues, whose stories accord exactly with the author's own experience of working in the Peace Market in the 1970's. To fully appreciate the severity of the disparity between national prosperity and personal poverty, however, it must be borne in mind throughout that these 'financial histories' were played out within the context of a booming economy in which Korean politicians, entrepreneurs, and major conglomerates were accumulating wealth at an unprecedented rate.

It will have been noted that, in the warren of small enterprises in the Peace Market, a number of factors were in play that determined how much money was actually paid to each of the female workers at the end of the month. In essence, those considerations included:-

- i. The 'per garment' rate decided upon initially by the employer but, subsequently and increasingly, after negotiation between the employers and the Chonggye Union. Prior to the time when the union input was taken into account, the rate per unit was dependent upon the complexity of the particular garment and the whim of the employer;

- ii. The number of garments each team of *oya-machinist*, *bocho-machinist*, and two *shidas*, could complete;
- iii. The decision of the *oya-machinist* in regard to how she would apportion the gross income between the members of her team;¹³
- iv. The amount of overtime, either voluntary or enforced, that was worked, and whether it was actually remunerated;¹⁴ and
- v. The sum of the deductions made prior to payment.

Of course, individual financial ‘outgoings’ also varied, with a major variation for all grades of female employee being the proportion of pay allotted immediately to parents or next of kin, usually, but not exclusively, as a contribution towards the education of male siblings (see Chapter Six). Another feature, albeit of lesser significance, was the amount of money spent upon basic sustenance items such as food, clothing, and toilet requisites. This category of expenditure clearly depended upon personal preference, personal priorities, and which retail outlets were used.

It is, therefore, impossible to itemise a universally precise ‘domestic budget’ for each grade of female worker in the Peace Market so, with this caveat firmly in mind, the policy adopted for the purpose of this study was to present all the interviewees with a draft budget made up of an aggregate of the inputs. A ‘roundabouts and swings’ philosophy was adopted by all concerned, insofar as emphasis was placed upon balance rather than absolute precision; and if one item was considered by one person to be over or under-priced, it was accepted as long as it was counterbalanced elsewhere.

The final variable centred upon the fact that even in the most stable of economies prices and incomes change over time, usually in an upward direction, whilst the relationship between them does not necessarily remain synchronised. Thus, between the date of Chun Tae-il’s death in November, 1970 and the assassination of Park

Chung-hee in October, 1979, fluctuations with a generally upward trend occurred. Four factors influenced the decision to base the 'financial snapshot' presented in this section on the circumstances which pertained on or about 1 January, 1974. First, that date is close to the mid-point between those two momentous events in Korean history identified above and, thus, the mid-point of the period under review in this study. Second, on 15 January, 1974 agreement was finally reached between the Chonggye Union and the Peace Market employers that enabled Chonggye representatives to participate in wage negotiations (Unpublished Chonggye Union document, 1976), and it is considered appropriate to represent conditions prior to the time when the union was able to achieve real improvements to wages. Third, from the end of March, 1976, and at the insistence of the Chonggye Union, *shidas* were no longer paid by the *oya-machinists* but, instead, were paid directly by the employer (see Chapter Ten). This improvement, if included, would further distort the circumstances endured for so many years by those thousands of young girls. Finally, and coincidentally, one of the interviewees still retains a detailed record of her living expenses for the early months of 1974.

7.9 Personal Budgets

(N.B. The exchange rate during the period under consideration in this section was approximately 485 *won* to the US dollar (Calverley, 1982; Korea Annual 1974).

Income

The experience of the *oya-machinist* Kim Hae-soo and her abortive attempt to increase the rate paid per finished garment in one particular factory in the Peace Market in 1974 is described in Section 7.4 above. The rate insisted upon by her employer was 180 *won* per jacket, and her team was capable of completing a maximum of 20 jackets in one day: this produced a total income for the team of 3,600 *won* per day. However, it

was also noted that up to 30 of the previous year's jackets were completed in one day because their design and construction had been much simpler. The rate per garment in 1973 had been 160 *won*; thereby resulting in a 1973 daily team earning of 4,800 *won*, 1,200 *won* more than what would be possible in 1974. All 860 factories in the Peace Market were managed along very similar lines and this circumstance was by no means unusual. Although thirty garments per day in 1973, and twenty garments per day in 1974 represent achievements which could never have been sustained for a full month, it is, nevertheless, considered appropriate to use those figures as base lines for subsequent calculations. In the interest of balance, therefore, the notional daily sum earned by the standard team of two machinists and two *shidas* is calculated as having been 4,250 *won*, or 25 completed garments at a rate of 170 *won* per garment; exactly midway between the 1973 and the 1974 figures. On the basis of four days off per month, the monthly team income amounted to 110,500 *won*.

Prior to the arrangement in March, 1976 whereby *shidas* were paid directly by the employer, the universal practice was for the *oya-machinist* to allow her most junior helper 5,000 *won* per month, rising to 9,000 *won* for the most senior. The *bocho-machinist*, meanwhile, would receive 12,000 *won* for each month's work. This left 84,500 *won* for the team leader.

There is one important caveat, however, which made a substantial difference to the above amounts. Each year there were two periods when the factories virtually closed down while the owners and *jaedanshas* planned for the following season's schedule. These ran from the end of June until the beginning of August, and from the end of January until the beginning of March; a total of some eight weeks per year during which

there was no work for the teams, and no pay. Thus, the money earned over 44 weeks had to be made to last for 52 weeks; effectively reducing income to the following:-

Table 7.1: Monthly Income, 1974

Grade	Monthly Income (Korean <i>won</i>)	US Dollar Equivalent
<i>Oya-machinist</i>	70,400	145
<i>Bocho-machinist</i>	10,000	20
Senior <i>shida</i>	7,500	15
Junior <i>shida</i>	4,200	9

Source: Interviews, diaries, women workers; author observation.

Having established the relative incomes of each team member, the intention now is to focus upon the circumstances of the Peace Market *shidas*; for although Chun Tae-il's concern was for all female textile and garment workers, it was towards the youngest and most vulnerable of them that he directed the major part of his attention. Thus, it was primarily the plight of the *shidas* that caused him the greatest anguish, and which precipitated his final act; the outcome of which was to be the birth of democratic trade unionism in Korea.

To simplify the model, and to continue to observe the imperative of maintaining balance and impartiality, the 'composite' *shida* will be neither the most junior nor the most senior, she will fall exactly in the middle of the earning range and, thus, be paid 7,500 *won* per month. (This figure should be rounded down to 6,250 *won* by the *pro rata* correction identified above but, so as not to fall foul of the temptation to paint the picture blacker than it needs to be, the estimate is left at 7,500 *won* per month, or \$US 15: our *shida* will be left to fend for herself during the eight 'fallow' weeks per year).

As has been described, many of her peers were accommodated in the makeshift dormitories in the 'attics' constructed in the Peace Market factories, and were not charged for this 'concession'. A significant number of girls lived elsewhere, however. Our model *shida* conformed to the pattern of the more experienced *shidas* and, in company with three of her colleagues, rented a room in a locality of Seoul which was sufficiently close to the Peace Market that she could commute to and from work by bus. To complete the picture, she is sixteen years of age and her family lives in Chollado province, some two hundred miles south of Seoul. She has one younger brother who is attending school in his home village. Her father is what would be referred to in the United States as a 'sharecropper', who has suffered a substantial fall in the return on his rice crop due to Park Chung-hee's predilection for importing cheap rice from the US (Park Hyun-chae, 1978). The reason why she has been sent to find work in Seoul is to try to make up the severe shortfall in the family income. Finally, she is not yet a paid up member of the Chonggye Union and does not, therefore, have the union subscription deducted 'at source' from her wages.

Outgoings

The four *shidas* rented one room in a slum area of the capital, for which they paid 3,000 *won* (\$6) per month. All living expenses were shared equally between the four young girls, so each contributed 750 *won* (\$1.50) towards the rent. Bus fares to and from the Peace Market were 60 *won* per day for each *shida*, or 1,560 *won* (\$3.20) over the 26 working days per month: our *shida*'s wage packet of 7,500 *won*, has already been reduced by over 30%.

Records kept by one ex-*shida* permit a very accurate assessment of the amount of money the girls spent on food in 1974, and three daily shopping lists abstracted from the period January – March are reproduced here (quantities were for four people, and all prices in *won*):-

<u>List 1</u>	<u>List 2</u>	<u>List 3</u>
Rice 500g - 100	Rice 500g - 100	Rice 250g - 50
Barley 1 kilo - 70	Barley 1 kilo - 70	Barley 500g -35
Beansprouts 150g - 50	Mackerel heads - 50	Noodles - 80
Radish 200g - 50	Vegetables - 50	Potatoes - 50
Spring onions 50g - 20	Cooking oil - 120	Kimchi - 100
Pickled shrimp 100g - 50	Radish - 30	Beansprouts - 50
Vegetables - 70	Spring onions - 20	
<u>Total:</u> <u>410 won</u>	<u>440 won</u>	<u>365 won</u>

From these examples, and from the full record in the author's possession, it is clear that the basic daily food bill for four *shidas* was in the region of 400 *won*. Thus, in a thirty day month the combined cost would be 12,000 *won* (\$25), or 3,000 *won* (\$6) per girl. So, once our notional *shida* is housed, fed, and able to get to and from work, she is left with 2,190 *won* (\$4.50) with which to take care of her remaining commitments and expenses for the month.

It has already been noted that the only reason a traditional rural Korean family would consider sending their daughter to find work in Seoul was the seriousness of the financial situation in which the family was struggling to survive. Thus, apart from keeping herself alive and in work once she had reached Seoul, the imperative for the daughter was to send as much money home as she possibly could. But our composite *shida* has only \$4.50 left out of her month's pay and there are other requisites which she must purchase to meet her own very basic needs.

Let us consider some of those additional requirements. Cooking was carried out on a small stove fuelled with kerosene, which cost approximately 840 *won* for one month's supply. The room was heated by a device which used compressed coal briquettes costing 30 *won* each. Heating was only necessary for six months of the year, during which the briquettes would be burned at a rate of 40 per month, resulting in a cost of 1,200 *won*, or 600 *won* when spread over the whole year. A mains water supply was not a feature of the sort of accommodation occupied by *shidas* in the 1970's, so clean water had to be purchased for 5 *won* for two small buckets. Cooking for four people, washing the utensils, and personal ablutions, required a minimum of six such small buckets each day at a cost of 15 *won*, or 450 *won* per month. Thus far then, we have accounted for additional 'communal' expenditure of 1,890 *won*, 222 *won* for each girl, to be deducted from the 2,190 *won* remaining of the monthly wage. What else has to be purchased with this 1,968 *won* (\$4) in an attempt to make life sustainable for this 16 year-old? Bearing in mind the highly polluted nature of the atmosphere in which she works, the fact that she is a post-pubescent female, and the need of most human beings to maintain at least a modicum of decency, adequate clothing and basic toilet items may be regarded as essential. The cost of clothing obviously varied with quality, but purely as an indication of the outlay necessary, a blouse would be in the region of 3,000 *won* (\$6), a skirt 4,000 *won* (\$8), and a pair of shoes 7,000 *won* (\$14). Considering that she has less than 2,000 *won* left out of her wage, it is clear that the purchase of any one of these items will demand a significant amount of planned saving. In general, the girls made their own clothing out of offcuts salvaged from the factory or, if there was a little money available, they could visit Yi So-sun, or someone in a similar line of business, and purchase items of clothing which had been rescued from the city mortuaries (see Chapter Nine). Instead of shoes, all the Peace Market workers wore simple canvas

plimsolls which, although costing 1,000 *won* (\$2) could, with judicious patching and stitching, be made to last for a surprisingly long time. As for toiletries, a bar of the cheapest soap cost 160 *won*, a tube of toothpaste 340 *won*, one month's supply of sanitary towels 200 *won*, and one packet of washing powder 250 *won*. Assuming that each of these commodities would last for the full month, and that no clothing or footwear is purchased, our *shida's* 1,968 *won* has now been reduced to 1,018 *won* (\$2).

It was of the utmost importance for the country girls working in Seoul, and for many of them the only prospect that kept them going in the miserable existence that was their lot in the sweat-shops of the Peace Market, that they return to their homes twice each year, at Harvest Festival and New Year. For a girl whose family lived in Chollado province, for example, this meant two return train tickets costing together 5,600 *won* (\$11.54), and demanded the saving each month of at least 460 *won*: our *shida's* monthly cash in hand has now become 558 *won* (\$1.15). Whilst it might be comforting to conclude that this remaining sum represented 'pocket money' to be spent upon little luxuries, that was, regrettably, not the case. It must be recalled that the *shidas* were working, on average, 16 hours a day, six days a week; starting at 7.30am and finishing late into the night. By the time they got back to their rented room all they wanted to do was sleep and, more often than not, they were too tired on the following morning to prepare their lunch-boxes. The only alternative was to visit one of the numerous food stalls in the vicinity of the Peace Market and purchase a bowl of noodles for their lunch. These cost 20 *won*, and it is all too apparent that if this practice were to become a habit, the monthly wage has been completely spent. There has been no visit to the public baths for a proper wash (300 *won*), no shampoo, no visit to even the lowest of the three

grades of cinema in Seoul (700 *won*), no books, no magazines, no newspapers, no sweets.

As in comparable situations all over the world, where there is poverty and desperation there will also be the money lenders and traders who are prepared to deal 'on tick' or 'on the slate'; all for punitive rates of interest, of course. Seoul in the 1960's and 1970's was no exception, and it was by no means unusual for a female textile and garment worker to owe up to half of her wages to money-lenders and/or local shopkeepers before it had even been paid to her. Spirals of debt were commonplace and, prior to the advent of the Chonggye Union, it was far from uncommon for young machinists at the Peace Market to be driven to prostitution in desperate attempts to obtain respite from financial pressure (Interview, Chung In-sook, Secretary, Women's Section, Chonggye Union 1971-1974, December, 1997).

But what of the primary purpose of leaving home and family and going to Seoul in the first place, the imperative to supplement the family income and help to fund the education of the male siblings? It is clear that for the most junior *shidas* their own survival in the city hung by a thread, and sending home even the most paltry sum was simply out of the question. Instead, the primary task for them was to work as hard as they could in order to gain experience, promotion, and more pay. A senior *shida*, earning 9,000 *won* per month, might be able to allot 2,000 *won* (\$4) monthly to her parents, and once she was promoted to *bocho-machinist*, on 12,000 *won*, that sum would normally be in the region of 5,000 *won*, or \$10. The *shida* in our example is neither the most senior nor the most junior, and out of her 7,500 *won* income, she could not be expected to set aside more than 500 *won* towards her obligation to her parents. It

must be borne in mind that, as has been demonstrated, sufficient food to keep one person alive for one day in the city could be bought for 100 *won*, a cost probably greater than would be found in the countryside, so five times that amount represented a very valuable addition indeed to the budget of an impoverished village family.

It was not normal practice, however, for the more senior *shidas* and the *bocho* and *oya-machinists* to actually send money home every month. Instead, a group of colleagues, usually no more than twelve and of similar seniority, would form a savings club, or '*gae*'. Each time they were paid, the members of the *gae* would each deposit an agreed amount with the organiser, or treasurer: for the better paid *oya-machinists* that agreed amount might be as much as 5,000 *won*, whereas for *shidas* of the seniority being discussed in this section it would more likely be in the region of 500 *won*. When the *gae* first started, each member would draw a number representing her turn to take possession of the combined savings; thus, in the latter instance, and assuming that there were twelve members of the *gae*, if our notional *shida's* number was 5 and it was the fifth month, she would collect the lump sum of 6,000 *won*. Clearly, as the members of the *gae* gained in seniority the size of the lump sum would increase and would become invaluable for paying off debts, indulging in tiny luxuries and, most importantly, sending home.

7.10 The 'Wage Deposit' System

One means whereby employers kept their employee turnover low has been described in Section 6.5 above. There was, however, another ploy used by unscrupulous factory owners which appears to have been unique to the Peace Market and which was the cause of considerable problems both for the workers themselves and for the

Chonggye Union (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1976). Under the 'wage deposit' system a worker starting at a new factory did not receive the money she had earned during her first two weeks. Instead, it was placed 'on deposit' with the employer and the worker was told that she would receive that money when she left the factory either to marry or to take up another job. This gave rise to two distinct difficulties. First, withholding the first two weeks' wages meant that the new employee had to work for six weeks before she received any money at all. Details of personal budgets outlined above make it quite clear that such an imposition would inevitably result in real hardship; although, in the event, friends and co-workers invariably rallied round to ensure the survival of the new girl.

The second implication was more problematic insofar as when the time eventually came for the wage deposit to be given to its rightful owner, the employer would prove both elusive and evasive. Chonggye Union records abound with cases of unpaid deposits; the details of which are uncannily similar. The 'retiring' worker asks her employer for her deposit and he assures her that it will be included in her final month's wage packet. When she finds that it is not, she confronts the owner who apologises profusely for someone else's mistake and asks her to return the following week when her money will be ready for collection. The worker returns to the Peace Market the following week but the owner is nowhere to be found; he is 'out of town', and she should try again at the end of the month. This charade continues until the inevitable occurs; the distance the ex-employee has to travel, or the difficulty in getting time off from her new place of work, forces her to give up the chase and she resigns herself to the loss of the money owed to her. Until the formation of a democratic trade union dedicated to the protection of her rights she has no-one to whom she can turn for

help, and her colleagues have no means whereby they can prevent such additional and blatant exploitation occurring to them. The only action they could take in practice was to try to keep the number of times they were robbed of their earnings to the absolute minimum, which, of course, meant remaining in one job for as long as possible. From the factory owners' perspective this widespread tactic represented a substantial reduction in the already pitifully low wages being paid to workers in the Peace Market and, considering that they retained the wage deposits of all, or most of their employees, a commensurate and not inconsiderable boost to profits.

The magnitude of the problem of unpaid deposits is highlighted by the fact that after the formation of the Chonggye Union at the end of 1970, eight full-time union officers devoted all of their working time to assisting the huge number of women to secure the payment of their deposits and back wages:

Hundreds of workers came to report about unpaid deposits and unpaid wages. It is no exaggeration to say that our first year of union activity was dominated by solving the unpaid deposit wage. But it was not an easy job for union staff because the employers tried very hard not to pay and sometimes violence was involved between employers and union staff. There were occasions when we had to take legal action (Interview, Choi Chong-in, Vice-President, Chonggye Union 1971; President, Chonggye Union, 1971-1976, February, 1999).

7.11 Summary

This chapter has ranged across the entirety of the day to day lives led by the thousands of female workers whose labour contributed more than any other single industrial group towards Park Chung-hee's 'economic miracle'. It has examined the diverse, intense, and relentless pressures with which those girls and young women were perpetually confronted; and has provided numerous examples of the deeply ingrained cultural conviction held by most Korean males of their inherent superiority. The sheer drudgery of the work and the drabness of the lifestyle have both been portrayed, as has

their combined and quite inexcusable effects upon the health of an already impoverished and deprived 'sub-class'.

Against this background, it is submitted that in not only surviving the unmitigated exploitation by cynical and ruthless employers, men who were allowed to prosecute their profit-centred conduct unimpeded by an authoritarian regime intent only upon national growth, but in having the strength and determination to fight back, to combine, and to overcome, the women of the textile and garment industry changed forever the face of Korean society and wrote a new chapter into Korean history.

The fight back by these women involved union organisation and action. Before examining the detail of union struggle in the Peace Market and elsewhere, it is necessary to consider the nature and character of trade unionism in Korea at the time. This is the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES

¹ The financial collapse of the Weimar Republic in 1922-3 is a classic exemplar of the meaninglessness of 'wage levels' being recorded in isolation as an index of prosperity or poverty. At the height of German inflation, one US dollar equated with 136,000,000,000 marks. Thus, a 'Deutschmark billionaire' could not even afford to buy half a kilo of butter (Grunfeld, 1974).

² As described by the many ex-Peace Market workers interviewed November, 1997-January, 1998 and November, 1998-February, 1999. The description also accords with the author's own experience, and the research of Chun Tae-il.

³ This was despite the fact that the exterior of the building had been freshly decorated for the benefit of visiting delegates from North Korea (Interview, diary author, December, 1997).

⁴ *Kimchi* is made by pickling the large Korean radish, cabbage, or the Korean equivalent of Chinese leaves, in salt, garlic, red chilli peppers, and other ingredients to taste. It can be eaten cold, or cooked with rice and fish, etc.. *Kimchi* is arguably the most important single food item to a Korean; more so even than rice, because it has deep cultural and emotional connotations which no other staple possesses (Chu Young-ha, 1995). Korean women, and some Korean men, take great pride in the quality of their home-made *kimchi*, and if there is one thing a Korean abroad misses more than anything else, other than family, it is the distinctive taste of *kimchi*. *Kimchi* of the highest quality is expensive, however, and workers in the Peace Market could afford only the lowest.

⁵ Whilst this might appear to be the only rational means of conducting wage assessment under the piece-work scheme, it was not normal procedure in the Peace Market during the 1960's and 1970's, where workers rarely knew how much they would receive until the job had been completed. Thus, the owners and the *jaedanshas* would regularly collude in order to maintain profit and shift the effects of any business downturn away from their own returns and onto the remuneration of the workers (Group discussion, Peace Market women workers, January, 1999). Furthermore, they clearly took advantage of the truism that there is little leverage to be gained by workers contesting a piece-work rate after the job is finished.

⁶ This fact did not emerge until the interview itself, because throughout the author's time of employment in the factory the owner left the day-to-day management to others while he attended to business elsewhere.

⁷ This case was related to the author by Kim Hae-soo, the *oya-machinist* who was the prime mover in the action. Kim Hae-soo was a member of the Chonggye Union and had attended the Acacia Meeting labour education programme (see Chapter Ten).

⁸ Wage rates and purchasing power are discussed in later sections of this chapter, but in order to place this incident in sharper perspective it should be noted that in 1974, 160 won would buy two cups of rice or a bar of soap (Office of Labour Affairs, Korea Annual, 1974). Furthermore, this 160 won had to be shared between two machinists and two *shidas*. (NB This statistic, emanating from a Park Chung-hee government department, is supported by the author's own experience).

⁹ What is euphemistically called 'rice' in most literature concerned with the diet of Korean workers was, in reality, a mixture of rice and barley; 'undiluted' rice being eaten on a regular basis only by the affluent. During the 1960's and 1970's the price of barley was almost exactly half that of rice, so the normal practice of the lower paid was to mix the two grains together. The degree to which the rice was 'diluted' with barley in any

particular household was a matter of considerable significance, especially when guests were entertained; the greater the proportion of rice to barley, the greater the social cachet. In normal domestic circumstances, the wife and mother would apportion the rice and barley in accordance with family 'seniority'; with the husband receiving the largest proportion of rice and the junior member of the family receiving the largest proportion of barley.

¹⁰ The agreement by the Ban-do company to conduct annual X-ray examinations for its workers was a progressive, and rare, concession that was one of the most significant early achievements of the Ban-do Union under the leadership of Han Soon-nim (see Chapter Nine).

¹¹ A weighty and relatively middle-of-the-road political and economic publication that has been held in generally high regard throughout Korea for many years.

¹² For example, Calverley (1982) makes much use of the Bank of Korea Monthly Economic Statistics, the Bank of Korea Economic Statistics Yearbook, and the Economic Planning Board's Monthly Statistics of Korea. Frank (1975) uses identical figures as source material and, indeed, refers to Calverley's earlier writing on the topic; and Kim Cae-one (1986) relies upon all of the aforementioned and material issued by the Korean Development Institute. This tendency to repeat previously quoted and otherwise unsubstantiated data and, thus, to treat 'questionable' statistics as adequate bases for serious comment is widespread, and should be the cause for concern and reflection.

¹³ This arrangement was prior to the agreement reached between the Chonggye Union and the Peace Market employers whereby the *shidas* would receive a wage direct from the employer and not as a share of the team income (see Chapter Eleven).

¹⁴ Between 1971 and 1979 the major cause of industrial action was the non-payment for overtime worked and back wages (see Chapter Three).

CHAPTER EIGHT

KOREAN TRADE UNIONS

8.0 Introduction

Preceding chapters have described the changes in the position of women, both in the workplace and in the wider society, during the first two decades of Korean industrialisation, which were determined to a large extent by state-centred development strategies and policies. Although these strategies included the organisation of trade unions, the government-sanctioned institutions which emerged afforded no indication that their primary purpose was to safeguard the interests of their members. This fundamental disregard of obligation was nowhere more apparent than in the textile and garment industry where some 85% of workers were women. The effects of this insouciance on the part of the textile workers' union was further magnified by the fact that of the seventeen national industrial unions in being at the time, the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU) was the second largest in terms of membership. Furthermore, it maintained this position in the membership league table throughout the 1970's (FKTU Annual Report, 1979). The majority of those seventeen industries had become unionised during the period shortly after liberation from Japan. The Dong-il Textile branch union, for example, was formed by Chung Pyong (see below) in 1946 (History of the Dong-il Textile Branch Union, 1985), whereas some factories remained unorganised until early into the 1970's. The reason why it took so long for many enterprises to gain union recognition was not because they were considered too small to merit recognition, or that their workforces lacked the initiative to seek recognition, but was, instead, a clear reflection of national-level union policy. Put in simple terms, that position might be expressed thus: national leaders did not attempt to organise these

workers unless there was evidence of open revolt at a particular factory location. The view was that introducing unions, and thereby giving the workers the impression that they had institutional support, and a voice beyond their own workplace, served only to generate unnecessary conflict. A prime example of this selective resistance to recruiting was the YH Garment factory, opened in January, 1966, and which, despite employing approximately 4,000 girls and young women in appalling conditions, had no trade union until 1975 (YH Textile Branch Union Report, 1984).

This chapter will show that the salient characteristics of the 'official' trade unions in existence in Korea during the period under review were that they were dominated by men and, further, were fully expressive of a 'classical' male hegemony. Women were systematically excluded from all positions of influence and, regardless of their overwhelming numerical dominance in the workforce, were exploited economically, physically, and culturally. By various means, including the levying of compulsory union dues and the selective appointments of union officials, the state machinery of President Park Chung-hee secured the loyalty of union officers to the state, and their commitment to the interests of capital. This calculated endeavour on the part of the Park regime resulted in the consolidation of the positions of union leaders as 'labour aristocrats', and the reinforcement of their privileged status by close collaboration between unions and management.

In accord with the ideological bias of the Park administration, the philosophy of the union leadership was essentially anti-communist and, like their political masters, union leaders appeared unable to differentiate between communism and democracy. Any effort to widen democratic representation in the workplace was automatically

branded as 'pro-communist'. The state-sponsored labour organisations so constructed can aptly be described as being little more than instruments for use by the state to control the national labour force. They were epitomised by the FKTU, which will be shown to have been concerned only with facilitating the achievement of the Park government's economic policies, without regard for the costs incurred by its membership.

What will also be discussed in this chapter is the paradox whereby the FKTU and the national-level textile and garment union sowed the seeds of their own attenuation by their adherence to a state-inspired posture in dealings with their members. By their overt male chauvinism, in a work environment dominated by women, and by their affinity for management rather than for employees, the official labour institutions succeeded in intensifying the vacuum between workers and employers and, in so doing, prepared the ground for a grassroots collective movement.

This grassroots movement was set in motion by women:

We needed to ensure that the fullest expression of our predicament and our needs was carried right to the heart of union business. We needed collective bargaining. We had to deal direct with the owners and the government because we could not depend upon male leaders who would not represent our interests (Group discussion, women workers, Ban-do, Won-pung, YH, So-tong, Nam-a, Chonggye, and Dong-il, branch unions, January, 1999).

One outcome was direct confrontation, not only between women workers and their employers but, more bitterly, between the women who were trying to organise enterprise-level unions and their industry's national-level union officers.

The first section in this chapter focuses upon the FKTU and the national-level textile union, the NTWU, and, in so doing, will explain the symbiotic relationship

between the state and the union leadership of the textile industry. The second section provides an overview of the trade union situation as it existed in Korea during the 1970's and will describe briefly the linear and 'one-way' characteristic of its 'chain of command' structure and the incidence and degree of government intervention in the shaping and control of the resultant institutions. Section Three discusses the practical implications of the malfunction, from the workers' point of view, of the official trade union structure previously described and will, thereby, explain the bases of the escalating conflict that developed between national-level and branch-level union administrations. The penultimate section contains examples of critical reaction by the international labour community to the standards and practices of President Park Chung-hee's industrial relations organisation, whilst the final section consists of an overall assessment of the circumstances described in the chapter.

8.1 Historical Development Of The FKTU

The evolution of Korean trade unionism differs from that of most industrialised countries insofar as, in the Korean case, the foundation of unions and the formulation of their procedures have been driven primarily by political imperatives. As the political atmosphere changed over time, so did the nature of trade union organisation and structure (Park Young-ki, 1969).¹ After the First World War, and as a reflection of the upsurge of nationalism throughout Asia, Korean socialist intellectuals began to form social movements such as the Labourer's Mutual Relief Association, begun in 1919 and, five years later, the Korean Federation of Labourers and Farmers (Kim Nak-jung, et al., 1970; Lee Jeong-taik, 1988). Although the titles of many of the organisations were suggestive of a focus on worker welfare or agricultural co-operation, most of them were, in fact, socialist political groups rather than embryonic trade unions, whose

principal objective was liberation from Japan (Park Young-ki,1969). Due, primarily, to their ambition for independence, all of these groups were driven underground after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, but the mould had been set for the continued dominance of the political over the social.

After World War II, the country's infrastructure was in chaos; many factories and firms, over 80% of which had been Japanese-owned, were at a standstill because Japanese managers and technicians were no longer present and Korean businessmen and workers had insufficient knowledge and expertise to replace them. Unemployment was very high during the period of transition from Japanese rule to an administration overseen by the AMG, and many socio-political organisations, including communist-inspired factions, sprang up and attempted to capitalise on the widespread social unrest by working within the labour movement. It was in this chaotic climate that the General Council for Korean Trade Unions, or Chung Pyong, was formed in November, 1945. Consisting mainly of communists or fellow travellers, and despite proclaiming that its sole purpose was to represent the workers, Chung Pyong soon revealed its political agenda by demanding the withdrawal of all US forces in Korea and worker-ownership of all industries and firms (Ogle, 1990; Lee Jeong-taik, 1988; Hart-Landsberg, 1993; Kim Nak-joong, et al., 1970).

The anti-communist AMG and the capitalist employers, confronted with the very real political and industrial threat posed by this leftist organisation, actively encouraged the establishment of anti-communist trade unions at company level (Kim Yoon-hwan, 1985; Lee Jeong-taik, 1988). In March, 1946, the 'government-favoured' unions thus organised came together and formed the Federation of Korean Trade Unions

(FKTU) (Rauenhorst, 1990). This confederation had two primary incentives, neither of which were directly concerned with the interests of their grassroots associate members. The first objective was to foster the fullest support for the conservative government and its policies, whilst the second was to diligently seek out communists within the trade union movement and expel them. One expedient for facilitating this latter endeavour was that it was held that any worker who refused association with the FKTU automatically identified his, or her, self as, at best, a leftist sympathiser or, at worst, an outright communist, and was, therefore, ripe for persecution.

Conflict between Chung Pyong on the left and the FKTU on the right was inevitable, and it could be argued that, taking into account the level of governmental and capital support being afforded to the FKTU, the outcome was also inevitable. Matters came to a head when Chung Pyong called for widespread industrial action in October, 1946, and the FKTU stepped in and brokered a successful settlement (Rauenhorst, 1990; Kim Yoon-hwan, 1985). From that moment on, membership of Chung Pyong began to decrease, although the organisation continued to make every effort to foment industrial unrest in an attempt to destabilise the political order. In March, 1947, the few remaining committed members of Chung Pyong went underground after formal proscription by the AMG, and the organisation was finally disbanded in 1949. The field was then left clear for the FKTU.

When the Republic of Korea was established in August, 1948, the FKTU became the only organisation in South Korea nominally representative of the entire trade union movement. Korean labour took its place for the first time on the international stage when, in December, 1949, representatives of the FKTU attended the

inaugural congress of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in London (Park Young-ki 1969).

However, with the demise of Chung Pyong, the usefulness to the state of the FKTU as a militant anti-communist agency declined, and the leadership of the FKTU had to look elsewhere for a primary objective to justify governmental patronage. The first, and most worthy, objective might have been to transform the FKTU into an institution dedicated to the furtherance of the interests of its grassroots members, but this was unlikely. Central and provincial government had grown accustomed to their supervisory roles where trade union matters were concerned and were unwilling to disrupt what had proven to be a convenient and effective *status quo*. Conversely, the unilateral relationship between government and the FKTU that had existed from the beginning resulted in the leaders of the FKTU being dependent upon government patronage. The prospect of opening up lines of meaningful communication between themselves and their members, and even confronting the government with workers' demands, was entirely alien to them. Nevertheless, between 1948 and 1950, tentative internal moves which had the support of the rank and file membership were made to introduce what, in the context of the time, represented a radical shift in philosophy; a shift that was aimed at distancing the FKTU from direct political control and instituting avenues of dialogue with the grass-roots (Park Young-ki, 1969).

The outbreak of the Korean War in June, 1950 brought chaos to the peninsula in general and the FKTU in particular. Genuine efforts to engineer philosophical reform were brought to an abrupt halt whilst, in their stead, internecine squabbles intensified between those who remained unflinchingly loyal to Rhee Seung-man's Liberal Party

and the minority who favoured continuing to explore the 'new' philosophy. The increasing discord among the leadership broke into open conflict in December, 1951, when one faction of the FKTU leadership supported the employer,² whilst the other faction gave its allegiance to the workers, in a dispute at the Chosun Textile Company in the city of Pusan. The incident ended in defeat for the pro-worker faction in the FKTU leadership and the loss of their jobs. It was also a defeat for the Chosun workers, 600 of whom were dismissed (Whang Duk-young, quoted in Park Young-ki, 1969).

Between 1954 and 1960 the FKTU, with support from the Rhee administration, succeeded in restoring its membership to pre-Korean War levels. The degree of attachment to the ruling party, and the extent to which the FKTU had become more overtly political, was evidenced in December, 1955 when, without consultation with any of its affiliate members, the FKTU actually became part of Rhee's Liberal Party. Leading figures in the FKTU hierarchy were appointed ex-officio members of the party's Central Committee (Kim Yoon-hwan, 1985; Park Young-ki, 1969). The linkage between state and trade union federation was now complete; the FKTU was an arm of government, and any deviation from the party-line in matters connected with industrial relations was out of the question.

Just how unprincipled and opportunist were the leaders of the FKTU was amply demonstrated in April, 1960 when, after a student revolt had ousted the Rhee Seung-man regime, the FKTU called an extraordinary meeting of the executive board and issued a statement of support for the revolutionaries and a declaration that all ties to the Liberal Party had been severed (Park Young-ki, 1969). The FKTU's shift of allegiance to the Democratic Party of Chang Myon was not to be tested to any great

extent because, after just one year, South Korea's very first experiment with parliamentary democracy was terminated abruptly by the military coup led by General Park Chung-hee. The interregnum had, though, been of sufficient duration to allow the internal squabbles and petty jealousies, which had long characterised the FKTU executive, to rise to the surface yet again. In November, 1960, after six months of wrangling, the executive fell into disarray when some delegates walked out because of disagreements over nominations for the leadership (Park Young-ki, 1969). Premier Chang Myon's troubled time in office had also been long enough for the FKTU to demonstrate its collective inexperience and incompetence. With deep-rooted corruption and institutional disorder being the only legacies of the Rhee era, with inflation and unemployment rising rapidly, and with social confusion and uncertainty ever widening, an independent, well-intentioned, and determined trade union organisation could have helped restore social cohesion and national stability. This, however, was beyond the capability of the FKTU.

Among the first measures taken by Park Chung-hee's Supreme Council for National Reconstruction following the 16 May coup was the dismantling of all political and social institutions, including trade unions. As far as the FKTU was concerned, Park's intention was clear from the outset: deconstruct the organisation and then reconstruct it as an 'umbrella' institution fully supportive of the regime's industrial and labour policies, whose primary objective was to help to achieve and maintain a high-output/low-cost, and passive, workforce. Reference is made below to the means by which the Korean Central Intelligence Agency ensured that the reconstructed FKTU was equipped to fulfil Park's intentions. It became a compliant trade union movement

composed of national, industrial-level trade unions, of which the NTWU was but one of seventeen.

8.2 Korean Trade Unionism In The 1970's

In an exposition that translates directly to the circumstances extant in Korea during the 1960's and 1970's, Gospel and Palmer (1993) describe the existence of 'sweetheart' unions, known in Korea as '*oyong*', or 'yellow', unions:

In some countries employee institutions have been established and shaped by government action. Where this has been the case, as in former Communist and in some Third World countries, unions usually follow administrative or industrial structures as laid down by government. Such unions provide governments with channels of communication and consultation with employees and are often used in attempts to mobilise worker support for government policy. Lesser degrees of government influence may occur if, rather than forming or reshaping unions, legislation is passed to license or permit only those unions that conform to certain specifications in terms of their objectives or methods of operation.... Employee institutions may also be established by employers.... They are rarely intended to do more than inform management of staff views before decisions are taken, and the typical staff association does not have the right or the necessary sanctions seriously to challenge managerial decisions. Institutions of this type are resented by independent trade unions, on the grounds that they were formed as part of a managerial strategy to prevent the spread of real trade unionism and thereby to protect managerial prerogatives (Gospel and Palmer, 1993).

According to figures published in the Korea Annual 1973, the total number of employed persons eligible to join a trade union as of 31 August, 1971 was fractionally in excess of two million.³ Of this number, 504,624; that is 25.2% of the total eligible, were actually members of a trade union. By August, 1976, trade union membership had increased to 823,130, although this represented an increase of only 0.1% of the total eligible to join, which had risen to over three and a quarter million in the same period (Korea Annual 1977).

Almost immediately after the leadership of the military coup succeeded in overthrowing the nascent administration of Chang Myon in May, 1961, Park Chung-hee commenced what he referred to as 'resolute surgery' on the body politic of South Korea (Park Chung-hee, 1962). A major component of the operation was the complete restructuring of the trade union organisation. Park set about dissolving the more than one thousand registered local and national trade union organisations in existence in April, 1961 (Park Young-ki, 1969) and replacing this chaotic, fragmented, and largely unregulated scene with what might well appear, on the surface, to have been an ideal form of union structure. In reality, however, the structure Park put in place circumscribed the conventional interpretation of legitimate trade union activity, leaving the trade unions themselves solely dependent upon the continuing favour of the Park regime.

At the apex of the newly constituted industrial relations pyramid was the reshaped FKTU, which was administered by an executive committee made up of nine men, each one hand-picked by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) (FKTU Report, 1979). The nine placemen underwent a two-week special education programme conducted by the KCIA during which it was impressed upon them that:

Participation in the FKTU was the duty of all patriotic labourers. Those who refused were to be considered as communists or collaborators of the left wing. From the earliest stage it was known that the FKTU had two purposes: to organise support for the conservative policies of the government, and to eliminate communists from the industrialised society (Park Young-ki, 1979).

The FKTU was the only legal organisation able to co-ordinate trade union activity throughout the country, and this study will show that the driving imperatives of members of its executive committee were, first and foremost, to adhere slavishly to the dictates of the state and, second, to further their own individual ends. In practical terms,

the FKTU's role was to relay government policy down to the national-level unions, and to filter out as much as possible all adverse representation from those same subordinate institutions.

Seventeen national-level trade unions formed the next stage in the hierarchy, and they ranged from the two largest, the National Automobile Workers Union and the National Textile Workers Union, down to the two smallest, the National Printing Workers Union and the National Tourist Service Workers Union. The means of selecting the leaders of each of these industrial trade unions was similar to that employed in the staffing of the FKTU executive committee; that is, they were all men, and they could all demonstrate affinity with the political and industrial policies of Park Chung-hee. In all, thirty men were nominated by the KCIA to form the seventeen national-level unions and, in company with the nine members of the FKTU executive committee, were afforded a one-week indoctrination course at KCIA headquarters. Not only were these 'representatives of the workers' selected and trained by the agents of Park Chung-hee, they were also paid substantial monthly retainers by the state (American Friendship Charity Committee Field Research Report 1978). In accordance with the Labour Union Law enacted by the Park regime, it was mandatory for all national-level unions to be affiliated to the FKTU; and affiliation meant compliance.

Beneath the national-level unions the structure bifurcated into branch-level and regional-level. Branch-level unions could be formed within companies which employed more than one thousand workers, whereas companies with smaller workforces were eligible to combine at regional level. According to figures promulgated by the FKTU (FKTU Report, 1979), the 417 branch unions registered in 1970 had increased to 533 in

1979, whereas the 3,628 unions affiliated to regional-level unions in 1970 had grown to 4,392 unions by 1979. In accord with the procedures adopted at the higher levels, selection of regional and branch leaders was restricted to conservative males already located either in workplace management or other supervisory positions, despite the prodigious numerical dominance of women over men in the textile and garment, and electronics assembly, industries. This restriction precluded even the consideration of a female as union leader at branch or regional level.

Article 3(5) of the Labour Union statute ordained that only one union would be permitted in each enterprise or industry, while Article 13 required all unions to register with the authorities and gain approval before recognition would be afforded. Tight control from the outset by the national-level leadership over their regional and branch subsidiaries was ensured by the necessity for formal applications for union recognition to be countersigned by a national-level officer. Furthermore, this national-level representative was required to have actively participated in the formation of the new applicant union. External control did not end with approval for registration being granted; detailed procedural instructions continued to flow from national to regional and branch levels, each of which was required to submit daily reports of all activity to national level. The administrative structure in place empowered national-level representatives to intervene and take control of all collective bargaining, election, and dispute procedures. Any recalcitrance at local level was greeted with temporary suspension of recognition whilst a 're-examination' of the on-site leadership was conducted by the KCIA. The outcome was that any independent action at local level was strictly proscribed by national-level rules and procedures.

Ostensibly, and setting aside the fact that no women were permitted to be involved, a situation within which all trade unions were bound together under a single federation banner, and with a two-way line of communication between grassroots union members and the Ministry of Labour Affairs that was uncluttered, rational, and direct, should have greatly facilitated a well-focused and effective pursuance of worker interest. In practice, however, and unquestionably by design, what should have been a channel of representation for workers was nothing more than a 'top-down' chain of command. Union leaders at all levels were appointed by the state, which issued mandatory directives to the FKTU. The FKTU charter gave it complete control over the seventeen national-level industrial unions which, in turn, exercised statutory powers over regional and branch-levels. Systematic legislative rationalisation had transformed a national labour force made up of a huge number of disparate organisations into a unified and regimented extension of government within which the opportunity and facility for fair worker representation was non-existent. A critique of Soviet trade unions is apposite in reference to their counterparts in the South Korea of the 1960's and 1970's:

.... their role was at best an advisory one, and more often was merely to rubber-stamp proposals drawn up unilaterally by the administration (Fairbrother and Clarke, 1994).

A fitting conclusion to this overview of the trade union situation in Korea is provided by four examples of the propensity of the Park Chung-hee regime to intervene in trade union affairs. Of greater significance, however, these examples also illustrate an underlying, and growing, opposition to the machinations of an authoritarian bureaucracy. The first three examples are taken from the field research document compiled by the American Friendship Charity Committee in 1978 referred to above.

Example 1

The periodic election of union leaders was of particular interest to the government and although it was expedient to preserve at least the façade of democratic process, the KCIA was, nevertheless, almost invariably able to achieve its desired ends by behind the scenes chicanery. The National United Workers Union (NUWU) was the fifth largest national-level union in South Korea, catering for a wide variety of worker specification; its members ranging from street cleaners to security guards and apartment janitors. Due to the amorphous nature of the organisation, both in geographical disposition and job specialisation, it was difficult for the KCIA to maintain as close a degree of supervision over its conduct as was possible with the other, more ‘tightly structured’, national-level unions (Research document, Japanese Textile Workers Union, 1979). Thus, in 1967, the majority of NUWU workers voted for Kim Marl-yong to be their new president. Kim had long been an outspoken opponent of government industrial policies as well as a vociferous advocate of FKTU reform. Greatly disconcerted by this turn of events, the FKTU immediately declared the election unconstitutional and suspended all union activities. For the next nineteen months, during which time the NUWU remained in suspension, Kim Marl-yong and his associates fought a battle of attrition with the FKTU. Finally tiring of the impasse, the KCIA ordered in a gang of thugs who physically evicted Kim and his followers from their offices. They were replaced by a group more in sympathy with the wishes of the state.

Example 2

Kim Marl-yong appeared again in 1971 when he offered himself as a candidate for president of the FKTU. In the decade since its reformation by Park Chung-hee, the FKTU had been confronted by increasing opposition from the growing number of

unions affiliated to it; organisations large and small which were becoming restless and dissatisfied with the level of control exercised from above. The KCIA was aware that the leaders of four national-level unions were seriously considering throwing their support behind Kim Marl-yong, and there was a degree of uncertainty with regard to the way some of the remaining leaders might vote if others took the initiative. It was clearly not the time for finesse, and agents of the KCIA simply 'persuaded' the four dissidents not to attend the meeting at which votes would be cast, and the 'problem' was solved. In the absence of those who might have been principled enough to make a stand, those leaders who were permitted to attend fell meekly into line.

Example 3

The next election for president of the FKTU took place in 1976, by which time it was clear that the KCIA had learned from the previous unsettling event and was determined to take no chances. The agency itself nominated four candidates, in a pretence of providing actual choice, and prevented the proposal of any other candidates. One week prior to the election two of the nominees were ordered to withdraw and, on the day of the election itself, one of the remaining candidates, Kim Yi-sam, was instructed to stand down in favour of the eventual winner, Chung Dong-ho, the leader of the National Chemical Workers Union. From beginning to end the positioning of the most senior figure in the South Korean labour movement had been overtly, and successfully, engineered by agents of the state.

Example 4

On 20 January, 1979, delegates from the National Printing Workers Union, representative of some ten thousand print workers, convened to hold a ballot on a

proposal of 'no confidence' in their president. Dissatisfied with the incumbent, Han Te-soo, who had demonstrated almost preternatural acquiescence to the whim of Park Chung-hee, the delegates voted by 22 votes to 12 for his removal. Soo Yon-kwan, the KCIA agent responsible for ensuring the 'smooth running' of the print workers union, and who normally remained in the background, leapt to the podium and berated the assembly for its shameful behaviour. How dare they criticise publicly their exemplary leader; furthermore, did they not understand that a vote for the removal of an incumbent president required a majority in favour of at least two to one? Thus, not only was the assembly guilty of disgraceful behaviour in the casting of aspersions upon Han Te-soo, but the vote of 22 to 12 fell short of the necessary majority by 0.6. The incumbent president should continue in office, and there should be no repeat of such action. (Research document, Japanese Textile Workers Union, 1979).

The first of the four examples quoted is indicative both of a relatively early attempt by predominantly male trade unionists to exercise some degree of democratic choice within their union fora. The arbitrary response to the possibility of an unfavoured candidate gaining office, the determined siege that was laid against him, and the ready willingness to publicly employ violence when all else had failed, is indicative of a regime seeking to ensure its control over trade unions. Although, as is shown in the second case, Kim Marl-yong himself continued bravely with his struggle against reactionary forces within the FKTU, the union leadership remained under the control of the KCIA.

The second example is important for three reasons. First, it is symptomatic of the growing discontent among the national-level unions affiliated to the FKTU; a

measure of dissatisfaction that had become sufficiently pressing that some of them would dare to even consider overtly attacking the federation hierarchy. Second, it underlines the extent and the efficiency of the KCIA intelligence network that permeated every level of Korean society, including the labour movement; and third, it suggests perhaps the beginning of a slight reduction in the degree of confidence felt by the state in its ability to continue to exercise the fullest control over the trade unions. Faced with a weakening of its control over the voting behaviour of the national-level union leaders must have given the regime some cause for concern, and lent added impetus to the formulation of the oppressive Yushin reforms which were to be implemented in the following year.

The third example took place some four years into the period dominated by the Yushin model of economic, social, and industrial management, and clearly illustrates the fulfilment of Park Chung-hee's determination to re-impose his will upon the organisation of the Korean labour force. The old hubris has returned and the way control over the list of candidates was exercised, and the subsequent conduct of the election, confirmed that the KCIA was in control from the outset; a classic case of centralised control negating the democratic process.

The final example quoted offers something of a mixed signal. The final year of the lives of both the Yushin reforms and of Park Chung-hee himself has begun, although no-one could have been aware of that at the time. Repression of labour organisations, and the arrogance of the KCIA, had reached such levels that it was not, as would normally be the case, the chairman of the delegate's assembly who pointed out that the 'no confidence' vote had been lost, but a KCIA agent. It was not necessary for

him to take this action, everyone knew that the motion was lost, albeit by the smallest of margins, and he could have remained quietly in the background satisfied that his master's will had been done. So confident was he of the invincible nature of his position by the beginning of 1979, and so disdainful of the trade unionists over whom he wielded such power, that he could arbitrarily take over control of the proceedings without compunction or reservation. And yet, at a time when the effects of punitive anti-democratic labour policies were at their height, the actions of the print workers' delegates, in initiating a revolt against a known 'government man', is not only an indication of courage and determination, but can also be regarded as a suggestion of a growing confidence among the lower echelons of the union. In the same vein, it may well have been the case that the display of apparent hubris by Soo Yon-kwan, the KCIA agent, had as much to do with desperation and frustration as it did with arrogance and contempt.

While these four examples cast some light on the processes of union control in the country during the 1960's and 1970's, it is also necessary to examine the situation in the textile and garment industry. For this, the examination turns to the National Textile Workers Union, a constituent union of the FKTU. During the 1970's the NTWU became the focus for resistance by women workers from the Peace Market and elsewhere.

8.3 National Textile Workers Union: Structural Reorganisation

Prior to 1961 there had been branch and regional-level unions in the textile and garment industry which were affiliated under the aegis of the Federation of Textile Unions. Immediately following the military coup, all these organisations were dissolved

to make way for the construction of Park's 'ideal type' labour organisation for the textile and garment industry. Having selected and 'educated' the nine labour leaders considered the most suitable to put into effect Park's plan for the FKTU, the KCIA instructed one of them, Kim Kang-soo, to organise branch unions in each of the 23 largest textile companies, and to appoint local leaders for each one. By the beginning of August, 1961 these branch unions had all been formed, and on the 17 August the national body to oversee them was inaugurated as the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU). The first president of the NTWU was none other than Kim Kang-soo himself, and he was supported by an establishment consisting of a part-time vice-president, a full-time secretary, four departmental heads, and ten full-time office staff.

Thus, the inextricable linkage between the head of state, the FKTU, the NTWU, and individual trade union branches in the garment and textile industry, was established. Park Chung-hee, through his nephew-in-law, Kim Jong-pil⁴, the founder of the KCIA, personally appointed the executive committee of the Federation of Korean Trade Unions. In turn, one member of that committee, Kim Kang-soo, appointed the leaders of every trade union branch in the 23 dominant textile companies, and was himself appointed president of the national textile union. When it is appreciated that it was economically imperative for Park Chung-hee to gain competitive advantage by presiding over a low-wage, tightly regimented workforce, it is difficult to conceive of a system more functionally guaranteed to facilitate the achievement of such an objective than the one described. As the logical corollary, it is also difficult to imagine a trade union structure less likely to attend to the interests and ambitions of its ill-fated members.

8.3.1 Park's Misjudgement

Park Chung-hee carried through his reconstruction of the Korean trade union organisation in the early 1960's, and routinely tightened labour legislation throughout the almost two decades of his stewardship. However, it might be considered anomalous that, for all his self-confessed debt to social history, he appeared to pay little, if any, heed to the inevitability of the consequences of unremitting oppression. This was a nation, Park Chung-hee noted, in which:

... organised political corruption and injustice [had] gradually permeated our way of living, [where] even upright and honest persons fell into the degenerate practice of pursuing personal gains once they were allowed to hold public office (Park Chung-hee, 1962).

However, while Park Chung-hee pledged himself to the eradication of such collective malfeasance, it is somewhat paradoxical that the trade union structure which was so much his personal brainchild was characterised, from its beginning, as a hotbed of duplicity, intrigue, avarice, and unscrupulous opportunism. Nowhere was this circumstance more in evidence than in the garment and textile industry.

The gulf, in both lifestyle and communication, between ordinary workers and the leadership of the NTWU could hardly have been wider, and was epitomised by the dilemma in which most women workers in the 1970's found themselves:

Actually, one of the biggest problems for us in the 1970's was that we didn't really know who our enemy was. If you know who you are fighting it is easier to decide what your strategy should be. But in our case we were never quite sure whether it was the government, the factory owners, or the union leaders who were the cause of our troubles. We didn't know who to talk to or who to trust (Group discussion, women workers, January, 1999).

Some of the pre-eminent causes, and practical effects, of a workplace situation wherein trade union members were as suspicious of the partiality and bias of their own union leadership as they were of their employers will now be examined.

In common with their counterparts world-wide, the dominant characteristic of employment for Korean manual workers in the 1970's, and the deciding factor in determining the quality of their lives, was the magnitude and purchasing power of the accessible wage. Working conditions which otherwise might have been regarded as unsustainable may have been bearable if the remuneration at the end of each month was sufficient to guarantee the continuing survival of self and dependants. Furthermore, harsh working conditions and long hours, concomitant with adequate earnings, may have been more tenable if the worker was able to appreciate that, first, the conditions were unavoidable and, hopefully, temporary; second, that by accepting the immediate circumstances the nation as a whole would benefit and progress to better things, and finally, that the 'pain' was being equally distributed throughout the workforce. Beyond these fundamental considerations, however, there is a deeper implication. In a capitalist society the size of income, relative to that of others, is a tangible indicator of the degree to which the recipient is valued by that society. Thus, wage magnitude becomes a direct determinant of self-worth. Based upon the aforementioned considerations, women workers in the Korean textile and garment industry of the 1970's lost out on every count.

A corollary of the detailed exposition in the previous chapter of wages earned in the textile and garment industry and the purchasing power those wages accessed, is the income disparity across the breadth of the Korean National Textile Workers Union

membership. According to research conducted by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) of the USA, the President of the NTWU in the mid-1970's, Kim Young-tae (see below), was paid an annual salary of 5,400,000 *won*; equal to just over \$US11,000 (ACTWU, 1979). In addition, he occupied salaried positions as chairperson of the Pusan Textile Union Council and the FKTU Pusan Regional Council; each of which provided a personal limousine. One of the thousands of *shidas* in the Peace Market, and a member of Kim Young-tae's union, would have considered herself fortunate to have earned 100,000 *won*, \$US206, after a year in which she would have worked a minimum of 340 days⁵ (Interviews, ex-*shidas*, January, 1999). It could not be regarded as unreasonable for such an impoverished and over-worked young girl to expect at least a modicum of sympathy and support from the leader of her union, who was receiving, in addition to numerous 'perks', in excess of fifty-five times the wage she was getting, part of which was made up by her own subscription.

From the point of view of the likely support that workers in the industry might expect to receive from their trade union representatives, the decade did not have a propitious beginning. On 6 December, 1971, Park Chung-hee declared a State of National Emergency, ostensibly as a response to increasing domestic and foreign tension, but also as a prelude to the inauguration of the Fourth Republic (Ha Bong-gyu, 1989).⁶ Included in the emergency provisions were the banning of the exercise of collective bargaining and participation in collective action. Trade union reaction was immediate and unequivocal:

We welcome and fully support the declaration of a State of Emergency with all our hearts. We believe that our top priority is to help the government to establish a strong state and strong economic growth. Trade union interests will come later. Without our nation there will be no trade union (FKTU Annual Report, 1972).

This document was signed by Bai Sang-ho, President of the FKTU, and the presidents of all 17 national-level trade unions, in December, 1971.

On October 17, 1972, a State of Martial Law was proclaimed, the Constitution was suspended, the National Assembly dissolved, freedoms of speech and assembly were revoked, and all political activities banned. These draconian measures were to pave the way for the Yushin reforms; the succession of radical legislation that would both legitimise Park Chung-hee's lifetime presidency and take the repression of workers to new depths. Apparently oblivious to the waves of public outrage and large scale protests taking place throughout their country, the same trade union signatories to the previously mentioned document felt able to append their names and, by implication, those of all of their members to another encomium:

We offer the positive support of 500,000 organised and determined workers for President Park Chung-hee's prompt and decisive declaration of the October Yushin Constitution (FKTU Annual Report, 1973).

Park Chung-hee's five year economic plans, the first of which was implemented in 1962, each heralded increasing hardship for workers in all industries and a diminution of the instruments of worker representation: at the same time, however, integral components of these plans reinforced the status and security of tenure of the leaders of trade unions. In 1974, for example, legislation was introduced which extended from two years to three years the fixed term in office of union leaders, and which also included measures designed to make it more difficult for union members to express a lack of confidence in their leadership. Under the amended rule at least two-thirds of the mandated representatives of the entire membership needed to be present when a vote was taken, and the majority in favour of removal of the leader had to be at

least two to one (Korea Annual 1975). The combined effect of these factors was to encourage national-level leaders to become even more beholden to the state, make them feel more secure in their authoritarianism, and remove from them the last vestiges of any sense of responsibility or duty to their membership. Cumulative legislation also weakened the position of branch-level unions *vis-à-vis* their ability to challenge, or even moderate, decisions made at national-level, thereby markedly reducing the extent to which branch unions could attend in any meaningful way to the interests of their members. They became little more than obedient extensions of the national organisations, and the inevitable consequence was a further widening of the gulf, and an increase in the distrust, between the leadership of both national and branch levels and the grassroots membership.

The exclusively male dominated trade union structure, allied with its repeatedly demonstrated inability and/or disinclination to engage with management on behalf of grass-roots members, provided a signal lesson to the majority of textile and garment workers; that is, women. Learning from each successive abrogation of duty and responsibility on the part of their union leadership, women workers became increasingly aware that the only hope for salvation lay in their own hands. What is of particular interest in this context, and certainly worthy of a separate study, is the fact that although male workers in the industry were in the minority, the number of *shiaggaes* and *obarokus* working in the Peace Market, for example, was both significant and, apart from substantially higher rates of pay, subject to working conditions similar to those endured by women. Yet despite this apparent comparability of circumstances, the preparedness of these men to ally themselves with the initiatives taken by their female co-workers was notable by its absence.

Awareness of gross social injustice is, alone, insufficient to motivate social revolution. As Karl Marx wrote in the New York Tribune on 2 February, 1854, in anticipation of a proletarian uprising throughout Europe: “A signal only is wanted,.....” (Quoted in Wheen, 1999). For the women workers in the Korean textile and garment industry that signal came in the form of Chun Tae-il’s self-immolation on 13 November, 1970. Just two weeks later, on 27 November, 1970, the Chonggye Garment Workers Union was formed - by women (Chonggye Garment Workers Union Annual Report 1971). In February, 1972, the Dong-il Textile Company branch union elected a woman leader; the first woman to take over an already established union (Dong-il Textile Branch Union Report 1985), and in the same year, on 17 August, the female membership of Won-pung Textile Company branch union disassociated themselves from the ‘*oyong*’ philosophy that had previously held sway in the company and formally adopted an ‘independent’ line (Ten Years of a Democratic Trade Union, Won-pung Textile Branch Union, 1988). On 15 April, 1974, the Ban-do Textile Company branch union was formed – by women (Unpublished minutes, Ban-do Inaugural Meeting, 1974) and on 10 May, 1975, women combined to found the YH Wig and Garment Company textile branch union (History of the YH Textile Branch Union, 1984).⁷

In 1972, the year of the introduction of the Yushin Constitution, the registered number of labour disputes stood at 452; by 1979, the year in which Park Chung-hee was assassinated, they had increased to 2,039 (KDI Report, 1980).⁸ The majority of this escalating number of industrial actions had working conditions as the primary cause, and one example is offered as being typical of the remainder. The example also

underscores the fact that, although women workers had established the exemplar for independent and democratic trade union organisation as early as November, 1970, neither the state, the employers, nor the male dominated '*oyong*' trade unions were prepared to countenance with equanimity such female usurpation.

In 1976, some six years after the formation of the Chonggye Union, the Pangnim Textile Company, one of Korea's largest firms, employed approximately six thousand workers, more than 80% of whom were women (Choi Jang-jip, 1989). To add to what was an already extremely harsh working situation, this spinning and weaving company introduced a requirement for all workers to 'donate' up to one hour of extra work, unpaid, every morning: it was the final straw. Fully aware that their branch union was all-male, unsympathetic to their plight, and powerless anyway to intervene on their behalf,⁹ the women workers assembled a petition, signed by ten thousand fellow employees in the industry and members of the general public, and delivered it to the factory management and the Ministry of Labour Affairs. The petition included the following statements:

We have no time off, the night shift is too much and we are exhausted. We are given pills to keep us awake and some of us have taken so many that we are addicted to them. If we fall asleep we are reprimanded and beaten. We are ashamed to say that often we cannot go to the toilet and so use the factory floor. The machines never stop. We work continuously throughout the year and get very little time off. When special public holidays come we want to visit our parents, but we must work by our machines. It is a crime that workers cannot fulfil their filial duty to their parents. Animals have a rest time, why must we work harder than animals? (Quoted in Ogle, 1990)

In the dark shadows of this pride and glory, we women workers, young and weak, have for too long worked too hard and experienced too much pain. Our one reason for working is to help our poor parents. We want to wear a student's uniform, but instead we have left our beautiful homes in the country and have come to the strange surroundings of Seoul to work in a factory. We came to earn money, but it has been more difficult than we thought possible (Asian Labour magazine, 1976).

The two main requests submitted by the women workers were for payment of all outstanding overtime wages and a reduction in working hours. Whilst they were obviously fully aware of the events as they unfolded, the branch-level and national-level union leadership were content merely to stand by and allow matters to take their course.¹⁰ When the company refused to consider the requests, the women declared strike action. All too conscious of the financial implications for their already low paid workers, the company made a token offer after a few days, which the impoverished women were obliged to accept. At least they had made a stand independent of their branch union and had won some concession from management – they thought. Unbeknown to the women activists, however, the KCIA and the police had been maintaining a watching brief and were biding their time before taking action. Shortly after work at the factory resumed, the police arrived and arrested all those women who were thought to have been instrumental in the action: they were interrogated at length and dismissed from the company (Asian Labour magazine, 1976).

The escalating number of disputes in which women played leading roles gave the FKTU and the NTWU much cause for concern as the 1970's progressed, and the lack of judgement and understanding that these organisations had demonstrated all too clearly in the previous decade came to the fore yet again. The predominant line taken by both the state and the '*oyong*' organisation leadership was succinctly enunciated in a publication, alluded to previously in Chapter Three, written by an ex-KCIA agent who had been seconded to the FKTU and tasked with 're-educating' workers:

First, it is part of the female nature to be far more susceptible than men to the supposedly humanitarian appeal of communist and religion-based labour reform organisations. Lacking the capacity for logical thought and moral judgement, women are unable to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and falsehood; they are easy prey for articulate and persuasive demagogues. Second, the congenital sentimentality, especially of young girls, draws them

inexorably toward group situations where they can find comfort in numbers, and preclude the development of individuality and self-respect. At the same time, women are far more vain than men, and are driven to seek higher wages simply by the desire to have more money to spend upon themselves and upon their appearance (Hong Ji-young, 1977).

This short extract from his writings, which formed the basis of a series of seminars held throughout the country, reflects precisely the Confucian view of the inherent character of women, the overt chauvinism that pervaded Korean society and, perhaps most important of all, in the context of this study, the conviction that external, subversive, and male, forces were manipulating intellectually and emotionally inadequate women for their own, anti-establishment, ends.

Propaganda of this ilk might well be considered as crude, simplistic, and transparent in the extreme, yet it was to be easily outstripped by more robust measures adopted by the FKTU in that organisation's attempt to curb the ever more troublesome women. On 10 January, 1978, a directive was issued by the FKTU requiring each national-level union to organise 'action squads' of between 100 and 200 men. The recruits should all be trained in martial arts and were to be specifically tasked to use as much physical violence as necessary to suppress any local union which posed a threat to national-level authority. Additionally, smaller numbers of 'top secret' agents should be recruited and trained to infiltrate the local organisations and identify the leading dissidents. With, presumably, unintended irony, the initiative was entitled the Programme for Improving the Working Environment (Report in "Labour Unity", January, 1979, published by the ACGWU, USA, and interviews with Dong-il workers and UIM members, November 1998 - April 1999).

For its part, the NTWU followed the instructions from the FKTU to the letter, and the NTWU president, Kim Young-tae, issued the following warning:

.... if branch unions cannot handle their members I will mobilise the Action Squads of all the unions to pull the roots out myself. And if any workers continue to have any connections with religious Christians I will order the Action Squads to tear them apart, even if I have to destroy the houses of ministers or priests, or churches or cathedrals, to do it (American Friendship Charity Committee Field Research Report, 1978).

True to his word, Kim Young-tae ordered in a 200 strong squad to intimidate and harass workers in the Dong-il Textile Company (see below) prior to elections for union officers scheduled for 21 February, 1978 and, on the morning of the election, to smash the ballot boxes and smear with human excrement the women workers when they arrived to cast their votes.

As clear expression of the national-level concern that physical violence alone might not succeed in quelling 'troublesome' branches which, it was asserted, were being increasingly influenced by externally inspired women workers, the NTWU took steps to tighten its regulatory grip on the branches. On 23 January, 1978, Kim Young-tae called a special meeting, which he chaired, at which he ruled that all limitations placed upon the National Executive Committee to declare a branch as being a 'problem union' were to be removed forthwith.¹¹ In future, the NTWU would be empowered to void any action taken by branch unions, expel without recourse to appeal the officers of the branch, and assume direct control of all branch business. Present at the meeting was Pang Yong-suk, President of Won-pung Textile branch union, and one of the few male trade unionists who did empathise with the plight of the female members of his union. Also present were the women leaders of Ban-do Textile and YH Wig and Garment branch unions. Having given voice to their disquiet about both the legality and the

morality of this blatant attempt to deprive the branches of their last vestiges of authority and influence, Pang and the two women were promptly ordered to leave the meeting (Interview, Pang Yong-suk, March, 2000).

Because it was deemed that her status did not merit inclusion, Lee Chong-gak, the chairperson of Dong-il Textile branch union, was forbidden to attend Kim Young-tae's meeting; nevertheless, there can be little doubt that she was one of the main targets of the NTWU's initiatives (Interview, former NTWU officer, February, 1999). One month after the meeting, on 25 February, 1978, the NTWU Executive Committee put the new regulations into practice. They charged Lee Chong-gak and the women leaders of Ban-do and YH with instigating labour disputes and distributing leaflets critical of the NTWU and company management; declared their branches as 'problems' and, on 6 March, expelled all three, in company with Pang Yong-suk of the Won-pung branch, from the NTWU (NTWU Report 1978 cited in ACGWU Report 1978, and Dong-il Textile Branch Union, 1985).

The extent to which the NTWU and company management were by now working so closely together was amply illustrated by the fact that, having rid themselves of the female leader of their fractious labour force, the owners of Dong-il Textiles immediately set about dismissing all those whom they suspected of being 'subversive'. One hundred and twenty-six women were sacked on 2 April, with the active collusion of the NTWU. Indeed, on the very next day Kim Young-tae drew up a 'blacklist' of all 126 dismissed women, including home addresses and government registration numbers, and circulated it to all textile companies and union branches in Korea with a warning

that none of the persons so named should be employed again in the industry (Quoted in a letter from the dismissed workers to the ACTWU, dated 3 November, 1978).

The relationship between the NTWU and the owners of Dong-il Textiles was not only very close, it was also shown to be deeply corrupt. As was subsequently revealed, the break-up of the independent union by the national-level leadership was actually funded by the company. Seven million *won*, approximately \$US14,500, was donated by the company to finance the operation and, in an attempt to disguise its source, was channelled through the accounts of a number of NTWU branch unions. Additionally, and as a gesture of appreciation for his efforts on the company's behalf, Kim Young-tae was rewarded with a 'bonus' of six million *won* (ACTWU Report, 1978).

Whilst it is not intended to focus too acutely upon one single personality, it is, nevertheless, considered that Kim Young-tae was, in many regards, the epitome of Korean male trade union leadership, and a personification of the magnitude and nature of the obstacles which women activists had to overcome in their quest for recognition, respect, and fair treatment in the workplace. The matter of his election to the presidency of the NTWU in July, 1976, is a case in point. The body supervising the election was the government's Joint Labour Policy Council, made up of representatives of the Ministry of Labour Affairs and the FKTU. However, behind the scenes, as in all areas connected with labour and trade unionism, lay the shadow of the KCIA (American Friendship Charity Committee Field Research Report, 1978).

In his application statement submitted to the Council, Kim pledged that:

If I am elected as president of the NTWU I will follow all instructions from the Council. I promise that under my leadership all concerned authorities; government officials, police in charge of labour affairs, and the KCIA, will be invited to all assemblies of the NTWU, while union members who are not official delegates will be excluded. I also promise that I will follow the instructions of concerned government authorities in granting or not granting voting and speaking rights to delegates from branch unions which have been designated as problem unions (ACTWU Report, 1978).

Evidently impressed with his application and credentials, the KCIA took the necessary steps to ensure the appropriate result. On the day of the election, four union delegates who were known to oppose Kim's candidature were arbitrarily denied voting rights, while eight of his supporters, none of whom were technically qualified to vote, were given permission so to do. Kim Young-tae was elected by the narrowest of margins and proceeded to fulfil the promises he had made to the government (Interview, former NTWU officer, December, 1998).

In retrospect, and when all circumstances are taken into account, it was inevitable that conflict between national-level and branch-level unions in the textile and garment industry would both begin and escalate. In a workplace dominated numerically by women, but governed in all aspects by men, the first ingredient for potential confrontation is in place. When this circumstance is reinforced by deeply ingrained social and cultural prejudices, heavily weighted in favour of the perpetuation of male superiority, and when those prejudices are underpinned by a state regime that embraces and encourages all the most exploitative endeavours of self-regarding capital, the outcome is almost certain. The final, and most telling, prerequisite for guaranteeing industrial strife is when the structures entrusted and funded by workers to represent their best interests and protect them from abuse renege upon those trusts and, instead, become the main enemy.

8.4 International Reaction

Note has already been made in this chapter that the FKTU valued its association with the international trade union movement, and had been formally recognised since 1949. Such recognition and acceptance became of vital importance after the military coup of 1961, and Park Chung-hee's subsequent concentration on industrial expansion and an export-oriented economy. As manufacturing output increased, so did the imperative to nurture and develop overseas markets. Any indication of infringements of human rights and exploitation of the labour force by the producer nation would have impeded this development and had, therefore, to be avoided. Additionally, and as has been alluded to elsewhere in this study, Park Chung-hee made much of the skilled, compliant, and turbulence-free characteristics of the Korean workforce in his wooing of foreign investors in general, and in his attempts to reassure American and Japanese capital, in particular. In other words, if the truth about working conditions, and the abject failure of the Korean trade union organisation in its duty to Korean workers were to gain credence abroad, the repercussions on trade could be severe. What is more, it must always be borne in mind that, in the final analysis, the legitimacy of the Park Chung-hee regime hinged quintessentially upon economic success. Failure to become economically self-sustaining would mean failure to become militarily independent, the lynch-pin of Park's 'strength through growth' appeal to the Korean nation.

A key dimension of the Park Chung-hee policy on economic growth was to secure the position and place of the textile and garment industry. As has been noted, during the 1970's women workers began to challenge the dominant leadership of the

NTWU and the policies pursued by that leadership. In an attempt to counter these developments, the NTWU leadership made efforts to present the labour situation as one of harmony, at least internally. The problem for the NTWU leadership and the Park Chung-hee regime was that sections of the international press began to report and publicise the situation of women textile and garment workers, as well as their attempts at challenging the dominant union in the industry.

As indicated, Korean women workers were all too aware of the shortcomings of their 'official' trade union representation from the late 1960's onwards. Furthermore, in the absence of any meaningful representation in Korea, they became increasingly conscious that changes would only come about with the support and intervention of trade unionists in the 'outside world'. The women felt sure that if they could just communicate their plight to labour organisations in the more democratic countries, that support and intervention would be forthcoming (Interview, Lee Chong-gak, female president of Dong-il Textile branch union 1976-1978, March, 2000).

One of the ways in which their message could be transmitted was via the medium of the foreign press, and examples abound of factual reports on the Korean industrial situation appearing in foreign national newspapers, labour organisation publications, and television documentaries. Whilst, from 1974¹² until his death in 1979, Park Chung-hee maintained rigid censorial control over the Korean media, his policy with regard to foreign correspondents and church figures, who were mainly American¹³, remained ambivalent. On the one hand, he did not wish the image of industrial South Korea that he had so carefully constructed to be blemished in the eyes of overseas

agencies; whilst, on the other, he was never in a position to impose editorial bias too forcefully upon foreign national journalists and socially-minded missionaries.

An example of coverage of the labour situation in Korea by an international trade union publication, and one that was to have major repercussions which are addressed below, is an article that appeared in 'Labour Affairs', the organ of the Asian Regional Organisation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ARO-ICFTU) in September, 1978. The author goes into graphic detail about the privations visited upon the Dong-il women:

The [election] meeting could not be held because the union room was being ransacked by a gang of thugs, who included male workers at the plant. When the women appeared, they were beaten and kicked and buckets of excrement were thrown at them, rubbed into their clothes and into their faces. Policemen who had been called to the plant by the management stood by and watched without interfering. When the women appealed to them for help, the policemen shouted at them to keep quiet. The workers at the Dong-il plant, and all others who attempt to organise themselves democratically to bargain collectively with their employers and stand up for their rights, face a strong and well-managed alliance of management, government and certain union officials, whose mechanisms for suppressing the workers' demands are brutal and effective.

Agents of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency maintain constant surveillance on all worker-related movements; those that support workers' demands are labelled 'communist', a charge that can bring about imprisonment. Unions are infiltrated and controlled from the inside and help to organise gangs of thugs to disrupt workers' meetings, as at the Dong-il plant. This is the grim background to South Korea's 'economic miracle' founded on income from exports, especially of textiles ... (Asian Labour, 1978).

Publicity of the type illustrated above, and a documentary programme commissioned by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and shown on nationwide television, generated direct response from organisations and individuals worldwide; a reaction that was to prove the cause of much concern on the part of the NTWU. Two hand-written letters, both from Hawaii, were located in the files of the NTWU and

are typical of others received. The first one, dated 7 January, 1979, and signed 'Eileen Cain', reads as follows:

I am very concerned about reports from reliable sources about political and economic injustices in the textile industry, particularly regarding 126 Dong-il textile workers who were fired and blacklisted.

I urge enforcement of the Labour Standard Law, to protect workers' rights to a living wage, safe working conditions, breaks for meals, and other workers' rights. The abuses that the Dong-il workers have been subjected to are shocking and are an affront to decency and justice.

Workers have the inherent right to organise without interference from management or government. The legitimate Dong-il Union must be recognised and allowed to function autonomously.

As long as this shocking situation continues in your country, I resolve not to buy any goods produced in South Korea, and will encourage others to do the same.¹⁴

The second example is from the Honolulu Friends Meeting, a Quaker organisation, and is signed 'Wendy Bobbitt':

I am writing concerning working conditions for women at your local at the Dong-il Textile Plant in Inchon. Reliable documentation has shown the lack of enforcement throughout the textile industry of labour standards concerning wages, hours and working conditions, and the firings, beatings and blacklistings of women at the Dong-il plant who attempted to improve their situation are being widely publicised here.

I cannot support an industry where workers are so exploited and will boycott South Korean textiles and work to convince groups and organisations I am in contact with to boycott Korean textiles as well.

Let me urge you as representatives of workers to monitor and correct working conditions in these plants and to support the people whose rights you are supposed to protect.¹⁵

That these letters, and others in similar vein, were, indeed, a cause for concern on the part of the NTWU is confirmed in a memo (Unpublished NTWU internal document, dated 23 March, 1979), written by Kim Young-tae, President of the NTWU, to the Ministry of Labour Affairs, in which he says:

We have received a number of letters from abroad indicating that a campaign to boycott Korean produce may be initiated. This is a serious matter about which we must take positive action.

It is uncertain whether or not the 'reliable documentation' and the 'reliable sources' referred to in the letters from Hawaii included the article in 'Asian Labour' quoted above. What is certain, however, is that it did catch the attention of Charles Ford, the English General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF), which is the largest and most influential organisation representing textile and clothing industry unions throughout the world, and which has its headquarters in Brussels. In a letter, located in the files of the NTWU, to Leong Fook-kee, the Japanese Assistant Secretary of the Asian Regional Organisation (ARO) of the ITGLWF, dated 5 January, 1979, Charles Ford, says:

I should welcome, as soon as possible, the comments of our Korean affiliate on the enclosed news item that appeared in 'Asian Labour' in its September edition.

Ford's concern about the Korean labour situation was sharpened a month later by a letter from the Chairperson of the German Textile and Clothing Union (GTB), B. Keller, enclosing a detailed exposition of working conditions in South Korea that had been received by that organisation from a church associate (This letter, also located in the files of the NTWU, is dated 4 August, 1978). The gist of the GTB's covering letter was as follows: first, was the ITGLWF aware of what was going on in Korea. Second, was the NTWU, a member union of the ITGLWF, under the control of the Park Chung-hee regime or was it a properly autonomous organisation. Third, should not the ITGLWF treat as a matter of urgency the clarification of the facts?

In the meantime, Leong Fook-kee had contacted the Japanese President of the Asian Regional Organisation of the ITGLWF, and one of the four Vice-Presidents of the ITGLWF itself, in Tokyo, Taranobu Usami, who telephoned Kim Young-tae in Seoul on 23 March and advised him that the ITGLWF would be holding a conference in Milan

on 6–7 April and that Kim should present himself at the conference and explain the circumstances behind the growing number of worrying reports about the textile industry being disseminated throughout the world. It was this telephone call, details of which were located in the files of the NTWU, that precipitated the memo, referred to above, from Kim to the Korean Ministry of Labour Affairs. Having thus been alerted to the gathering international disquiet over the series of occurrences in his bailiwick, and having been summoned to defend the position of the NTWU to the governing council of the ITGLWF, Kim Young-tae's memo canvassed support from the Park government, both financial and diplomatic, for his impending trip to Milan.¹⁶

At the meeting in Italy, the President of the ITGLWF, Karl Buschmann, began by asking Kim about the nature of the tripartite relationship in Korea between the government, the employers, and the trade unions. Kim replied that the government and employers co-operated well together but that the unions had remained largely uncooperative and obstructive. H. Gibson, President of the British Textile and Garment Workers Union and Vice-President of the ITGLWF, said that he had gained the impression from a BBC Television programme, which had included interviews with workers, that the NTWU was actually controlled by the government. The NTWU president responded by claiming that if such a circumstance were true he would not be free to come to Milan to explain the facts. Kim added that he did not consider it appropriate for the ITGLWF to have included the Dong-il incident on its agenda because the ITGLWF's first duty was to its associate union members, of which the NTWU was one, and to support them in any conflict they had with renegade branches.

Kim Young-tae was then asked about the pictures of women workers with human excrement smeared over them. The main thrust of his reply was that first, the photographs were totally misleading; they were black and white pictures and, therefore, did not convey the fact that the Dong-il women workers' uniforms were the same colour as excrement, and that even if excrement had been thrown at them, it would not show.¹⁷ The marks were, in fact, ink stains which the women had deliberately applied themselves. Second, the trouble was caused by the women, who were fighting among themselves and pulling each other's hair. Male co-workers had to intervene only to stop the women fighting. Third, if the Central Committee members cared to visit Korea, Kim would be able to prove to them that the stains were ink, and not human excrement. The NTWU president then detracted somewhat from his denial by admitting that a few male Dong-il workers did touch some of the women with pieces of paper on which there was excrement but they certainly did not put it on their faces or in their mouths. Furthermore, the guilty men had been arrested immediately and sentenced to eight months imprisonment.

When asked to comment about the 'action squads' of thugs and gangsters which had allegedly been organised by the NTWU and mobilised to break up the Dong-il dispute, Kim Young-tae insisted that such an accusation was totally unfounded. These were, in fact, illicit organisations set up by the workers themselves to combat what they saw as unfair working practices. They were used against the employers, not the employees. As for the Dong-il dispute, the men were all Dong-il workers, not specially hired from outside, and the NTWU had had no involvement whatsoever in their behaviour.

Finally, when asked about the 126 dismissed women workers and the reported blacklist that had been drawn up, Kim advised the committee that all of the women had been members of the Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) who, despite repeated invitations from the Dong-il company and the NTWU to return to work, had refused so to do. It was impossible for the company to continue with so many workers absent, so it was forced to hire replacements. As for the alleged blacklist, this was part of a church-inspired conspiracy to get rid of the NTWU president. The document had been forged by the women themselves and circulated in Kim Young-tae's name. Clear proof of the forgery, claimed Kim, lay in the fact that the women had used an incorrect NTWU official seal on the document.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Kim's representation, the ITGLWF committee felt that it would be appropriate to send a fact-finding mission, made up of Buschmann, Ford, Usami, and Gibson, to Seoul in May, the following month. In an effort to moderate the possibly dire consequences of such an 'uncontrolled' visit, Kim Young-tae issued a formal invitation to the ITGLWF, on behalf of the NTWU. The full intent of this gesture was revealed in an NTWU internal memo (Unpublished NTWU internal document) drafted immediately after his return to Seoul from Milan, in which Kim states quite bluntly that one of the most important of his achievements in Italy was:

.... that they accepted our invitation to visit Korea instead of dispatching an independent delegation to investigate the Dong-il incident. This means we can organise their schedule ourselves and explain to them about the incident.

In a written confirmation, dated 26 April, 1979, (Unpublished NTWU internal document) of the verbal invitation made in Milan, Kim concludes by saying to Charles Ford:

We want to take this opportunity to increase your understanding [of] Korea and to more strengthen our fraternal relationship. May we cordially request you that all the expenses such as hotel accommodation and domestic travels, etc., to be [incurred] during your stay in Korea will be met by our union. We will also provide you with interpreter service.¹⁸

One example of international newspaper coverage, and one that helped to initiate further action on the part of the international trade union community, was an article by Philippe Pons published in *Le Monde* on 14 August, 1979. The occurrence that sparked off the article was the demonstration by some two hundred women workers from the YH Wig and Garment Company who staged a sit-in at the headquarters of the New Democratic Party, the main party of opposition to Park Chung Hee's Democratic Republican Party, on 11 August, 1979. In the piece, Pons reports that:

A 21 year old women driven to commit suicide, fifty others injured, political leaders of the opposition molested: that is the result of the police action against a peaceful demonstration of women textile workers several hundred policemen broke into the premises to turn out the women demonstrators with unusual brutality and with the help of tear gas Three journalists covering the event had to be taken into hospital and Mr Kim Young-sam¹⁹ who, a month ago, had held discussions with Mr Carter [US President], was arrested.

With no small measure of perspicacity, Pons goes on to cast doubt upon the sincerity of the Korean president:

The brutality to which the Korean authorities resorted against women who can hardly be qualified as being 'communist agents' – an accusation which, in South Korea, makes any repression legitimate – makes you question the significance of the gesture of clemency of Mr Park who, last month, arranged for 86 prisoners (mainly students) to be released. Since this occurred after President Carter's visit to Seoul, who then mentioned the question of human rights in a country that, although claiming to be a democracy, cares little about it, it could have led one to believe that the authorities were going towards a relative relaxing of the regime. Not only is it not so, but in addition, the apparent lack of control of the police towards women who were not in the least 'subversive elements' reveals the edginess of the authorities.

Le Monde then looks beneath the surface of the state's over-reaction to what was an entirely non-militant demonstration by women workers:

It [the demonstration] annoyed the authorities because it brought to light, and particularly to the American press, realities that the authorities, worried about their image abroad, were reluctant to spread around.

Philippe Pons then broadens the focus of his report by saying:

In recent years, some women workers have made an attempt to rebel against their conditions. For example, the workers in the Dong-il textile factory, located in Inchon, created in 1972 the first trade union grouping women.²⁰ The management rapidly considered this as being too active and, therefore, 'subversive'. In February, 1978, during the election of women trade union leaders, management thugs broke into the room and threw over the women workers buckets of excrement. Six months later, during another meeting, 40 women workers were simply arrested (Philippe Pons, *Le Monde*, 14 August, 1979).

The article in *Le Monde* stimulated an immediate response from Charles Ford. Less than one month after its publication he wrote direct to Kim Young-tae, rather than to the ITGLWF Asian representative as he had done previously:

The attached article was published in '*Le Monde*', one of the major French newspapers, on 14th August 1979. It concerns an event involving textile workers that occurred in Seoul on 11th August 1979 and refers to the Dong-il incident. I would appreciate it if you could send me more information on the above incident and let me have your comments on this article (Unpublished letter).

Whilst details of Kim Young-tae's reply to this request are unavailable, what has been clearly shown in this section is that, of the Korean textile industry workforce, only the women workers were courageous enough to take the necessary steps to communicate their difficulties to the wider global community. Whether or not male workers appreciated the importance of such a strategy is open to question. What is not open to question, however, is that, as a collective, these male workers proved themselves either too complacent or too intimidated to contribute to the initiative.

Meanwhile, the male dominated institutional nexus of state, employer, and trade union understood all too well the likely outcome of publicising the truth abroad, and combined their efforts to construct a façade based upon misrepresentation, mendacity, and denial. It was exclusively as a result of the actions of oppressed, impoverished, and exploited women and young girls that these powerful institutions were coerced into such a defensive and, ultimately, untenable posture.

8.5 Summary

The two salient truths which emerge from the discussion contained in this chapter are, firstly, that throughout the entire history of the ‘organised’ Korean trade union movement, the interests of grass-roots members and ordinary working people have never figured high, if at all, on the agendas of those who are mandated to attend to those interests, the trade union leadership. Indeed, despite frequent protestations to the contrary, union leaders adhered consistently to the imperative to actively and systematically exclude worker participation, rather than to encourage its inclusion. If measures are put in place to prevent problems from being voiced, it is but a short step to be able to pretend that problems do not exist. Secondly, and as a logical corollary of the first point, if change for the better in the conditions under which Korean people laboured was ever to be realised, that change had to be initiated and sustained from below.

Beyond, and contributory to, those conclusions, other important factors are revealed in the exposition of Korean trade unionism during the first eighty years of the twentieth century. Among the most crucial is the apparent blindness evidenced on the part of both the leaders of the state regime and their minions who headed the FKTU and

the national-level unions to the historical certainty that intense repression of the mass of the populace cannot be sustained indefinitely. No matter upon what pretext it is based, or how it is explained or rationalised, alienation on such a scale, created by the distancing of workers from effective representation, will inevitably result in spontaneous and/or premeditated rebellion. In the words of Abraham Lincoln a century before: “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time” (Speech, 8 September, 1858).

Of course, this commonality of view shared by state and labour institutions was merely a reflection of the extraordinary extent to which those ‘official’ labour institutions were politically, rather than socially and industrially, oriented. In retrospect, it is clear that, from the outset, there was very little probability of Korean trade unions fulfilling the role as independent representative organisations. Political polarisation, whether based upon nationalism, independence from colonial rule, unification with the north, or communism, was the dominant factor in the ideology, philosophy, and structure of the succession of labour organisations which appeared on, and frequently disappeared from, the Korean industrial scene. This is not to suggest that the trade union movement in any country can, or should, remain aloof from political considerations, or that it is necessarily detrimental to have political affiliations. The problem in Korea was that the FKTU, having been, to all intents and purposes, formed by the government for a specifically political purpose; that is, to counter the leftist aspirations of Chung Pyong, never subsequently succeeded in divorcing itself from state influence in favour of the interests of its members. Not only that, but having never won for itself even the vestiges of independence and autonomy, it was left to cling to the coat-tails of whichever political party happened to be in the ascendancy at any particular time.

The repercussions from this circumstance were as serious as they were inevitable. Devoid of any freedom from state direction, and certain of state intervention in the event of any signs that some of the FKTU hierarchy might wish to adopt a progressive trade union philosophy, the leadership of the FKTU was never able to develop the qualities and industrial relations skills to achieve such an objective. Instead, they became increasingly characterised by internal squabbling and plotting which, in turn, resulted in further diminution of respect from below. Not only did this ineffectiveness result in the loss of a real opportunity to stabilise the social chaos of the Chang Myon era, an opportunity that could have changed the face of modern Korean history, but it rendered the FKTU easy prey to the assault on all social institutions that was to be launched by Park Chung-hee. It is open to conjecture whether Park's 'reconstruction' and 'radical surgery' would have been quite so easy, and followed quite the same pattern, had the FKTU established itself as a powerful and independent organisation truly representative of, and fully supported by, the Korean labour force.

It has been shown that the exercise of minority male domination, both in the trade union context and on the factory floor, was most evident in the textile and garment industry. Furthermore, and due at least in part to reasons of tradition and culture, male workers were reluctant to ally themselves with female activists in their efforts to stimulate improvements to working conditions. Had the male workers been more prepared to combine with women, it is difficult not to construe that the added weight they would have brought to the movement would have increased markedly its impetus and its effect. Therefore, in the absence of indigenous male involvement, and from their enforced position of cultural and industrial isolation, Korean women workers took the

initiative to recruit the aid of foreign journalists and other arms of the international media. The power of such a strategy, and the genuine and serious concern this substantial widening of the women's sphere of influence generated both at national trade union level and, especially, at the highest levels in the Park Chung-hee administration, became apparent almost immediately. Despite the implementation of the harshest and most violent of repressive methods, the 'wrong' message had got out and was garnering a world-wide, and highly unfavourable, reaction. Not only was the economy thus threatened and, along with it, the very bedrock of Park Chung-hee's domestic and international legitimacy, but the spectrum of Korean political, economic, and industrial administration was condemned abroad as corrupt and inhumane. That inexorable pressure from below was gathering momentum and the institutions which had been designed and constructed with the express purpose of total social control were seen to be fundamentally flawed.

So as to explore the dynamics behind the resistance by women textile and garment workers, attention is now turned to the roles of significant leaders in the worker and union struggle in the Peace Market and elsewhere. Whilst individual leaders operate in a complex socio-political context, involving many others, they are nonetheless indicative of the social forces effecting those workers as well as the choices they faced.

NOTES

¹ Park Young-ki was International Secretary at the FKTU in the early 1970's and is currently Professor of Industrial Relations at Sokang University, Seoul.

² Owned by President Rhee Seung-man's adopted son (see Chapter 5.3).

³ Korean Labour Law prohibited all government employees, including teachers, from trade union participation.

⁴ The Machiavellian *eminence grise* of Korean politics. Kim Jong-pil has played pivotal roles in every administration, of no matter what political hue, since 1961. He was Prime Minister in the Kim Dae-jung administration until April, 2000.

⁵ This figure does not take into account the customary 'fallow' periods discussed in Chapter Seven.

⁶ Social unrest at home, Sino-US rapprochement, Sino-Japanese normalisation, withdrawal from Korea of 20,000 US troops, and uncertainty about North/South dialogue, all contributed to Park's unease.

⁷ These companies were among the largest in Korea, and details of the formation of the 'democratic' unions within them are included in Chapters Nine and Ten.

⁸ Few commentators agree even upon an approximate number of disputes and 'wildcat' strikes which took place during the 1970's; thus, for the purposes of this study, and in the sure knowledge that they will have been manipulated downwards*, the statistics issued by the Ministry of Labour Affairs are considered sufficient to make the point. (*Throughout his presidency, and frequently for the benefit of prospective foreign investors and trading partners, Park Chung-hee made it a priority to place great emphasis on the disciplined nature, and stability, of the Korean workforce)

⁹ It is worthy of note that the leader of the Pagnim Branch Union in 1976, Lee Chun-sun, became Vice-President of the FKTU in 1979.

¹⁰ In the textile and garment industry there was, effectively, little, if any, distinction between branch-level and national-level leadership, inasmuch as it was quite usual for the president of one of the largest branches to be also president of the NTWU. In the Pagnim case, the president of the Pagnim branch union in 1976 was Lee Chun-sun, who had already served two terms as NTWU president, 1966-70; 1973-1974 (FKTU Centre Research Institute 1998).

¹¹ Previous to this ruling, a prescribed procedure had to be followed before a branch could be declared a 'problem' and, thus, before a branch leader could be required by law to turn over control of his organisation to the NTWU.

¹² Donga Ilbo is cited as being the last Korean newspaper to lose its independence, in 1974. (Kang Sug-won, Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, 1977).

¹³ Irish, English, French, German and, of course, Korean, church figures were also actively involved in ensuring that details of the working and living conditions of Korean women were disseminated world-wide.

¹⁴ Eileen Cain was traced in Hawaii and confirms that that the letter-writing protest was initiated by the Hawaii Council of Churches (HCC). A copy of the HCC circular, dated January, 1979, urging the protest and inviting cash donations to assist the Dong-il women, was provided by the archivist of the Honolulu Friends Meeting, Professor K A W Crook. The circular makes it clear that the plight of women textile and garment workers in Korea was the focus of attention of a number of organisations internationally including the Japan Council of Churches, the Quaker International Program of East Asia, and the Friends of the Orient Committee. The circular ends with

an extract from a letter written by Ahn Soon-ae, one of the Dong-il women activists, and presumably sent to other sympathetic organisations:

To Friends Overseas We are not disheartened ... and ... will continue our struggle until our demands are met, in the firm belief that justice and truth will soon prevail. We request your continued concern and support for our cause (Quoted in Enclosure to HCC letter, January, 1979).

¹⁵ The whereabouts of Wendy Bobbitt could not be ascertained.

¹⁶ Perhaps surprisingly, the NTWU retained a transcript of the ITGLWF governing body's 'interview' with Kim Young-tae at the Milan meeting on 6 May, 1979; a précis of this unpublished NTWU internal document indicates all too clearly the NTWU's obduracy.

¹⁷ That the uniforms were, in fact, light blue is confirmed both by the author's personal knowledge and the evidence of colour photographs taken at the time and in the author's possession.

¹⁸ Contact was established with Charles Ford on 10 March, 2000, and arrangements were made to interview him with regard to the ITGLWF trip to Seoul. Unfortunately, he died on the following day. However, his companion generously offered to place all of his records at the author's disposal. A search of these records was conducted in April, 2000 but, although they appear comprehensive and cover all aspects of Charles Ford's life-long involvement in the international trade union community, no trace could be found of any comment concerning the outcome of the investigative trip to Seoul by the ITGLWF Presidium in May-June, 1979. What was found of interest, however, was the ITGLWF Report On Third World Congress, an assembly that took place in Vienna in October, 1980, in which a comment made by ITGLWF Vice-President Taranobu Usami (see main text) was recorded:

..... the KNTWU [Korean National Textile Workers Union] has somewhat suffered from a tarnished image due to the spread of misinformation and misunderstanding. As the President of TWARO [Textile Workers Asian Regional Organisation] I sympathise with our Korean friends and I would like to emphasise that our common affiliate, a founding member of TWARO, is seeking to carry out its *free and democratic labour movement* based on the same ideals as advanced by TWARO and ITGLWF though under difficult circumstances (author's italics).

At approximately the same time Kim Young-tae was elected to the ITGLWF Executive Committee (ITGLWF Annual Report 1980). In the light of the above, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that Charles Ford and the other members of the ITGLWF Presidium were completely 'taken in' by Kim Young-tae during their visit to Seoul. However, the impression of the late General Secretary of the ITGLWF, gained by the author from the lengthy research into his copious files and other records, and from conversations with his partner, was that of a socially dedicated, industrious, and scrupulously honest man. It was, therefore, essential to ensure that his name was not unfairly besmirched. Contact was established with the Brussels headquarters office of the current (2000) General Secretary of the ITGLWF, Neil Kearney, on 8 May, 2000, and specific questions concerning the outcome of the 1979 investigative visit were facsimiled, including ITGLWF correspondence reference numbers to facilitate the search of headquarters records. Numerous telephone calls, e-mails, and repeat facsimiles elicited an e-mail message from the General Secretary on 21 June, 2000 in which he promised a full response to the specific questions: "on return from Congress the week of 3 July 2000".

Further communications, over a period of months, failed to elicit any meaningful reply, even though, in the final facsimile, the General Secretary was assured that any statement that the ITGLWF was prepared to issue on the matter would be reproduced *verbatim* in this study. There clearly remains an element of doubt concerning this issue, but after balanced consideration of the details recorded above, the author is forced to the conclusion that Kim Young-tae's deviousness and 'managerial expertise' proved more than a match for the ITGLWF Presidium, and he not only succeeded in 'pulling the wool over their eyes' with regard to the true nature of conditions in the South Korean textile and garment industry, but he so persuaded them of his personal qualities and devotion to the ethic of trade unionism that they elected him to serve as a full member of their ruling body.

¹⁹ Leader of the New Democratic Party and President of South Korea 1992-1998.

²⁰ A slightly ambiguous statement: Dong-il was the first union to elect a woman leader, but the first 'grouping' of women, in the trade union context, was the Chonggye Union, in 1970.

CHAPTER NINE

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

“There is properly no history; only biography”.

(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

9.0 Introduction

Although the power of a collective social dynamic is undeniable, the extraordinary and disproportionate effect that one individual can have on the generation and sustenance of such collective action is equally apparent. Whether it be by the exercise of charismatic leadership or the investment of symbolic regard, it is clear that the role played by a single person can be crucial to the outcome of combined endeavour. It is submitted that the biography of one such individual can encapsulate the atmosphere of the period and, in so doing, draw together the diverse strands of influence which were prevalent at the time, and measure them one against the other.

Biographies do not constitute mere snapshots of social circumstance, as do some other methods of research but, instead, can provide objective accounts of lives which, in turn, illuminate the protracted historical processes which are fundamental to the fullest understanding of social change (Evans, 1993). The societal changes, for both good and ill, which took place in South Korea during the 1970's involved the actions of individuals, albeit acting within a broader social context. To fully understand how and why those changes came about, it is necessary to examine closely the individuals who set them in motion.

9.1 Apathy And Opposition Among Women

One of the weaknesses of many studies which have the issue of gender as an intrinsic component is the tendency to group together all women, and all men, into discrete, and internally unified, entities. However, it is important to disentangle the complex relationships which underpin these social entities. The important point to note is that individuals' lives are shaped by 'structural pressures of norms, values, and opportunities' (Humphreys, 1993). To illustrate, it may appear in the account to date that Korean men, of all social and economic strata, are rabid male chauvinists intent only upon maintaining and reinforcing the *status quo*. However, impressions thus gained would be erroneous, and their perpetuation would serve only to weaken the overall thrust of this study. As far as Korean men are concerned, the mere mention of Chun tae-il is sufficient to discount the myth of male unanimity, and this study includes other examples of men who were palpably sympathetic to the women's cause.

In relation to women workers in South Korea, commentators such as Kim Seung-kyung (1997) quote many cases to confirm that women workers were not unanimous in the determination to contest the circumstances in which they were forced to labour. It is submitted that, in perhaps the majority of instances, the failure of Korean women workers in the textile industry to present an entirely united front against *jaedanshas*, factory owners, national-level union leadership, and the state, is perfectly comprehensible. In all workforces there will be those whose ambitions are personal and modest: the imperative to earn money, no matter how little, overrides all other considerations, and any perceived threat to the continuing earning facility generates fear and antipathy. The simple philosophy subscribed to by such individuals is that the expression of opposition to the work system, in any form whatsoever, can result only in

further pain and increased deprivation for themselves, and that the only rational option is to avoid confrontation at all cost, put up with the working conditions, however harsh, and be grateful for small mercies (Interviews, women workers and ex-workers, December, 1998). The propensity to adhere to such a philosophy is considered likely to be more prevalent in a low-wage, exploitative, and oppressive society than it is in a democratic environment in which individuals at all levels are encouraged, and empowered, to have their voices heard: fear of retribution being a most effective deterrent. Furthermore, the phenomenon is magnified in the case of girls and young women, especially those from rural communities, for whom a rigid social order in which the female is subordinate to the male in all regards is deeply ingrained.

The birth and development in the 1970's of the democratic labour movement in Korea bears out the above submissions. It would be remiss of any serious work on the subject to fail to draw attention to, and explore the complexity of, the forces underpinning acquiescence and the circumstances for resistance.

9.2 Two Women Leaders

The unique nature of Chun Tae-il's statistical research in the Peace Market, and the catalytic significance of his self-sacrifice in November, 1970, are referred to throughout this study. His contribution to the evolution of the movement is invaluable and unquestioned, and is commented upon at length in a vast array of literature: Chun Tae-il's place in the pantheon of heroes of working people is assured. On the other hand, the detailed story of his mother, Yi So-sun, has gone largely unrecorded, despite the fact that there is a persuasive argument in support of the premise that hers was, and continues to be, a role of even greater consequence than that of her eldest son. One of

the reasons for this contention being that by the time the most oppressive period for Korean workers in the Park Chung-hee era began, inaugurated by the declaration of the Yushin Constitution in October, 1972; when the merest hint of an affinity for democratic trade unionism carried the very greatest risk, Chun Tae-il had already been dead for almost exactly two years. Yi So-sun struggled and suffered throughout that difficult time, and the story of her experience tells us much about Park Chung-hee's fear of organised labour; governmental interference in the judiciary; institutional corruption; the guilt of the Peace Market Corporation, and the bravery of a doubly-bereaved woman.

Because the manifestation of fear, naivety, self-regard, or apathy on the factory floor, referred to at the beginning of this chapter, has been well documented elsewhere (for example, Sheila Rowbotham, 1973), it is considered that the drawing of attention to it, rather than the provision of a detailed analysis, is sufficient for the purposes of this study. What has not been subject to as close a scrutiny, however, is the far more rare circumstance wherein a dedicated, courageous, popular, and successful woman trade union leader betrays her membership and her birthright and collaborates with the employers. Just as the 'positive' contribution of one such as Yi So-sun brought benefits beyond measure to the cause of Korean working women, so the 'negative' contribution of a renegade union leader incurred penalties equally difficult to quantify. Thus, the activities of Han Soon-nim merit closer examination and comment.

9.3 Yi So-sun

(Note: Details of Yi So-sun's life have been communicated to the author, her daughter, over a period of many years. The author was present, and intimately involved, in most of the post-1954 events described below. Numerous subject-specific interviews have been conducted with Yi So-sun during the writing of this study).

The first woman leader to be considered is Yi So-sun. Born in 1929 into a poor farming family in a village near to the city of Taegu, in the south-east of the Korean peninsula, Yi So-sun was destined for a life of the very greatest hardship. Whilst she was still a baby, her father was arrested by the Japanese occupation police for his activities in the popular movement for Korean independence. He was taken into the hills close to the village and executed. When Yi-So-sun was three years old,¹ her mother remarried. The young girl and her elder brother were not welcomed by their step-father or his parents and, as soon as they were able, were put to work on the farm. Her formal education was rudimentary in the extreme, and was foreshortened in 1942 when, at the age of thirteen, she was taken by the Japanese as part of their '*daishintai*', or slave labour, programme and forced to work in a factory where uniforms were manufactured. Having escaped from the factory after two years, the fifteen-year-old Yi So-sun walked for ten days to the home of her aunt, where she was hidden in a hole for six months until Korea was liberated from Japan in 1945. In 1948, at age nineteen, she married Chun Sang-soo, a skilled and hard-working tailor from Taegu who was five years her senior; their first son, Chun Tae-il, was born in the same year. There were to be three more offspring born during the following twelve years; another son and two daughters.

Caught up in the havoc of the Korean War and its aftermath, and having been bankrupted when his entire stock of fabric was ruined during a protracted rainy season, Chun Sang-soo and his family joined the desperate migration to Seoul in 1954 in search of work. For most of the first year in the capital they lived under the Yomchunkyo Bridge and only survived because Yi So-sun was able to prepare and sell food in the streets. It was frequently necessary to resort to begging. Chun Sang-soo worked wherever he could, and by 1955 had saved enough to build a wooden shack for his

family and rent a small shop in the Namdaemoon Market. Relatively speaking, the business prospered, but the improved circumstances were not to last. After winning a contract to manufacture students' uniforms, and having completed the order in the early Spring of 1960, Chun Sang-soo was overtaken by events. The self-same students for whom he had manufactured uniforms participated in the uprising on 19 April, 1960, which unseated the administration of incumbent president Rhee Seung-man. In the confusion following the revolt, the broker who had handled the uniform contract vanished with all of the money, leaving Yi So-sun's husband confronted by creditors and forced to sell everything, including the family shack, in order to pay them off.

This was the last straw for Yi So-sun, whose health had never been particularly robust. The cumulative effect of the misery of her early life, the perpetual struggle to keep her children clothed and fed in circumstances of absolute poverty, the repeated failures of her husband's business endeavours, and the blow of being reduced, yet again, to the situation where the family did not have even a roof over their heads, caused her to suffer a severe mental and physical breakdown. The family was now in real crisis; one that was exacerbated by Chun Sang-soo's own feelings of failure, feelings which led him into depression, and an increasing reliance upon alcohol. Sympathetic friends provided the distressed family with a hut on top of a hill in the Itaewon district, but there was to be no respite. Park Chung-hee's earliest slum clearance programme, discussed in Chapter Five, embraced Itaewon, and the hut, along with hundreds of similar constructions, was bulldozed to the ground.

Somehow Yi So-sun struggled on. Her husband was contributing less and less to the family income, so she had little choice. With the help of her eldest son, Chun Tae-

il, she gathered plastic sheeting and pieces of wood and erected a tent; at least then her children had some shelter from the elements. She fed them on rotting vegetables fished out of the river, and earned a few paltry *won* by collecting bottles, washing them, and selling them in the nearby market. Such a circumstance clearly could not be sustained, and the family split up in 1964. Barely in his teens, Chun Tae-il took responsibility for his brother and youngest sister. Yi So-sun went to work in the kitchen in a restaurant in Seoul, until the owner dismissed her because she kept collapsing through ill-health. The remaining daughter stayed with her father.

After a prolonged series of bitter experiences, the family was reunited, but in 1968 Chun Sang-soo died. He was forty-four years old. Beset by ill-fortune, and in circumstances which even the strongest of characters would have found daunting, he had done the best he could, and is remembered with affection and understanding by his widow and three remaining children. Perhaps the greatest contribution Chun Sang-soo made, particularly in the context of this study, is that it was he who made his son, Chun Tae-il, aware for the first time of the existence of the Korean Labour Standard Law, and encouraged him to struggle to improve working conditions and become involved in the labour movement. On his deathbed, Chun Sang-soo asked his wife's forgiveness for his failures, and told her that she should try not to discourage their son in his efforts for working people because he might just be able to bring about some change for the better.

Her husband's last request was, however, one that was extremely difficult with which to comply. Indeed, prior to the dreadful events of 13 November, 1970, when, in desperation at government indifference and employer chicanery, her son poured petrol over himself and burned to death, Yi So-sun could muster little enthusiasm for matters

related to the labour movement. On the contrary, she frequently castigated Chun Tae-il for his own involvement, and for its detrimental effects on the already meagre family income. Her husband was dead, and the problems of feeding and providing for a family of five were severe enough without having the major breadwinner frequently thrown out of work due to his 'subversive' activities.

All this was to change when Yi So-sun stood by her son's bedside in the hospital where he died. With his last words to her, Chun Tae-il begged his mother to promise that she would take up the cause for which he had sacrificed himself. Despite all of her long-held misgivings and outright antipathy, Yi So-sun pledged that she would devote the remainder of her life to the endeavours which her son had initiated. It was a vow that would bring great hardship, persecution, imprisonment, and humiliation to her and to her family, but it was also one to which she has remained, to this day, unquestioningly faithful.

Chun Tae-il's body rested in the hospital mortuary for almost a week but, although Yi So-sun remained in attendance throughout, she was afforded no privacy to grieve undisturbed. The police were also present, and in an attempt to forestall any anti-government demonstrations that would likely take place at a public funeral of Chun Tae-il, they attempted to coerce Yi So-sun into signing the release for the body so that they could remove it and dispose of it quietly. Despite their 'persuasiveness', the police found Yi So-sun implacable in her refusal to accede to their demands. This ploy to avoid unfavourable publicity having failed, the next visitors to the hospital were representatives of the Peace Market Corporation, accompanied by a senior civil servant from the Ministry of Labour Affairs. However, unlike the police, they did not come

with threats; instead, they arrived armed with a more tangible inducement, a grey plastic holdall containing approximately three million *won* (approximately \$US6,000). Profuse expressions of condolence were followed by a plea to Yi So-sun to accept the gift and, in addition, to allow the Corporation to make and fund the funeral arrangements. Never before had the Peace Market employers shown more than a passing interest in the welfare of their employees (see Chapter Seven), let alone consider making a spontaneous offer of 'compensation' to the family of an incapacitated worker. This gesture was, therefore, ample evidence both of the very real fear of popular reaction felt by the Park regime, evidenced by the overt role played in the incident by the Ministry of Labour Affairs, and the awareness of culpability on the part of the Peace Market Corporation.

Pressure on Yi So-sun to accept the money came not only come from the state and the employers, for also present at the hospital were Chun Tae-il's paternal uncles and aunts. In accordance with Korean tradition, responsibility for financial support for their sister-in-law and her remaining children fell upon them, and the prospect of such a burden was one that they were unprepared to countenance. In the face of all attempts to persuade her to the contrary, Yi So-sun remained resolute. At one stage in the often heated exchanges, and as a measure of her grief and frustration, she opened the bag and threw handfuls of notes in the air. The delegation persisted, however, and having regained her composure, Yi So-sun explained to them the only resolution she would agree to was one whereby her promise to her son might be fulfilled. The money could not be accepted but, instead, the Peace Market employers could demonstrate their goodwill to all their workers, not solely to the family of Chun Tae-il. Remarkably, in the

circumstances, Yi So-sun recalled a list of eight conditions which reflected her son's wishes, and she spelled them out to the members of the delegation:-

- i. Approval for the establishment of a trade union in the Peace Market;
- ii. Reduce the working day from 16 hours to 8 hours;
- iii. Every Sunday off (i.e. four days per month off instead of two);
- iv. Regular wage reviews;
- v. Health checks for all workers at least once per year;
- vi. The 'upper rooms', or 'attics', to be dismantled;
- vii. The *shidas*' wages to be doubled, and paid directly by the employer;²
- viii. Adequate ventilation installed throughout the Peace Market buildings
(Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1971).

Set aback by the scope of the provisions, the representatives of the employers and the Ministry of Labour Affairs declared that they would need time to consider. In the meantime, Yi So-sun assured them that she would withhold her permission for the burial of Chun Tae-il until a positive response was forthcoming. Four days later, the employers agreed that:-

- i. The day of Chun Tae-il's funeral would be declared a general holiday for all Peace Market workers;
- ii. The FKTU would assist in the formation of a Peace Market union and provision would be made for a union office to be located in the Peace Market buildings;
- iii. The remaining conditions made by Yi So-sun would be implemented under the guidance of the Ministry of Labour Affairs (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1971).

Although this agreement was in the form of a document signed by the Minister of Labour Affairs, Yi Seung-taek, himself, subsequent events were to show that this was a ploy.³ Nevertheless, and irrespective of setbacks to come, barely a week after the funeral of her son, which took place on 18 November, 1970, Yi So-sun officiated at the

ceremony marking the formation of the Chonggye Garment Worker's Union (for a detailed account see Chapter Ten), the first democratic union in her country. A bulwark of Bonarpartist authoritarianism in post-war South Korea had been breached, in a very minor way, for the first time. What is more, the breakthrough had not been achieved by popular revolt or by mass action of any kind, but by the obduracy and the courage of a single, and highly principled, woman, albeit within a context that her son and others had initiated.

From that time on, trade union activity dominated Yi So-sun's life. She was instrumental in setting up educational programmes for workers, which encompassed vocational and basic academic courses, as well as instruction in trade unionism and labour law. This latter inclusion was to be the cause of much conflict with both the Ministry and the Peace Market employers (for more detail see Chapter Ten). In 1971, Chonggye organised a canteen at the Peace Market and provided free lunches daily to approximately five hundred workers. For the next four years Yi So-sun would begin work in the canteen at 7am every morning and work through until 3pm, at which time she would make her way to the union office where she would remain, usually until late into the night.

With the main breadwinner now lost to the family, and having rebuffed the offer of three million *won* from the Peace Market employers, Yi So-sun had only the minuscule wage of her eldest daughter, the author, who worked as a *shida* in the Peace Market, to keep her family fed, housed, and clothed. To supplement this inadequate income, Yi So-sun began to sell second-hand clothes in the streets of Chonggye-chun in the early hours of each morning. It is interesting to note, as well as being a pertinent

commentary of the times, that the only sources of second-hand clothes in the Korea of the 1970's were the hospitals and mortuaries; the precarious financial circumstances of the mass of the people dictated that they wore their clothes until they literally disintegrated and became of no use for anything other than cleaning rags. Most of the clothes sold by Yi So-sun could have been readily identified as having belonged to a corpse by the distinctive manner in which they had been removed from the bodies by mortuary staff by the simple expedient of cutting down the front of every garment with scissors. But those who spent their lives manufacturing clothing could not afford to buy new items for themselves, and any serviceable garment, no matter its source or mutilation, was better than none at all. Never was the axiom: 'beggars cannot be choosers' more apt.

The early experience of the Chonggye Union was fraught with difficulties and setbacks, in the light of which it might be expected that Yi So-sun would have had scant inclination, or opportunity, to direct her efforts elsewhere (for fuller details see Chapter Ten). But her vision was broader even than that of Chun Tae-il, and her oft-repeated maxim that: "Every worker is my son now", rapidly earned her the soubriquet 'Mother' in the common parlance of workers throughout the length and breadth of Korea.⁴ It was also to further alienate her from Park Chung-hee and his administration. Irrespective of industry or location, if workers were in conflict with their employers, Yi So-sun, 'their mother', was likely to be there offering support and leadership.

As awareness of her tireless efforts in the cause of working people spread, so did her acquaintance with political figures who were, or who were to become, of great influence. For example, the then leader of the main opposition party, and current (2000)

President of South Korea, Kim Dae-jung, paid the first of many visits to Yi So-sun's makeshift home in January, 1971. The two became, and remain, close friends, and Kim Dae-jung was especially grateful to Yi So-sun for the support she gave to his wife and family after he was kidnapped in Tokyo by KCIA agents on 8 August, 1973.⁵ In 1987, and in recognition of her singular contribution, Kim Dae-jung offered a seat in the National Assembly to Yi So-sun.⁶ Her response, even to a request from an old and valued friend, was typical: if she thought that the workers considered that she would be more effective on their behalf as a member of the National Assembly, rather than continuing her activities independent of any political party, she would accept. She did not believe this to be the view of ordinary working people, however, and so she refused.

As the effects of the Yushin reforms bit deeper into the daily lives of the Korean labour force, Yi So-sun's personality and persistence, and the perceived threat of her activities, assumed an increasingly high profile in the eyes of state administrators. The Peace Market canteen was closed down, on the grounds that it was a front for the dissemination of pro-Communist propaganda and, in February 1975, Yi So-sun led a sit-in strike of some 250 workers protesting against government interference in the education programmes organised by the Chonggye Union. The 'classroom' in the Peace Market was under constant police surveillance, and it was only the stubbornness of the union members that ensured that the facility reopened after its frequent enforced closures. It was clear that the only way these classes could continue would be for the union to have premises of its own, rather than relying upon the 'generosity' of the Peace Market Corporation. But premises cost money, and the resolution of the dilemma encapsulated perfectly Yi So-sun's mind-set and sense of priorities. Despite their inadequate, and hard-earned, remuneration, the Peace Market employees had all

contributed to a fund to pay for a decent headstone and surround for Chun Tae-il's grave. Yi So-sun proposed that the money that had been raised should not be spent on her son but should, instead, be used to rent a building that could be used by all workers to improve their education. The proposal was accepted (see Chapter Ten).

The KCIA was not an organisation noted for its subtlety and, in May, 1977, it demonstrated a particular heavy-handedness in its ongoing attempts to 'manage' Yi So-sun. Whilst working in the Chonggye Union office one afternoon, she received a telephone call from a man who said that he wished to discuss urgently a matter of importance with her. She agreed to meet him in a nearby coffee shop where, upon her arrival, she was immediately taken into custody by two agents and escorted to an hotel. For the next two days Yi So-sun was subjected to an almost non-stop barrage of pressure to accept an offer which, it was thought, she could not refuse. Throughout the period of her enforced detention, and denied permission to tell her whereabouts to either her family or her work colleagues, the two agents took it in turn to try to persuade Yi So-sun to accept the deeds of a luxurious apartment south of the River Han that had been purchased for her, and papers conferring ownership to her of a bank account containing 30 million *won* (\$US60,000). The line of approach followed by the KCIA was that the President himself appreciated the value of her work for the labour movement over the previous six years and had decided to make a special concession in recognition of her dedication. Now that, in their words, the union was firmly established and that all of her son's wishes were in the process of being fulfilled, it was time for Yi So-sun to look after herself and her family. She should move into the new apartment and use the money to open a business. They suggested that a restaurant might be appropriate, and that she could then support the Chonggye Union even more effectively

by making financial donations rather than by merely organising and agitating. Despite the concerted and protracted efforts of the KCIA representatives, and the alluring nature of the bribe, Yi So-sun once again stood firm and, at the end of the two days, the agents gave up and released her.

One of the most dedicated teachers in the workers' educational programme was a young law student at Seoul National University named Chang Ki-pyo. In February, 1977, he was arrested and charged with inciting anti-state protest, both by his involvement in the workers' education programme and by the publication of a pamphlet entitled 'The People's Voice'. At his trial, on 15 July, 1977,⁷ the prosecution based its case upon the most simplistic accusation and, in its way, most difficult to contest. The charge was formulated as follows: the activities of the accused had encouraged public demonstrations, and public demonstrations created social unrest. Social unrest in the South was the objective of North Korea, and the accused had, therefore, aided the North in the achievement of its objective. Chang Ki-pyo had shown himself to be anti-state and pro-Communist, and was in violation of Presidential Emergency Measure No. 9 For Safeguarding National Security and Public Order⁸ (Interview, Chang Ki-pyo, December, 1998)

Yi So-sun had attended the trial to show support for a man who had risked much in the cause of worker education (Chang Ki-pyo was found guilty and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment). When she heard the precise nature of the charge she could not restrain herself from standing up in court and voicing an equally simplistic, and equally difficult to contest, rebuttal. If the South Korean state is suggesting that it is pro-Communist to create an educated workforce and improved working conditions, then the

South Korean state is actively encouraging a pro-Communist stance by equating such conditions with Communism. This interjection was duly reported in national newspapers, and it could be argued that it constituted a watershed in the already uneasy relationship between Yi So-sun and the machinery of political authority. From that moment onwards, the Park regime adopted a decidedly harder line in their response to the 'problem' of Yi So-sun.

Earlier in the year, and apparently as a result of some inexplicable bureaucratic oversight, Yi So-sun had been granted a passport and visa to enable her to travel to the United States. She had been invited by the Asian-American Free Trade Union Organisation to spend the month of August, 1977 touring the US and speaking at a series of labour conferences. Although it can only be speculation, it is, nevertheless, reasonable to draw the conclusion that the Park regime had become increasingly anxious at the prospect of Yi So-sun being given free rein to address labour organisations in America. She had demonstrated the effectiveness of her oratory on countless occasions, and the likelihood of her speeches gaining wide international publicity, beyond the reach of the Blue House censor machine, would be more worrying still. Thus, the effect of the aforementioned policy shift did not take long to manifest itself. On 22 July, 1977, barely one week after Yi So-sun had made her representation at the trial of the young law student, her house was surrounded by a cordon of armed policemen, and she was arrested. Yi So-sun had been bathing when the police burst in and, such was the urgency of their mission, she was not even permitted the courtesy of being allowed time to dress before being taken to Sungdong prison.⁹ Whilst this small woman was being bundled into a heavily guarded police vehicle in her underclothes, the officer in charge was standing outside the house addressing the neighbourhood through

a battery-powered loud hailer. The gist of his disclosures to the gathering crowd was that Yi So-sun's brother lived in Japan (which was true) and that he was a known Communist spy working for North Korea (which was untrue). Although her neighbours understood that Yi So-sun was travelling to America, the KCIA had detected that she was, in fact, going to Japan, a known hotbed of Communist activism,¹⁰ to collude with her brother in an anti-Park Chung-hee plot. Yi So-sun's proven sympathy for the North Korean cause placed her in direct contravention of the aforementioned National Security Law, and she would be charged as such.

On the same day that Yi So-sun was arrested, the labour education building rented by the Chonggye Union was raided by the police and closed down. The combination of these simultaneous events was the trigger for widely supported mass protest, which included among its protagonists Peace Market and many other workers; church leaders of the stature of Cardinal Kim Soo-hwan, and former President of South Korea Yun Po-sun who, together, formed the 'Countermeasure Committee for the Peace Market Incident' (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989). On the day following the arrest, and confirming what must have been the Park regime's worst fears, hundreds of workers gathered outside the prison in a tangible demonstration of support and anger. State concern about the frailty of the prosecution case was now compounded by the certainty of public reaction, but the administration was committed, and the case proceeded quickly, with the government hoping for a low-key trial.

The Central Court list for 24 August, 1977 was cleared of all other business and the court authorities restricted admission to 300 ticket-holders only. More than one thousand people, from all sectors of society, turned up for the opening of the trial, and

those hundreds who were refused tickets remained outside the courtroom protesting vociferously. Faced with a prosecution case that was, to all intents and purposes, baseless, increasing public disquiet, and a heightened awareness of international sympathy for Yi So-sun, the court still handed down a sentence of three years imprisonment. The strength of the groundswell of opposition was reflected in the sentence being reduced on first appeal to two years imprisonment, and to one year on the second appeal. In all, Yi So-sun served 14 months in solitary confinement in Su-won women's prison, without access to physical exercise, before being released on 28 September, 1978.

During her time in prison, opposition to the Yushin reforms gained strength and spread throughout the country, fuelled, not least, by public awareness of her predicament. The Japanese trade union federation Chunpyoung made a film about her entitled simply: "Mother", which was banned from being shown in South Korea, and her plight was given world-wide publicity.¹¹ After her release, and utterly undeterred, Yi So-sun immediately resumed her endeavours to further the cause of democratic trade unionism.¹² She would be arrested again and again; serve more time in prison, spend more than six months in hiding from the police, be held for twenty days in KCIA headquarters, and endure physical beatings. Her resolve never weakened, and there can be no doubt that her contribution played a significant part in the mobilisation of public and international opinion, and the eventual downfall of the Park regime. It was to be only one year after she walked out of Su-won prison, after her first period of incarceration, before President Park Chung-hee was assassinated, and his infamous Yushin reforms brought to an abrupt end.

9.4 Summary

This is not the ‘story’ of Yi So-sun, and there are two reasons why it is not. First, because it is grossly incomplete and barely scratches the surface of the entirety of her experience in connection with the fight for democratic trade unionism over the last three decades. Second, and of far more importance, because it describes events and circumstances which pertain to countless other disenfranchised South Korean women who suffered the same impositions and who fought against them with equal tenacity and courage. The value of the experiences of Yi So-sun, in the context of this study, is that she acted as a ‘dual’ focus: a focus for the aspirations of all workers in their struggle against brutal authoritarianism (and the investiture of the soubriquet ‘Mother’ is graphic evidence of this), and a focus for the discrimination, the dishonesty, the inhumanity and, ultimately, the illegitimacy, of the state/capital/labour nexus in South Korea. Thus, any discussion about Yi So-sun inevitably draws together all the strands of the diverse social forces which dominated the scene throughout the Park Chung-hee era, and beyond. Furthermore, the focal nature of her experience and her achievement, added to the understanding that they were shared, and even surpassed, by so many other women, reinforces the fundamental proposition that forms the basis of this study.

9.5 Han Soon-nim

A different history is encapsulated in the life of Han Soon-nim, the second women leader. Little is known of the personal background of Han Soon-nim other than that she was born in 1951 and left school at age sixteen to work in a textile and garment factory. In 1971, after four years with her first employer, she changed jobs and was taken on at the Ban-do Sangsa Bu-pyung factory in Incheon, the major seaport and industrial Free Trade Zone, some twenty kilometres west of Seoul. As an intelligent and

articulate 20-year-old, Han Soon-nim worked in quality control where, within a short time, she was promoted to team leader of a quality control section.

The Ban-do factory which Han Soon-nim joined was part of what was to become the Lucky Goldstar group, and manufactured wigs, leather garments, and shoes. Opened in May, 1969, the factory started with approximately thirty employees, but grew very rapidly indeed. After eighteen months the establishment had increased to eight hundred, and a two-shift system, each one of twelve hours duration, was introduced. By the time Han Soon-nim arrived there were in excess of two thousand workers on the Ban-do payroll, and by the end of 1972, there were more than three thousand (Unpublished internal document, Ban-do Textile Branch Union, 1975). The ratio of female to male workers at that specific time cannot be ascertained with any degree of accuracy, but is estimated to have been in excess of nine to one (Interviews, ex-Ban-do women workers, January, 1999 and March, 2000).

From the time it first opened, working conditions in the Ban-do factory were among the worst in the industry. Wages were low, even in comparison with other women textile workers in the locality, and overtime was compulsory when demanded by management. Dormitory standards were especially spartan: as in the Peace Market, no space was specifically designed for living accommodation and in the early part of the 1970's some 800 women and young girls were expected to live in the factory warehouse, in makeshift 'rooms', and sleep on concrete floors without the benefit of mattresses. At the beginning of 1974 there was a fire in this 'dormitory' area in which thirty female workers were burned, and others injured in the panic to get out of a building for which no fire escape provision had been made. No compensation, of any

kind, for all those incapacitated was forthcoming from the Ban-do company (Interviews, ex-Ban-do women workers, January, 1999).

The glue used in the manufacture of wigs and leather garments was both pungent and toxic, so much so that it was necessary for the workers to tie dampened cloths over their mouths and noses throughout the working day. Although the women were all too aware that the fumes were injurious to health, and despite the fact that the size of the Ban-do workforce made the company, ostensibly, subject to the Labour Standard Law, no routine medical checks were conducted, and workers were afforded no legal protection (Interview, Chang Hyun-ja, former Vice-President of Ban-do Textile Branch Union, and President in 1977, December, 1998). The Ban-do Sangsa Bu-pyung factory had gained a reputation for encouraging a particularly violent management style, where the customary admonishment of female workers took the form of a slap of the face or a kick in the posterior (Unpublished internal memo, Ban-do Textile Branch Union, June, 1974, and interviews, ex-Ban-do workers, December, 1998).

Bearing in mind the conditions so described, the reason why Han Soon-nim decided to take a position at Ban-do in the first place is open to conjecture. One factor is certain, however, it was not to be long before she was taking the initiative in organising her fellow-workers in protest against these working conditions. This opposition came to a head on 28 February, 1974, when the factory management found that a body of women workers, led by Han Soon-nim, had barricaded themselves in on the second floor of the factory declaring that this was not only a withdrawal of labour, but also a hunger strike, and that it would continue until six demands were met:

- i. A 60% increase in wages and abolition of enforced overtime;
- ii. Cessation of face slapping and other physical abuse;

- iii. Violent members of supervisory staff to be punished;
 - iv. Dormitory conditions to be improved;
 - v. Workers to be provided with written job descriptions and company work policies;
 - vi. The company President to sign an oath that the above provisions would be carried out
- (Unpublished Ban-do Textile Branch Union internal minutes, 1974).

This first example of organised and determined industrial action clearly shook the company hierarchy. The strike had lasted for barely one day before the management made an offer which, on the face of it, constituted major concessions. However, in ways reminiscent of the Chonggye 'agreement' described previously, the devil was to be both in the detail, and in the implementation.

The Ban-do company agreed that:-

- i. Workers would be permitted to organise a trade union, and the company would enter into negotiation with the union over the question of wage increases;
 - ii. Staff members who had been violent would be required to apologise;
 - iii. Work on improving dormitories would begin as soon as weather permitted;
 - iv. Company employment and work policies would be printed and promulgated;
 - v. Overtime work would be on a voluntary basis;
 - vi. Those who had participated in the industrial action would not be punished;
 - vii. There must, henceforth, be a 'no strike' agreement.
- (Unpublished Ban-do Textile Branch Union internal minutes, May, 1975).

The women wasted no time in making the necessary arrangements for the setting up of Ban-do's first trade union, and the election of union officers was scheduled for 15 April, 1974. Sixteen candidates put themselves forward for the position of

President; eleven men and five women, of whom Han Soon-nim was one. The disparity in numbers between male and female aspirants had as much to do with the overwhelming popularity of Han Soon-nim among the women workers, and the consequential disinclination of other women to oppose her, as it did to the traditional Korean male assumption that if there was to be a position of leadership, it was assumed that it should be filled by a man. In the event, Han Soon-nim won the ballot by a large majority, receiving more than ten times the number of votes cast than her closest male rival, Park Chan-sik.

In her inauguration speech, and after thanking her supporters, Han Soon-nim emphasised the importance of mutuality, and identified the areas to which she would immediately turn her attention:

I now take responsibility for improving and developing our working conditions through the union. But the union is not mine, it is yours, and I ask for your continued support and participation in all union activities. I see as my priorities an immediate increase in wages; the introduction of a new scheme for retirement payment; an annual bonus scheme for skilled workers; improvements to our dormitories, and the introduction of an education programme for the 90% of women workers who have received no more than primary school education (Unpublished minutes, Formation of Union Conference, 15 April, 1974).

Shortly after her election as president of the new Ban-do Textile Branch Union, Han Soon-nim was interviewed by a journalist from the Joong-Ang Ilbo national daily newspaper. In an article published on 2 May, 1974, under the headline: “23 Year-old Single Woman Han Soon-nim Elected President of Ban-do Textile Branch Union”, she is quoted as saying:

There were so many problems to overcome before we were able to form a union, but I learned much from the Urban Industrial Mission¹³ and from other unions (see Chapter Ten) in the Inchon Free Trade Zone; they were all very supportive of our attempts to organise at the Ban-do company (Joong-Ang Ilbo, 1974).

The article came to the attention of Park Chan-sik, Han Soon-nim's beaten rival in the presidential election, who set about raising a petition opposing Han Soon-nim's legitimacy as president. He sent the petition, with a copy of the article attached, to the Ministry of Labour Affairs claiming that it proved that the union had not been organised with the best interests of the workers at heart, but was manipulated by external forces (the UIM) for its own, political, purposes. Because the union leadership was externally influenced it was, therefore, illegitimate and had no right to the union dues of 'real' workers. Park's petition went on to claim that as Han Soon-nim did not truly represent Ban-do employees, the union should be disbanded and reformed along 'proper' lines (Unpublished Ban-do Textile Branch Union document, 8 May, 1974).

There was no question that the company fully endorsed Park Chan-sik's efforts to destabilise Han Soon-nim's leadership, but circumspection was necessary if public outcry, and considerable disquiet among the workforce, were to be avoided (Interview, former Vice-President Ban-do Textile Branch Union, March, 2000). Management and union met in negotiation for the first time on 30 May, 1974, with four representatives from each side being present. As a direct result of Han Soon-nim's confident, informed, and forceful presentation, normal business proceeded very satisfactorily, from the union perspective, and agreement was gained from management that:-

- i. Consideration would be given to the matter of compensation for the women injured in the fire at the beginning of the year [see above];
- ii. A written constitution, including an agreement on collective bargaining, would be produced by the company;
- iii. Work would begin shortly on improvements to the dormitories and associated facilities;
- iv. Union and management would meet on a regular basis on the 15th of every month;

- v. The company affirmed its intention to work closely with the union to ensure high productivity and the achievement of export targets. (Unpublished minutes, 30 May, 1974).

With regard to Item v. above, however, the management representatives raised the issue of the Joong-Ang Ilbo article, and made it clear that its contents compromised the possibility of the fullest co-operation between the company and the union. The company said that Han Soon-nim should not have discussed working conditions at Ban-do with the journalist, and her admitted influence by the UIM and other union organisations placed union recognition within Ban-do in jeopardy. As far as the company was concerned, Han Soon-nim must sever all contact with outside agencies forthwith. Han Soon-nim countered by insisting that unless Park Chan-sik withdrew his petition unreservedly, and taking into account the sweeping majority support she enjoyed, the establishment of a meaningful and effective industrial relations dialogue would not be possible. Management then played its trump card by first of all agreeing with Han Soon-nim's assessment of the situation and then declaring that the only resolution acceptable to the company was for the appointment of Park Chan-sik to the position of full-time Vice-President of the union in addition to the female, Chang Hyun-ja, who had already been elected to the post (a part-time post). So keen was the company to have Park infiltrated into the highest decision-making level of the union that it agreed to meet the cost of funding a full-time Vice-President¹⁴ (Unpublished negotiation minutes, 30 May, 1974).

Despite Park Chan-sik's continued efforts to neutralise her effectiveness, Han Soon-nim achieved an extraordinary amount of improvement to working conditions at the Ban-do factory during the first year or so of her time in office. With untiring persistence and astute negotiation her successes included a 30% wage increase; the

abandonment of compulsory overtime; improvements to the dormitories; compensation paid to the women injured in the factory fire; observance of the Labour Standard Law with regard to the introduction of regular health checks, and an agreement on retirement pay, dependent upon the length of time served, backdated for three years (Unpublished Ban-do union records, 1975). For a woman to be elected leader of the first union in the Ban-do organisation was remarkable enough, but the exemplary manner in which she furthered the interests of her members in the face of great opposition won for Han Soon-nim the popularity and respect not only of those members, but of the far wider working community in Korea (Interviews, ex-Ban-do workers, December, 1998).

The 1974 oil shock and the accompanying devaluation of the Korean *won* exacerbated an already high inflation rate and precipitated a substantial fall in real wages (Calverley, 1982). The inevitable corollary of such a circumstance was an increase in wage demands being submitted to employers by workers' representatives in early 1975. In March of that year, Han Soon-nim led the Ban-do Textile branch union delegation in its demand for a further 30% rise.¹⁵ The company refused to countenance such an increase, and offered less than 20%. Despite protracted negotiation, no compromise could be found, and the union was forced to withdraw and reconsider. The executive committee decided that the company offer was unacceptable and, in the light of the Ban-do management's obduracy, agreed to recommend to their members a ban on all overtime, and a strict 'work to rule' policy.

This posed a real problem for the company: a major export order was nearing completion and shipping contracts had been signed for early April. The banning of voluntary overtime would place achievement of the deadline at severe risk. After four

days, management representatives returned to the bargaining table with an offer of a 23% increase which, albeit with great reluctance, the union accepted (Interview, ex-members Ban-do branch union executive committee, April, 2000)

The owners of Ban-do were deeply angered by this overt demonstration of organised opposition, and were determined to re-establish and reinforce what they regarded as their rightful, authoritarian, position *vis a vis* internal industrial relations. This marked cooling of the atmosphere between management and union coincided with the first indications that Han Soon-nim was shifting her allegiance.

9.5.1 From Rebel To Collaborator

Towards the middle of 1975, Han Soon-nim's colleagues began to detect a change both in her demeanour and in the performance of her presidential duties. It became increasingly noticeable that she was distancing herself from the other union officers on the executive committee, and spending more and more time with management, national-level union figures, and representatives of Park Chung-hee's labour administration. Han Soon-nim's social life also began to provide cause for concern among activists and rank and file members. Whereas she had previously always associated with her fellow-workers, and had used 'out-of-working-hours' opportunities to foster two-way communication between union officers and union membership, reports began to filter back of her being regularly sighted at restaurants and nightclubs in the company of KCIA agents and leading figures in the NTWU¹⁶ (Interviews, ex-Ban-do Textile Branch Union executive committee members and ex-Ban-do workers, December, 1998).

Han Soon-nim had been so popular and so productive throughout her time at Ban-do, and especially so during her first year in office, that it was tempting for her colleagues to cling initially to the possibility that her association with individuals who might, in normal circumstances, be regarded as inappropriate, was actually being effected for the benefit of her constituents. After all, if their president could establish such good relations with those who had the power of change within their hands, her effectiveness on their behalf could be greatly enhanced, and the outcomes of these 'extra-curricular' associations could be highly beneficial to the workforce. The first intimation that such hopes were groundless came at the 1975 annual meeting of the Ban-do Textile Branch Union, held in May. From her very earliest days at the company, Han Soon-nim had focused her efforts exclusively on the interests of workers, and during her first year as president of the union she had not deviated from the pursuit of those interests. In her opening speech to the assembled union members, however, she revealed a political facet much in line with her erstwhile adversaries at the NTWU,¹⁷ the FKTU, and the anti-communist ideologues in the Park Chung-hee administration:

Fellow delegates, comrades. Our nation faces serious insecurity because of the problems posed by the idiotic leader of North Korea, Kim Il-sung, who remains ever vigilant for the opportunity to overthrow South Korea by military force. We are living in a divided land; we know what happened in Vietnam, and we must prepare ourselves to fight against communism. Only a strong anti-communist spirit will bring us victory. We must be prepared to sacrifice ourselves for the achievement of high productivity because economic success is the only way to protect our nation from communist invasion. Fellow comrades, this year's wage increase may not be satisfactory, but we must bear in mind that the textile industry has been less successful than last year, so the export situation is not as bright. With this in mind, I hope you all understand that we must accept the wage that has been offered by the company (Unpublished record of Ban-do union annual meeting, 1975).

It is not difficult to imagine the concern and confusion with which these words were greeted; words which could so easily have been uttered by Park Chung-hee

himself, and certainly not expressive of sentiments expected from one in Han Soon-nim's position.

One month after the May speech, and as the result of the recently introduced routine health checks, thirty women workers were diagnosed as having contracted tuberculosis of the lungs.¹⁸ Fifteen of these women were in the advanced stages of the illness, and were clearly in need of urgent medical treatment. What they actually received was instant dismissal, without compensation. Han Soon-nim accepted the decision on behalf of the union with apparent equanimity and, without even consulting her fellow executive committee members, placed the union seal on the company's dismissal notice. This was but the first example of an increasing number of instances when Han Soon-nim failed to consult with her fellow union officers and, instead, assumed dictatorial authority, much in line with the leadership style of those erstwhile adversaries (Interviews, ex-Ban-do branch union executive committee members, December, 1998).

The most blatant act of disloyalty occurred a few weeks after the tuberculosis incident and concerned repercussions from the four day work-to-rule action of the previous March. It is clear that the Ban-do owners and management continued to nurse a growing antipathy towards those who had been instrumental in organising the protest. The early April shipping date had been missed and Ban-do had been required to pay compensation both to the customer and to the shipping company. Reprisals were clearly high on the management agenda (Interview, ex-Ban-do branch union executive committee members, December, 1998).

The monthly meeting in July between management and union delegates lasted all day, and the item that caused such protracted debate was the management demand to know the names of the prime movers in the organisation of the March work to rule. When Chang Hyun-ja, the female Vice-President, was accused directly of playing the leading role she responded by saying that the executive committee, including the President, Han Soon-nim, had been unanimous in their support of the action. When pressed, Han Soon-nim agreed that such was the case. The company representatives appeared reluctant to accept this assertion and the meeting finally closed after it had been mutually agreed that resolution of the problem would be left in the hands of Han Soon-nim and the factory director (Interview, Chang Hyun-ja, March, 2000).

Prior to her meeting with the factory director, Han Soon-nim avoided all contact with the other members of the executive committee. She was equally reclusive after the meeting. The first intimation of what had been agreed was provided by a young woman who, in her role as union secretary, saw a document, signed by both the factory director and Han Soon-nim, which decreed that the female Vice-President and six executive committee members should be dismissed. Fortunately, the union secretary had the initiative to show the document immediately to Chang Hyun-ja, who set out to locate Han Soon-nim and confront her with the evidence of her duplicity.¹⁹ The result of the heated exchange that ensued between the two women was that Han Soon-nim was left with no alternative other than to go back to management and advise them that if the dismissals were to go ahead there would be very serious reaction from the workforce (Interview, Chang Hyun-ja, March, 2000).

Although the company had been forced to withdraw the notice of dismissal of the seven union executive committee members, the die had clearly been cast with regard to the tripartite relationship between Ban-do, the branch union, and the branch union president. Conflicts between Han Soon-nim and her fellow executive committee members escalated, while the rank and file membership rapidly lost all respect and trust in their president. Two factors mitigated against her removal from office, however, and union members had to stand by and watch the organisation for which they had fought so hard lose virtually all effectiveness. The first factor was a purely constitutional one: no mechanism existed whereby Han Soon-nim could be legitimately removed from the presidency before the end of her three year term, and she certainly showed no inclination to consider resignation. The second factor in her favour was that she had by now, to all intents and purposes, converted an autonomous, democratic, and progressive branch union into little more than a toothless and obedient ‘*oyong*’ organisation. This turn of events suited the Ban-do company very well, and the level of support afforded by management to the union president reflected that appreciation. A number of approaches to Han Soon-nim were made during 1976 by union members who tried to persuade her to sever her ties with management and national-level figures, and to regain the deserved reputation as a dedicated fighter for the cause of democratic labour that she had previously enjoyed. All entreaties fell upon deaf, and angry, ears (Interviews, ex-Ban-do workers and ex-executive committee members, December, 1998).

Han Soon-nim’s first, and final, term of office ended at the annual branch union conference, held on 27 March, 1977, when she was voted out by a majority comparable with that by which she had been elected three years previously. Chang Hyun-ja, the embattled female Vice-President who had been betrayed by Han Soon-

nim, and so nearly dismissed in July, 1975, replaced her, and became the second president of Ban-do Textile branch union²⁰ (Unpublished conference minutes, Ban-do Union, 1977).

As tacit confirmation that Han Soon-nim's loyalty had, indeed, undergone a diametric shift, she was appointed as a full-time officer of the NTWU in August, 1977, with specific responsibility for the women's section of that government-controlled organisation. As an 'education' lecturer, her objective was to 'realign' and 'refocus' women workers' attitudes towards organised labour. What this meant in reality was the systematic undermining of female worker initiative throughout the country (Interview, ex-NTWU officer, February, 1999).

A more obvious case of 'the poacher turned gamekeeper' would be difficult to find, and Han Soon-nim's first target of significance after being taken on by the NTWU was the Dong-il Textile Company branch union and, more specifically, its female president, Lee Chong-gak (see Chapter Eight). The NTWU rented rooms at the Moonwha Hotel, close to the Dong-il factory in Inchon, for Han Soon-nim to use as her operational base. Dong-il women workers were invited to attend lectures at the hotel in the belief that they would concern safety at work, quality control, or some other work-related topic.²¹ When assembled, they were addressed by Han Soon-nim along the following lines:

The Dong-il branch union is linked with the UIM, and the UIM is a communist organisation, you cannot believe anything they say, but you can trust your management, so you must listen to them. I know what I am talking about because I, myself, was once a member of a UIM team until I discovered that they are led by communists. Be careful, do not meet with any UIM members or even speak to them (Unpublished record compiled by Dong-il branch union, 1978).

On occasions when members of the audience voiced objections either to having been brought to the hotel under false pretences or, more frequently, to the content of the lectures themselves, the objectors were manhandled by NTWU thugs disguised as hotel employees, and subjected to various indignities designed to preclude further dissent. As knowledge of what was going on at the Moonwha Hotel became more widely disseminated, Han Soon-nim simply moved her locus of operation to another hotel, and worker 'education' proceeded as normal (Interviews, ex-Dong-il workers, November, 1998 – April, 1999, and ex-NTWU officer, February, 1999). It is worthy of note that, according to the ex-NTWU officer interviewed, the individual in overall charge of Han Soon-nim's programme was the then Organising Secretary of the NTWU, Park Kun-sik, whom Han Soon-nim married in 1981.

9.6 Summary

The experiences of Yi So-sun and Han Soon-nim are important, in the context of this study because, although differing in substance, they complement each other in the illumination of the wider social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances which pertained in South Korea during the period under consideration. Circumstances which are crucial to the fullest understanding of the pattern of evolution of 'modern' Korea. Whereas little is known of Han Soon-nim's early years, those of Yi So-sun provide graphic evidence of what life was like for the majority of the Korean population both before and after the Korean War. As a young woman, Han Soon-nim was an independently minded and fervent trade unionist with pronounced leadership qualities whilst, on the other hand, Yi So-sun was struggling to rear her children within a traditionally patriarchal family, and was as vehemently opposed to all trade union activity as Han Soon-nim was supportive of it. Then the lives of both women underwent

diametric changes in remarkably similar ways. For Yi So-sun, the emotional trauma of the death of her eldest son converted her, in a matter of hours, from an anti-trade unionist into the most dedicated proponent of the cause of working people. For Han Soon-nim, some other event, possibly emotional, possibly financial, caused her to abandon her oppressed constituents and join the 'enemy'. Negative became positive, and positive became negative; negative, that is, insofar as it retarded, negated, or even reversed, the dynamic toward the achievement of democratic trade unionism.

From the very beginning, Korean women labour activists met varying degrees of opposition from other women workers in their endeavours to elevate their social identity and industrial circumstance. That opposition which was grounded in fear, naivete, or self-interest could be alleviated, if not eradicated, by processes of education, persuasion, example, and collective strength. Furthermore, they were manifestations of readily understandable human emotions with which most activists could relate, if not actually sympathise. The detrimental effect of one such as Han Soon-nim, however, proved far more difficult to counter. In the first place, her activities must certainly have lent strength to the male dominated national-level union and the FKTU and, by extension, to the Park Chung-hee regime itself. Whether this very high profile woman had been targeted and 'turned' by the instruments of the state, or whether she had 'seen the error of her ways' of her own volition, the outcome was the same. She had seen, and been deeply involved in, the activities of women trade unionists and she had come to recognise that, in her assessment, they were misguided, manipulated, and ultimately subversive.

As far as uncommitted young women workers were concerned, and not only those in the textile industry, the state-funded publicity afforded to Han Soon-nim's newly acquired convictions must have acted as a further deterrent against becoming involved in trade unionism. She was, after all, speaking from a position of knowledge and experience and, perhaps most important of all, she was, or had been, 'one of them'. Others among the uncommitted may well have been fully converted to her assertions about where their duties to their country lay. Han Soon-nim had been a member of a UIM, she knew all about that supposedly Christian organisation, and so if anyone was in a position to comprehend its communist agenda and the threat it posed to South Korean security, surely it was she. Meanwhile others, perhaps the youngest or the more timid, would have been, understandably, frightened off both by the power of the rhetoric and the violence of the tactics employed. Even among the most fervent and dedicated of activists, the shock of seeing and hearing a woman leader who had been so successful and so respected turn against her colleagues and fellow workers and, in effect, admit publicly that she had been wrong, must have given cause for deep concern and introspection and, perhaps, even doubt.

Finally, and arguably most damaging of all considering the great importance of public support, were the repercussions of the Han Soon-nim case in the wider Korean community. As has been discussed previously in this study, deeply ingrained Confucian ethics and codes of social behaviour continue to exert influence, even to the present day, and fundamental to that philosophy is the place and role of women. Women were subordinate to men; they did what they were told without question, and it was certainly an affront for them to even consider combining in mass protest against their male superiors. When workers in the textile industry did just that, and when they actually

started to make real headway, attitudes in society must have begun to change: perhaps women had rights after all. When details of Han Soon-nim's apostasy reached beyond the industrial confines, how easy it must have been for the unenlightened to regard the recent initiatives of young working women merely as a transient aberration.

A more perceptive examination of the two cases discussed in this chapter will, however, reveal that the positive contributions made by women such as Yi So-sun not only far outweighed the counter effects of reactionary propaganda, but also made substantial inroads into the refutation of 'the conventional view'. The assertion that the women's labour movement in the 1970's was characterised by its predominantly economic nature is undercut by the experience of Yi So-sun. Far from being a young, single woman devoid of family responsibilities and seeking only to increase the amount of money she could take home and spend upon herself, as the 'typical' female activist was portrayed, Yi So-sun was a widow approaching middle-age who, after 1970, was left alone to provide for three young children. Had personal economics been at the forefront of her mind, the extravagant bribes which she was offered on at least two occasions, allied with the gross indignities she suffered, would have engineered an abrupt cessation of all of her 'subversive' activities. Whereas, on the contrary, they served only to reinvigorate her determination to struggle on for democracy.

The conventional belief that the women's labour movement did not, in reality, have that democratic principle as its bedrock is clearly thrown into question by the departure from the trade union scene of Han Soon-nim. After being elected as president on a free vote, and despite the very substantial power and institutional support she accrued to herself whilst in office, she was removed from the presidency at the earliest

time possible, and with equal facility, once she had demonstrated that she was no longer acting in the interests of her constituents. Hard as she might have tried to convert the Ban-do industrial relations structure into what de Tocqueville (1856) termed 'democratic despotism', and regardless of the backing she enjoyed from the machinery of an authoritarian state, Han Soon-nim was ultimately unable to overcome the growing strength of a nascent, and democratically based, worker organisation.

In the final analysis, it is fortunate indeed that there were women of sufficient grit and determination among the workers at the Peace Market, Ban-do, Dong-il, YH, and all the other sweat-shop factories throughout Korea who knew that they had right on their side, and that it would take considerably more than the machinations of the state, the national-level unions, and one renegade ex-branch union president to deflect them from their purpose.

The next chapter examines the way the nascent trade unionism in the textile and garment industry developed so as to provide a base and reference point for the two women leaders just portrayed. Their activity on behalf of unions and in relation to trade unionism is defined by the struggle of the women workers to establish progressive forms of collective organisation in the face of marked opposition from employers and the state. These are the themes that are now addressed.

NOTES

¹ It should be noted that, in many Asian countries including Korea, the method of age calculation differs in two main respects from that used in Europe. In Korea, the Lunar, rather than the Gregorian, calendar is adhered to, and a child is 'aged 1' from the date of conception.

² The extant practice was for the *shidas* to be paid by, and at the discretion of, the *oyamachinists* (see Chapter Seven).

³ The document was placed on file in the Chonggye Union headquarters but was confiscated and, presumably, destroyed during one of the many raids on the office carried out by the KCIA in the 1970's (Interview, Yi So-sun, February, 2000).

⁴ For example, in September, 1977, five workers on trial under national security legislation each referred to their 'Mother', Yi So-sun, in their evidence. The officiating magistrate remonstrated with the accused for using this form of address, and advised the court that such a practice was clear confirmation of the influence of North Korea, where the leader, Kim Il-sung, was always afforded the title 'Father'.

⁵ Park Chung-hee despised Kim Dae-jung, his vocal, civilian, opponent, who he had defeated by the most unimpressive margin in the 1971 presidential election. The President's paranoia did not stop with the drastic changes of the Yushin reforms, however, and on 8 August, 1973, KCIA agents kidnapped Kim Dae-jung from a Tokyo hotel and planned to dispose of him at sea somewhere between Japan and Korea. The Japanese police had learned about the abduction and informed the American CIA. The American ambassador to Korea, Phillip Habib, rushed to the Blue House and bluntly told Park Chung-hee that the US government wanted Kim returned alive. Five days after the kidnapping, a bruised and drugged Kim Dae-jung was abandoned on the street near his Seoul home (Oh Kie-chiang, 1999) Although American pressure secured his release he, nevertheless, spent most of the time between 1973 and 1979 either in prison or under house arrest. In 1980 he was sentenced to death; the international community, once again, came to his aid and the sentence was rescinded (Clifford, 1994).

⁶ Under the proportional representation system in effect at the time, the award of a specified number of parliamentary seats was within the gift of party leaders.

⁷ It was customary for the Park regime to hold 'political' prisoners in custody between the time of their arrest and the time of their trial; this period was frequently of many months, even years, duration.

⁸ This statute was put into effect on 13 May, 1975. Article 1 set the tone for the remaining thirteen Articles by stating:

It shall be prohibited for any person to deny, oppose, distort or defame the Constitution (Laws and Documents, Korea Annual, 1979).

⁹ This was highly unusual procedure. Normally, arrested persons were taken to police HQ and held for 72 hours before being committed to prison to await trial. During the 72 hour period they would be escorted to the Public Prosecutor's office, allowed access to legal advice, and family visits were permitted. So concerned were the authorities at the prospect of public disorder taking place during Yi So-sun's subsequent transfers from police HQ to and from the Prosecutor's office, and eventually to prison, that they bypassed the intermediate custody location, took Yi So-sun direct to prison, where the Public Prosecutor visited her, and held her there incommunicado.

¹⁰ A belief greatly reinforced in the mind of Park Chung-hee after the assassination of his wife, Yook Yung-soo, by a Korean who was resident in Japan, on 15 August, 1974 (Yang Sung-chul, 1981).

¹¹ For example, in their October 1978 press release concerning a 'Women and Global Corporations' conference, held in Des Moines, Iowa, USA, the American Friends Service Committee focussed on Yi So-sun's case.

¹² Indeed, a mere two weeks after her release from prison, Yi So-sun was arrested for attending a rally in support of the 126 dismissed women workers at the Dong-il textile factory. She was severely beaten and held for one week in Dongdaemoon police station.

¹³ The UIM was a pivotal Protestant organisation which, along with its Catholic counterpart, Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne (JOC) or Young Catholic Workers Organisation, offered unique support to the Korean labour movement.

In the vanguard of Christian action in the struggle for democracy were the UIM and the JOC. Recognising the miserable working conditions of Korean labourers, these two organisations were founded for powerless low-income workers to help them gain their basic rights as workers and human beings. Though labour unions in Korea have long since become instruments of the government and are completely controlled by the KCIA, the UIM and JOC organisations have not yielded to all kinds of pressures and threats, but have worked fearlessly to throw light on the darkened existence of the Korean workers (Emergency Christian Conference on Korean Problems (ECCKP)

Documents on the Struggle for Democracy in Korea, 1975).

¹⁴ The union executive committee reluctantly accepted the proposal but, from that time onwards, it became necessary to conduct 'dual' committee meetings, one with Park Chan-sik present and one without his knowledge. The reason for this duplication was that it became immediately apparent that when Park participated, a full report of everything said by the committee was relayed back to management (Interview, female Vice-President, March 2000).

¹⁵ The magnitude of this demand, and the award achieved in the previous year, must be measured against the excessively low base-line of wages paid by the Ban-do company.

¹⁶ In 1981, Han Soon-nim married Park Kun-sik, the Organising Secretary of the NTWU.

¹⁷ The Financial Secretary of the Ban-do union confirmed that the relationship between Han Soon-nim and officers of the NTWU became very close, and that Han Soon-nim gave every indication that she was actually acting under instructions from that organisation (Interview, Education Secretary, December, 1998). It is pertinent to note the NTWU's philosophy with regard to the manner in which presidents of branch unions should view their responsibilities. In 1975, the NTWU's recruitment officer, Nim Dong-soo, advised women activists at the YH Textile Company, who were in the process of organising a branch union:

The president's job is very simple and easy. All you have to do is walk around the workplace in the morning to see if there are any problems, then spend the remainder of the day sitting in a well-upholstered swivel chair, swinging from side to side, and reading the newspaper. Or you can go to the coffee-shop and drink coffee (History of the YH Textile branch union, 1984).

¹⁸ Bad social and environmental conditions are conducive to the contraction of tuberculosis, and the symptoms can include the spitting of blood, fatigue, loss of weight, and the cessation of menstruation (Brown, 1965). All of these signs were commonplace among women textile workers in the 1960's and 1970's.

¹⁹ The legal process in effect at the time required appeal against dismissal to be lodged prior to the actual date of termination of employment, thus prior knowledge of management intent was imperative.

²⁰ Immediately prior to the election, Chang Hyun-ja was approached by representatives of the NTWU who threatened that unless she withdrew her candidature and threw her support behind Han Soon-nim the Ban-do branch union would be expelled from the NTWU. Confident of her grass-roots support, and understandably dismissive of the worth of NTWU membership, Chang Hyun-ja refused to step down. After her election as president, the relationship between branch and national-level deteriorated rapidly, and the Ban-do union was expelled from the NTWU in 1978 (Interview, Chang Hyun-ja, March, 2000).

²¹ On occasions, they were invited to the hotel to attend a 'farewell party' for a worker who was leaving (Interviews, ex-Dong-il workers, November, 1998 – April, 1999)

CHAPTER TEN

THE BIRTH OF DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNIONISM AND THE DEATH OF A DICTATOR

“Large streams from little fountains flow, tall oaks from little acorns grow”.

(David Everett)

10.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter emphasis was placed on the importance of biography, as a history of action, in the study of social conditions and social change. As far as women workers in the Korean textile and garment industry in the 1970's were concerned, their vision of the world was determined by their position in a system of production relations and a growing awareness that that position located them within a 'class'. Having already examined some of the actions, and the resultant contributions to the democratisation project, of two pre-eminent individuals, the theme of 'action' is developed further in this chapter although, in this case, the action will be predominantly collective rather than individual. Encompassed within that thematic umbrella will be a number of diverse, yet interconnected, strands which, together, reinforce the main thrust of this study and, most critically, constitute the empirical base upon which its argument stands.

This chapter will set out to establish, first of all, the seminal importance of the role of women in the formation and development of the Chonggye Union; then illustrate the significance of the Chonggye Union in the spread of democratic unionism across industrial boundaries in South Korea during the 1970's and, finally, demonstrate the

linkage between the growth of democratic unionism and the rise of popular political protest that culminated in the assassination of President Park Chung-hee and the termination of his pernicious Yushin reforms. As a corollary to this endeavour, the degree of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and deliberate misrepresentation that combined to produce the 'conventional view' of modern Korean history, enunciated in Chapter Three, will be fully revealed.

The chapter includes a description of the beginning, and the subsequent 'ripple' effect, of the expansion of democratic trade unionism, and show that, far from being a random series of isolated occurrences, it was, in fact, a chain of connected and mutually sustaining events. The inability of both the state and the employers to abandon their deeply ingrained propensity for sophistry, collusion, and deceit, despite written and legally binding agreements, will be proven beyond doubt, as will the true extent of the personal sacrifices that female, and some male, workers were collectively prepared to make in order to achieve their human and industrial rights. Also described will be an ideal example of a circumstance where the 'factory consciousness' (Beynon, 1973), grounded in work experience, extended beyond the factory into a political expression of the interests of the embryonic Korean working class. Thus, in the process these women began to question and challenge the constraints of capitalist and state institutions. That the project of the Korean textile and garment workers developed beyond the parochial into the political, in its most acute sense, will be amply demonstrated in the establishment of direct linkages between the increasingly potent and widespread impact of the activities and achievements of those women workers, and the groundswell of public opinion that culminated in the assassination of President Park Chung-hee in October, 1979. There are, however, two 'background' matters to which attention should

first be drawn in order that the fullest appreciation of the points raised in the main body of the chapter may be gained.

In the light of the singular and specific *raison d'être* of this study; that is, the establishment of the rightful place of women textile and garment workers in the conception and practical implementation of the democratic ethos in the South Korean labour movement, the degree of male involvement in the establishment of the first democratic trade union may appear anomalous. Furthermore, and taking into account the highly critical tenor of this study's account of the activities of the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), an accusatory strand that has been consistent throughout the work, the fact that officials of that discredited organisation should be welcomed by women into positions of leadership in their new union is likely to give rise to even greater confusion and ambiguity. With regard to the former, it should be explained that during 1969 and 1970, Chun Tae-il gathered around him a small group of like-minded male friends who were determined to bring about radical change in the conditions of garment workers in the Peace Market. They called themselves 'The Society of Fools': 'fools' in the ironic sense of their quixotic awareness of the magnitude of the task they were undertaking. After Chun Tae-il's death, the remaining 'fools' joined with Yi So-sun, Chun Tae-il's mother, and supported her in the formation of the Chonggye Union (Cho Yong-rae, 1984). Because they were all Korean males, as opposed to females, their general level of education and, indeed, self-confidence, was markedly higher than that of their female colleagues, whilst their close association with Chun Tae-il meant that they were held in esteem by the women workers in the Peace Market. These two factors combined to make members of the Society of Fools eminently acceptable as leading figures in the new trade union.

With regard to the point concerning FKTU involvement, what must be understood, and what may be more difficult to comprehend in the western industrial relations context, is the degree of naivety, indeed ignorance, that existed in that country and during that period on the part of workers with regard to the existence, the purpose, and the achievements, of their national and federation-level trade institutions. Although union subscriptions were deducted at source from their already minuscule wages, few of the women and young girls in the textile industry had more than the faintest idea of what precisely they were funding (Interviews, women workers, November, 1997-January, 1998, November, 1998-February, 1999). In addition to this lack of awareness and knowledge was the underlying, yet ever-present, deferment to hierarchy, and the inordinate respect for education, which remain two of the hallmarks of Confucian ideology (Kim Kihwan, 1993).

The second imperative is to try to convey the physical and emotional condition of the worker participants in the events post-November, 1970. We are here discussing thousands of workers, most of whom were girls or young women from under-privileged rural backgrounds, whose working conditions were universally appalling, and which are described in detail elsewhere in this study. As a result of routine ill-treatment, inadequate facilities, and bare subsistence wages, the great mass of workers were under-nourished, in very poor health, and emotionally and physically exhausted. Even had they, as a group, been at the peak of intellectual and physical strength, the overwhelming power of the state/employer opposition axis would still have been daunting in the extreme. Added to this, of course, was the perennial handicap of being female, and bearing the weight of centuries of oppression justified merely by biological difference. In such circumstances it is entirely comprehensible that these women were

frequently driven close to the edge of despair and, therefore, could be excused for not always acting, and responding to events, in a calm and rational manner (Interviews, women workers, December, 1997).

10.1 The First Democratic Trade Union

Despite having gained formal approval, signed by the Minister of Labour Affairs on 17 November, 1970, for the formation of a trade union and for the siting of two union offices, one in the Peace Market building and the other at the nearby Donghwa Market (see Chapter Nine), Yi So-sun and her worker associates found, to their dismay, that when they attempted to begin making preparations for the launch of the new union, the employers at both locations had locked the allocated rooms and refused to allow entry to the union organisers. Saddened and angered by this early demonstration of the employers unwillingness to cooperate, Yi So-sun and her group repaired to a lodging house where they rented a room in which debate concerning the nature of their response strategy continued throughout the night. Agreement was finally reached to mount a protest demonstration outside the Ministry of Labour to insist upon the full implementation of the original agreement. After listening to their representation, a Senior Secretary at the ministry agreed to discuss the matter with the employers. The following day, 24 November, 1970, he contacted Yi So-sun and advised her that a 'new agreement' had been reached with the employers and that instead of two offices the new union would be permitted to use only one small room, situated on the roof of the Peace Market building. The room was the size of the average western domestic lounge, some twenty-five square metres, and was to house a trade union organisation whose catchment membership was in excess of 27,000, and which encompassed well in excess of 800 separate factories, none of which had any legal protection whatsoever for their

employees (Unpublished record, Chonggye Union, 1971, and interview, Yi So-sun, March, 2000).

Three important lessons were learned, or re-emphasised, as a result of this first, albeit relatively minor, experience at the interface between theory and practice. First, the employers would continue to place every possible obstacle in the path of those who were striving to establish a democratic union; second, the state bureaucracy was unable, or unwilling, to strictly enforce legal agreements into which it had entered with elements of the democratic labour movement and, third, Yi So-sun and her colleagues did not possess either the experience or the expertise to spearhead the formation of an institution that could shift the centre of gravity of South Korean industrial relations and effectively represent the mass of textile and garment workers. Not only were they cognisant of their inadequacy for the task, but they were also aware that there was nowhere they could go, and no-one to whom they could turn, for advice and guidance.

10.2 FKTU And Employer Involvement

Chun Tae-il's death on 13 November, 1970, was the trigger for major demonstrations in and around the textile and garment district of central Seoul, and many protestors were arrested and held in custody in the headquarters of the Seoul Metropolitan Police. Among those confined in the Dong-daemoon cells as a consequence of their participation in the public demonstration was Choi Chong-in, one of Chun Tae-il's closest friends and a member of the 'Society of Fools'. He recalls:

Whilst I was being held by the police, Kim Song-gil, who introduced himself as the International Secretary of the FKTU, came to visit me. This was the first time I had even heard of the FKTU, and he was very convincing. He promised me that the federation was on the side of the democratic labour movement and that he would do everything in his power

to help and guide us in our attempts to improve working conditions. I had no reason not to believe him (Interview, Choi Chong-in, January, 1999).¹

Two days after Yi So-sun and the remainder of the Chonggye organisers had been allocated the 'office' on the roof of the Peace Market, three men, all of whom were unknown to the Chonggye group, introduced themselves and declared that they were well versed in the intricacies of industrial relations and wished to offer their services in organising the new union. One of them, Hwang Kyung-un, went so far as to nominate himself as a candidate for the position of President. An older, and much respected male garment worker, who was not one of the central core of organisers, warned Yi So-sun and her colleagues to exercise the greatest caution in their dealings with these three characters because of their close affiliation with the employers. At approximately the same time, Kim Song-gil, the FKTU official who had visited Choi Chong-in when he was in police custody, also offered himself for consideration as first president of the union (Interviews, Yi So-sun and Choi Chong-in, March, 2000).

Thus, the group of democratic activists, so naïve and untutored in the arena of institutional procedures and organisational imperatives, found themselves in an invidious position at the very moment when informed and impartial advice was most desperately required, and was most conspicuously absent. They were all too conscious that none of them was sufficiently qualified, experienced, or confident to undertake the leadership role, whilst the only alternatives which had presented themselves were in the form of representatives from either the employers or the FKTU. This would have proved a totally untenable situation had it not been for the fact that none of the workers knew anything about the disreputable history of the FKTU and, therefore, had no reason to question the sincerity of its representative, Kim Song-gil. Furthermore, it will be

recalled that the two most crucial provisions agreed to by the Ministry of Labour in its negotiations with Yi So-sun at the time of Chun Tae-il's death (see Chapter Nine) centred around the involvement of the FKTU and the Ministry itself in assisting in the implementation of Yi So-sun's demands. It was, therefore, not unreasonable, especially in the light of their pressing need to maintain momentum, for the Chonggye activists, and their constituents, to look upon the FKTU's initiatives with more favour than those of the employers.

The imperative to maintain momentum is very relevant here, and it should not be overlooked that it took only nine days from the date of Chun Tae-il's funeral, which took place on 18 November, 1970, to officially inaugurate the first democratic trade union in South Korea on 27 November, 1970. The inaugural conference was held on FKTU premises and was chaired by the FKTU General Secretary. It was attended by 56 delegates, representing the 560 workers who had already joined the union during the nine day preparation period, who duly elected Kim Song-gil, the ex-International Secretary of the FKTU, as first president in preference to the 'employer's representative', Hwang Kyung-un. Chun Tae-il's close friend, Choi Chong-in, was elected to the office of full-time Vice-President. A female worker, Yoo Chong-sook, was elected as part-time Vice-President, whilst the remaining staff posts all went to ex-members of the Society of Fools (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1971). The state, in the guise of the Ministry of Labour and the FKTU, had publicly declared its support for the democratic aspirations of the workers in one of the most important sectors of the Korean economy: the employers, meanwhile, had remained obdurate in their opposition. That such an overt gesture on the part of the Park Chung-hee regime was little more than a sham, and that the employers, with the full connivance of government, would not

shrink from any tactic to obstruct the endeavours of the new union, would not take long to become apparent.

Shortly after the Chonggye Union was formed, members of staff erected a placard near to the office on the roof of the Peace Market which was designed to publicise the union and attract new members. Its message read:

Let us unite all workers in the Peace Market. Join the union that was achieved through the death of a colleague, and fight for your rights.

Immediately the placard was sighted by members of the Peace Market Corporation, the police were called and union staff were ordered to remove the sign. When they refused to comply with the instruction, the police stood guard while Peace Market security officers tore the offending placard down (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1971). The relevance of this incident is to be found in the fact that because workers in the Peace Market were employed in a myriad of small, independent factories, it was not easy for a trade union organisation to communicate directly with each and every member of the workforce. One way of overcoming this was to display publicity material at a location readily observable by everyone travelling to and from their place of work, and the roof of the Peace Market was ideally suited. It was, however, clearly in the interest of the employers to restrict as much as they possibly could their employees' awareness of the close proximity, and ready accessibility, of a 'profit threatening' and, therefore, highly undesirable, organisation. It was, equally clearly, within the remit of the state police to facilitate the removal of such threats to profit.

But this was merely the beginning of a campaign waged by both employers and the Park administration to negate and vilify the efforts and activities of those who had

mounted this first serious threat to the institutional control of organised labour. Two female garment workers, and subsequent full-time officers in the Chonggye Union, Shin Soon-ae and Lee Sook-hee,² recall their experiences in the early days of the union's existence:

Our boss and the *jaedansha* in the factory warned us against having any contact with the new union. They told us that the people behind it were all connected with North Korea and that if we did associate with them it would be very dangerous not only for us but for our families as well. They also told us that all the union officials were men who used their positions of authority to sexually abuse young women who attempted to join the union. One of our senior co-workers had told us about the objectives of the union and we were interested in finding out more. The problem was that because of the propaganda that was being spread by the employers we were too afraid to visit the union office (Interviews, Shin Soon-ae and Lee Sook-hee, December, 1998).

There can be no doubt that the Peace Market employers, and those from the other markets, conspired together to co-ordinate the spreading of false rumours denigrating the organisers of the new union. As alluded to above, the systematic dissemination of information to all 27,000 garment workers in the Chonggye-chun district was as difficult for a few individual employers as it was for the Chonggye trade unionists themselves; it was, therefore, self-evident that the anti-union propaganda was an orchestrated exercise. It was also a highly successful one. After an initial rush of applicants to join the union, the number of workers going to the office to seek membership dwindled rapidly to virtually nil. When union officers attempted to visit individual factories to recruit members at their places of work, word of their intentions spread with extraordinary speed and they were greeted by locked factory doors wherever they went³ (Interviews, ex-union officers, December, 1998). This continued for three weeks, and by the end of the fourth week, during which not a single worker had sought membership, the union organisers, including Yi So-sun, finally reached the ends of their tethers. They had fought so hard and for so long and when, after all of their

trials and tribulations, they thought they had at last achieved their goal, they found that it had turned to ashes in their hands after less than one month.

Overcome by hopelessness, frustration, anger, and disappointment, the hard core of the Chonggye Union activists, twelve in all, came to the desperate conclusion on 30 December, 1970, that as it had taken the death of Chun Tae-il, some six weeks previously, to galvanise the movement into action, sacrifice of a similar nature was necessary now that the movement had stalled. The twelve unanimously agreed to barricade themselves in their rooftop office and, in a manner reminiscent of Chun Tae-il's sacrifice, use petrol and other inflammable material to burn themselves to death. The police, aware of the union organisers' every movement as a matter of routine, turned up in force at 2 am the following morning accompanied by a unit of the fire service and, just as the protestors were making their final preparations, broke down the door, and placed all of the activists under arrest. When they arrived at the Seoul Metropolitan Police Headquarters, the group declared that they would begin a hunger strike and would persevere with it until their just demands were met in full. They had had enough of being patronised, obstructed, lied to, and lied about. If something positive was not seen to be done on this occasion, the authorities would show themselves publicly as being responsible for the deaths of twelve people (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1971).

The protest continued for two days, and on the evening of the second day officials from the Ministry of Labour and the FKTU arrived at police headquarters and suggested that they should all go to another location and discuss the matter. This was unacceptable to the protestors, who reiterated their determination to remain on

government property and persist with their hunger strike until the answers they were looking for were forthcoming. Finally, the representative of the Ministry of Labour, with the agreement of the Peace Market Corporation, guaranteed to arrange and mediate a joint labour-management conference at which all contentious matters could be negotiated on a formal basis. More in hope than in expectation the union officers accepted the guarantee, and on 6 January, 1971, the first official and properly conducted meeting between representatives of the employers in the three main markets and the Chonggye Union negotiating team took place (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1971).

At the conclusion of a protracted period of negotiation, the union demand for every Sunday off resulted in an agreement to grant every other Sunday off, whilst the demand for a reduction in working hours from sixteen to thirteen per day resulted in the employers accepting a fourteen hour day. Additional gains on the part of the union team included overtime work only for those who volunteered; approval for union officers to visit workers at their places of work, and clearance to open a health centre and a canteen to serve free lunches (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1971).

It was apparent from that first meeting⁴ that the employers and the state had, for the time being at least, accepted the union as representative of the workforce, and that attending these joint meetings would not be regarded merely as an empty gesture to placate the union membership but as an avenue of dialogue that could, possibly, be turned to the employers' advantage. Thus, genuine negotiation did, indeed, take place and, although the union failed to get their demands met in full, positive gains were achieved and, for the first time, the union was actually functioning as a union.

10.3 Union Leadership

The case of Kim Song-gil, ex-International Secretary of the FKTU and first president of Chonggye Union, is both interesting and enigmatic. Whilst no concrete evidence is available, the general consensus among all those with whom he worked at the Chonggye Union, and whom the author has interviewed at great length, is that he was originally tasked by his superiors at the FKTU with ‘infiltrating’ the new union and moderating, or nullifying, its activities. The attainment of the first presidency must, therefore, have appeared to be a most fortuitous opening gambit. What transpired, however, was far from being in accord with what is widely alleged to be the FKTU scheme.

Kim Song-gil turned out to be a compassionate and honourable man who rapidly gained sympathy for the objectives of the democratic labour movement, and respect for its proponents, once he came into close contact with the Chonggye activists. Thus, far from manipulating the union in accordance with the wishes of the state and his erstwhile masters at the FKTU, he actually led them from the front with distinction and courage through all the early events described above, including the collective suicide pledge and the hunger strike. The reaction of the FKTU and the Ministry of Labour to this aberrant behaviour on the part of one of their ‘agents’ is not known; what is known, however, is that at the beginning of March, 1971, barely two months after he had led the Chonggye negotiating team at the first labour-management conference, and little more than three months after he had been elected president, Kim Song-gil announced that he was resigning the presidency ‘for personal reasons’ and emigrating to America.⁵

This unexpected occurrence left the Chonggye Union officers in a quandary. The reservations which they had previously held about one of their own number being capable of assuming leadership remained uppermost in their minds. The union had, after all, only been functioning for a brief period, certainly an insufficient time in which to gain the experience necessary for leadership. In an attempt to alleviate the dilemma, and prior to his departure from office, Kim Song-gil introduced a middle-aged man, Ku Kun-hae, who had served as President of the Transport Union and who said that he was prepared to assume the presidency of Chonggye if the full-time officers so wished. Yet again, naivety, this time enhanced by a degree of desperation and the considerable trust they had come to place in Kim Song-gil's judgement, surfaced in the deliberations of the union staff, and they accepted the offer. Ku Kun-hae was duly elected president as from 1 April, 1971 (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1972). The second leader of the Chonggye Union would remain as President for barely four months before, in a bitterly ironic fulfilment of the Peace Market employers' earlier false prophesy, Ku Kun-hae was caught, *in flagrante delicto*, sexually abusing a female worker in the union office (Interview, Lee Sung-chul, General Secretary Chonggye Union, April, 2000). This was the final straw in what had been an inauspicious presidential incumbency. The suspicions of the union executive committee had been aroused soon after Ku Kun-hae took over the leadership, as members became increasingly certain that he was making private deals with individual employers in which he would receive money for 'overlooking' infringements of the maximum number of hours to be worked in any one day, thereby undermining one of the most valued achievements of the Chonggye Union at the first labour-management conference.

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In August, 1971, the resignation of Ku Kun-hae was accepted at an emergency meeting of the executive board, and on 20 September, 1971, Choi Chong-in, the long-time friend of Chun Tae-il and founder member of the Society of Fools, was elected third president of the Chonggye Union (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1972). Naïve and politically ignorant they may have been, but the inner circle of democratic union activists had been placed by circumstances on the steepest of learning curves. After being repeatedly disillusioned and taken advantage of by external agencies, the message had finally been driven home that if their trade union was to function and evolve in the manner envisioned by their spiritual inspiration, Chun Tae-il, leadership must spring from within, not from without.

10.4 Disillusionment With The FKTU

From the very beginning of the Chonggye Union, and despite the enormous internal difficulties experienced in getting the organisation established on a firm footing, the executive members maintained a broad and outward looking philosophy with regard to working conditions not only in the Chonggye-chun district, but throughout all of Seoul. In May, 1971, six months or so after the union was formed and during the first few weeks of Ku Kun-hae's presidency, trouble flared at the Hanyoung textile factory, situated across the Han River some forty minutes by bus from the Peace Market, and where workers were striving to organise a union in the face of stiff opposition from the owners. Knowing that the Chonggye workers were at a more advanced stage, Hanyoung activists had sought advice and guidance from their colleagues on the other side of the river; assistance that was freely and enthusiastically given. Violence broke out at the Hanyoung factory between pro-union workers and those who were being paid by the company to oppose them, and Kim Jin-soo, a union activist, was stabbed in the

back of his head with a screwdriver. Yi So-sun and Lee Sung-chul, the General Secretary of the Chonggye Union, visited Kim Jin-soo in hospital where he was in a vegetative state, and were asked by Kim Jin-soo's distraught and angry friends for advice on what their next move should be. At this time, the FKTU was held in high regard by the Chonggye people; after all, the FKTU had helped set up the Chonggye Union, they had intervened with the Peace Market employers and helped initiate the monthly joint labour-management meetings and, most telling of all, Kim Song-gil, the popular and sincere first president, had been, in effect, an FKTU appointee. It was, therefore, with some confidence that Yi So-sun and Lee Sung-chul advised the Hanyoung workers to ask the FKTU for help (Interviews, Yi So-sun and Lee Sung-chul, December, 1998).

It came as a great shock to all workers concerned when FKTU officials not only refused to even listen to the representatives of the Hanyoung unionists, but also formally reprimanded the Chonggye activists for directing the Hanyoung people to FKTU headquarters. The distinct impression gained by the executive committee at Chonggye was that the FKTU had been stung by the failure of the state/employer machine to preclude the formation of a democratic trade union at the Peace Market, largely due to the involvement of personalities like Chun Tae-il and Yi So-sun, and that they were determined to ensure that the 'contagion' would not spread. Hanyoung Textiles did not have a Chun Tae-il or a Yi So-sun. Forty-five days later, and never having regained consciousness, Kim Jin-soo died. The workers at Hanyoung Textiles failed in their attempt to form a democratic trade union; and from that moment on, the Chonggye Union knew where FKTU allegiance resided.⁶

10.5 The Role Of Women In The Chonggye Union

Yi So-sun suggested to me that I should contest the union leadership, but in those days it was still difficult for women to stand up and speak in front of a lot of people, and especially because all the employers were men and were quite frequently abusive and violent in their dealings with union representatives. I was deeply involved in the activities of Chonggye and was a member of the negotiating team but, like most of the other women workers, I preferred to remain in the background and support the leadership. We trusted our leaders because they were all Chun Tae-il's friends and were dedicated to working for the membership. They had also attended education programmes and were much more politically aware than we were in those days (Interview, Park Myong-ok, female Vice-President, Chonggye Union 1971-1976, December, 1998).

From what has been said previously, and from the general tenor of the above quotation, the impression might be gained that it was men who made all the strategic and tactical decisions in the Chonggye Union, while the mass of the female membership merely followed along meekly and accepted whatever policies the male leaders laid before them. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth, for although it is a matter of record that women did not occupy the highest position in the Chonggye Union hierarchy, it was women who decided what initiatives should be taken, and it was women who constituted the motive force, the energy, behind everything the union accomplished. Members of the Society of Fools were placed in a unique position by dint of their close association with Chun Tae-il, a position that could not be duplicated in any other organisation, and whilst it would be stretching the point rather too far to suggest that those privileged males were, in effect, 'honorary females' in the eyes of their constituents, such a concept does help to illustrate how unlike the relationship between men and women in the Chonggye Union was to the traditional Korean notion of 'gender relations'. A fitting example of the way women constituted the real 'engine' of the union, and a further demonstration of the state's ongoing determination to use whatever means at its disposal to manipulate and inhibit the activities of this

‘troublesome’ democratic movement, as well as its deep uncertainty as to precisely how such intent should be put into effect, is the case of the ‘Acacia Meeting’.

Some six months after the inauguration of the union, the Secretary of the Women’s Section, Chung In-sook, devised a scheme to help overcome the difficulty in recruiting, organising, and communicating with, a widely scattered workforce employed by more than eight hundred less than enthusiastic factory owners. Selected union activists were given the responsibility of supervising small groups of members, between ten and fifteen in each, who worked in their own factory locality; this system became known as the Acacia Meeting. By 1973, there were in excess of fifty such groups spread throughout the three main markets and they proved highly effective, especially in recruiting. For example, rather than rely upon the efforts of a few executive committee members to try to visit frequently all those different factories, efforts which could readily be frustrated by a determined employer or *jaedansha*, it was so much easier, and more difficult to counter, for someone within the factory itself, or who perhaps worked in the factory next door or along the corridor, to pop in for a chat with the *machinists* and *shidas* during the lunch break (Interview, Chung In-sook, November, 1997). So effective was the Acacia Meeting in penetrating the widely dispersed warren of sweatshops that by the middle of 1972 union membership had passed 8,000 and was still rising (The First Twenty Years of the Chonggye Union, 1990). In time, the Acacia Meeting, this network of centrally supervised yet largely autonomous ‘cells’, would become the core opinion finding and policy making mechanism of the Chonggye Union (Interview, Chung In-sook, November, 1997).

Membership of the Acacia Meeting consisted mostly of *oya-machinists*, the more senior and mature of the women workers, and a few *bocho-machinists*. As the young *shidas* made up the bulk of the union membership, however, it was important to the Chonggye Union that their views and needs were taken fully into account. On Christmas Eve 1971, the Acacia Meeting organised a party for the *shidas*, and more than 500 of them attended. During the party, members of the Acacia Meeting circulated among the young *shidas* to elicit their advice on what they most wanted from their new union. The overwhelming majority confirmed that they wanted to improve their education to middle-school level. In accordance with their wishes, a 6-month education programme was devised, and the first class commenced in February, 1972. It was conducted in the Chonggye Union office, and although more than 200 *shidas* applied for places on the course, the limited space available in the union office meant that only 40 applicants could participate. There was clearly a pressing need to expand facilities (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1973 and interview, Yoo Chong-sook, the first leader of the Acacia Meeting and Vice-President, Chonggye Union, January, 1999).

Illustrative, yet again, of the quirky and arbitrary nature of the Park regime, and of its frequently amateurish, heavy-handed, and transparent attempts to engineer the democratic movement to its own advantage, was that in September 1972, Chung In-sook, the originator of the Acacia Meeting system, was informed by the Ministry of Labour that she had been selected as an 'exemplary woman worker' and was to be presented at the Blue House, the President's official residence, to meet the First Lady, Yook Yung-soo.⁷ At the reception, Park Chung-hee's wife offered Chung In-sook her personal support in the development and expansion of the educational programme for the young women workers in the Chonggye Union that the Acacia Meeting had

pioneered in the previous February. The suspicion that this unexpected offer was not entirely unpremeditated was reinforced by the fact that within two weeks of the reception the KCIA had instructed the employer organisations at the three markets to co-operate in, and fund, the establishment of a labour classroom to be located in the Dong-hwa market (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1973, unpublished union minute, 1973). Furthermore, the First Lady let it be known that she would donate all the books and publications necessary to stock an appropriate library (Interviews, Chung-in Sook, November, 1997 and February, 1999). What was to transpire would confirm the KCIA's intention to use this educational facility as a convenient and opportune means of disseminating propaganda rather than for the furtherance of democratic and vocational enlightenment.

Having completed all the structural work and fitted out the premises with furniture and teaching aids donated by the US-based Asian American Free Labour Institute (AAFLI), arrangements were made to hold the opening ceremony on 21 May, 1973, with the guest of honour being the First Lady herself. The President's wife did not attend, however, and immediately after the formal opening of the new labour classroom and library, it was summarily closed on the orders of the KCIA. The reason given for this debacle was that the Chonggye Union executive committee had invalidated the agreement between the state, the employers and the union by inviting leading figures from the church and the main opposition political party to attend the ceremony. They had also invited Ham Suk-hun, a high profile opponent of the Park Chung-hee regime, and an ardent advocate of non-violent civil protest.⁸ From the union perspective, this bombshell constituted the first intimation that there had been any such agreement regarding who could, and who could not, be invited to witness the opening of the

facility. From the regime's perspective, on the other hand, the public association of such 'subversive' individuals with a 'state sponsored' worker education programme was clearly anathema. Furthermore, the fact that the KCIA had been embarrassed by its lack of foreknowledge of the nature of the guest list, and had thus been unable to take the necessary preventative measures, would become painfully apparent when the General Secretary of the Chonggye Union, Lee Sung-chul,⁹ was arrested after the opening ceremony and taken to police headquarters for interrogation.¹⁰

During three days in custody, throughout which he was physically beaten, Lee Sung-chul was made aware of the KCIA's original intention to use the Chonggye worker education classroom as a conduit for propaganda and as yet another mechanism for the control of organised labour. He also bore the brunt of the agency's frustration that their intelligence ineptitude had been exposed to their political masters. A theme that ran through the period of his interrogation by the KCIA was that much as the regime would have preferred to strangle the Chonggye Union at birth, they had been unable to realise that preference because of the potency of the threat of popular protest. Nevertheless, having been forced into a less than ideal position, the state intended to use all of its guile and power to preclude the further spread of such 'destabilising' phenomena whilst, at the same time, exerting influence to minimise the 'detrimental' effects of the democratic activists in the Chonggye Union and deflect their initiatives toward more propitious objectives. Lee Sung-chul had patently failed to carry out the duties of General Secretary in accordance with the wishes of the state and he was, therefore, ordered to resign from office (Interviews, Lee Sung-chul, December, 1998 and April, 2000).

After his release from custody, Lee Sung-chul refused to comply with this unlawful command and, with the full support of the Chonggye Union membership, continued as General Secretary. Finally, after two months of mounting pressure from the KCIA, and only after the employers made it known that unless he left office they would withdraw the funding of full-time officers and would cease to deduct union subscriptions from the wages of union members, Lee Sung-chul submitted his resignation (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1973).

10.6 The Role Of Education In The Chonggye Union

Deprived of the use of the educational facility almost from the moment of its opening, the Chonggye Union was forced to resort to using the already inadequate union office in which to conduct teaching classes in the evenings and on Sundays. Meanwhile, the activists within the organisation, largely in the form of the Acacia Meeting groups, explored every possible avenue, including appeals to the Ministry of Labour and Seoul City Hall, in a concerted effort to regain the use of the new classroom. Aided by bureaucracy's inherent propensity for delay, these endeavours dragged on fruitlessly for many months until the Acacia Meeting groups finally ran out of patience on 7 February, 1975. Some two hundred and fifty women workers assembled outside the classroom in the Dong-hwa Market and demanded that responsibility for its management be returned to the Chonggye Union. After a two day stand-off, during which time the representatives of the employers threatened to withdraw recognition of the union altogether unless the women dispersed, it was finally decided that Chonggye would set up their own labour education institution on three floors of the nearby Yoorim Building (see Chapter Nine), and that they would furnish it with the equipment that had been donated by the AAFLI (Chonggye Union Annual Report, 1975). The Chonggye

Labourers' Classroom opened on 21 April, 1975 and its inaugural ceremony was conducted on 30 April. An even broader section of the civil rights and democratic movement organisations attended than had been the case two years previously, but on this occasion there was no discernible response from the KCIA. As will be shown below, however, this absence of reaction was not indicative of any softening of the state's posture.

The relevance of the Chonggye education programme, in the context of this study, is twofold. First, it is symptomatic of the efforts women textile and garment workers made to elevate themselves both individually, and as a means of enhancing their collective strength and effectiveness. Second, it was the primary, but by no means only, medium whereby workers from other factories and industries could benefit from the Chonggye experience. The programme included academic subjects to primary and middle-school levels taught in accordance with the national curriculum by fully qualified volunteer teachers; vocational training courses focused upon textile and garment making skills and aimed at facilitating the advancement of the younger girls; a political education course consisting of politics, economics, labour law, and trade union law; a course in leadership and confidence building; and a special programme which combined students, workers, and intellectuals in a 'social solidarity' workshop. Choi Jang-jip comments upon this important innovation:

Above all, perhaps the one thing that makes the Chonggye Union extraordinary was the well-organised and effectively operated education for workers programme through the Labourers' Classroom, [an institution] from which the name of the Chonggye Union cannot be separated. It was instrumental in making the workers – most of them were only elementary school graduates, possessing among the lowest education level in the manufacturing sector - more conscious, and in forming a stable block of rank and file members. Also it was a channel that linked this famous local union to other various outside groups, like college students and church groups (Choi Jang-jip, 1989).

10.7 The Spread Of Democratic Trade Unionism

Four factors combined to ensure that the phenomenon of the Chonggye Union did not remain a unique and isolated event. First, the impact of Chun Tae-il's personal sacrifice was unconstrained by social or industrial boundaries. Although, of itself, not constituting a blueprint for civil action, the extent of the spiritual inspiration it afforded to the great mass of working people, and its effect of awakening widespread consciousness, beyond the confines of industrial society, to the plight of workers, has been referenced in this study and a substantial body of literature.¹¹ Second, the very act of the successful establishment of the Chonggye Union demonstrated in the most conspicuous manner that such a mould-breaking achievement was actually possible even in the face of the most daunting odds, and that the aspiration of all workers to combine in common cause could, indeed, become reality. Third, the determination of Yi So-sun and her many colleagues in the Chonggye Union to actively support, and participate in, the struggles of workers in all industries and at all locations resulted in the bolstering of confidence among women both within and outside the Chonggye-chun district and who were employed in factories not necessarily connected with textile and garment manufacture.¹² This first expansive and systematic policy of mutual support and solidarity became self-perpetuating as women workers who had gained courage and fortitude from the visible presence of the Chonggye activists lent their support, in turn, to the struggles of others. During this process, bonds were forged between a broad swathe of women workers which would sustain them through many difficult times to come (Interview, Yi So-sun, December, 1999). Finally, and perhaps the most tangible of the four factors, is the extent to which women from other factories and other industries benefited from their access to, and involvement in, the educational programmes organised by the Chonggye Union. In addition to participation in the broad range of

topics included in the syllabus described above, workers from many sectors of industry were given detailed guidance upon all aspects of trade union formation, organisation, and administration.

One group of activists recalled:

The Chonggye Union and the Labourers' Classroom were like lights being turned on in a dark society; they had a great influence on the Korean labour movement. It gave us hope, and it became the spiritual centre of democratic trade unionism. It was not only the physical and educational help we got from Chonggye that was important to us, but also the example they had provided; if the Chonggye women could do it, we could do it. This confidence spread rapidly throughout the Korean workforce, and where there were non-unionised factories we were encouraged to set up democratic unions; where there were *oyong* unions dominated by men we were shown how to transform them into organisations which would bring us fairness and justice. The Chonggye Union showed us what could be achieved within the existing institutional framework and became the criterion by which the degree of independence of a democratic union could be judged. When there were difficult times, the comfort we got from Chonggye was like the warmth of a mother's breast" (Abstracted from a group discussion conducted with women trade union activists in the 1970's at which representatives from Chonggye, Dong-il, Won-pung, Ban-do, and YH branch unions were present, January, 1999).¹³

This 'outreach' philosophy and practice on the part of the Chonggye Union constituted a substantial and meaningful contribution to the blossoming across the entire spectrum of Korean industry of new democratic trade unions, many of which used Chonggye as their model and Chonggye activists as their mentors (Choi Jang-jip, 1983).

It is important to note, however, and especially in the context of this study's analysis of the role of women in the Korean labour movement, that due to differing local circumstances, by no means all the democratic unions which emerged after Chonggye's first appearance followed a developmental pattern or hierarchical structure identical to that of Chonggye itself. In the textile and garment industry, as indeed in

other industries such as electronics, there were locations at which women workers, the overwhelming majority of the workforce, were 'represented' by male dominated *oyong*, or company controlled, unions which needed to be transformed into democratic institutions if *de facto* representation was to be achieved. At other factories there had been no previous representation whatsoever and, as a consequence, the organisation had to be started 'from scratch'. To further complicate the issue, in some instances women felt sufficiently confident to assume immediately the presidency of the newly formed, or transformed, unions, whereas in others men were voted into that position whilst women occupied most, if not all, of the lower offices. In some instances male workers continued to serve as president of the union, and in others they were replaced at a later date by women as self-confidence and leadership experience was gained. The crucial point to note, however, is that in all cases, and in accord with the fundamental democratic principle, whether the presidency of a union was male or female; whether it alternated between genders, or has remained permanently with either, the power of decision lay firmly in the hands, and the votes, of the grass roots membership. In the case of the textile and garment industry, this meant that, for the very first time in Korea, women had real influence over their own working conditions, living conditions, and financial circumstances.

A brief examination of the chronology and the leadership structures of the five democratic trade unions focused upon in this study is illustrative both of the time span involved and of the diverse circumstances alluded to above. First, it has been shown that the Chonggye Union was formed in November, 1970 in a location where there had been no previous worker representation. For reasons which have been explained, and following the early and brief aberrations, a member of Chun Tae-il's Society of Fools

was elected to the union presidency by the women of the Peace Market, whilst the lower offices were shared between other male members of the society and leading women activists. It would not be until the mid-1980's before the first woman president of Chonggye, Kim Han-young, was voted into that office (Chonggye Union: The First 20 Years Evaluation of Struggle, 1990). Second, in February, 1972, the exclusively male led *oyong* union at the Dong-il Textile Company (see Chapter Nine) was converted into a democratic organisation led by Ju Kil-ja, the first female president of a trade union in Korean history. Such was the radical nature of the transformation at Dong-il that not only was the male president of the *oyong* union ousted by a woman, but the entire executive committee also comprised women (Dong-il Textile Branch Union Report, 1985). Third, in August, 1973, a similar conversion was effected at the Won-pung Textile Company (see Chapter Eight), although in this instance a man was elected president while all other offices were filled by women (Won-pung Textile Branch Union, 1988). Fourth, it has been described in Chapter Nine how, in April, 1974, Han Soon-nim swept the board at the first democratic election for president of the newly formed trade union in the Ban-do Textile Company and how, in response, the company management demonstrated its fear of the democratic process by insisting that a non-elected male, Park Chan-sik, be appointed full-time Vice-President in order to ameliorate the 'damaging' endeavours of the otherwise all-female union leadership. Finally, in May, 1975, the YH Wig and Garment Company workers who, like their counterparts at Chonggye and Ban-do, had not previously enjoyed any form of representation, formed their own democratic trade union, run entirely by women workers. This organisation was destined to play a pivotal role in the abrupt demise of President Park Chung-hee and the curtailment of his infamous Yushin reforms.

As a measure of the pace with which women labour activists followed the 1970 example set by the workers in the Peace Market, by 1980 the number of women trade union leaders across the entirety of Korean industry had risen from zero to nineteen, whilst the number of women serving as full-time union officers rose from twenty-two in 1972 to four hundred and twenty-three (Labour Perspective Data Base, 1988).¹⁴ The ground-breaking and courageous initiative of the Chonggye women and their male colleagues in the Society of Fools almost a decade earlier had defined what in Korean industrial relations terms was a new and refreshing ideology; one in which workers, and in the context of this study that implies predominantly women, were entitled and enabled to take a measure of control over their own destinies. The pace of the spread of the democratic principle in the Korean workplace from the mid-1970's onward matched increasing social and economic difficulties being experienced by the Park Chung-hee regime (see Chapter Seven). As opposition to his tyrannical and vengeful administration grew; and the very idea, let alone the practice, of worker democracy was the apotheosis of 'opposition' in Park's scheme of things, so did the palpable indications of paranoia emanating from the Blue House (Oh Kie-chiang, 1999; Lee Jeong-taik, 1987; Choi Jang-jip, 1983). Circumstances described below rendered it inevitable that serious confrontation between civil society and the state machine would ensue. In the same way that Chun Tae-il's death in 1970 had provided the initial spark to galvanise the democratic labour movement, all that was required in the volatile circumstances of 1979 was a catalyst, or watershed, to precipitate major rebellion.

10.8 The YH Women: The Politicisation Of Trade Unionism

The YH Company incidentin retrospect marks the start of the Park regime's panic, which led ultimately to the collapse of the Yushin system (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989).

Founded in January, 1966, and bearing the initials of its owner, Chang Young-ho, the YH Wig and Garment Company benefited greatly from the export oriented provisions laid down in Park Chung-hee's First and Second Five Year Economic Plans.¹⁵ From an original establishment of ten employees and a start-up capital of one million *won*, little more than \$US2,000, YH grew rapidly until, after only four years of trading, it became the country's largest wig manufacturing company, employing some four thousand workers in two factories; one in Seoul and the second in Incheon. By 1970, it was ranked 15th in the nation-wide league table of export companies across all industries, and was the recipient of many prizes for exports, including the prestigious Presidential Commendation. In common with all other textile and garment companies in South Korea, the vast majority of the YH workforce were girls and young women from rural backgrounds (Choi Jang-jip, 1983; YH Branch Union History, 1984). From that high point in 1970, however, the fortunes of the company went into decline for a variety of complex and convoluted reasons.¹⁶ The deteriorating economic climate discussed in Chapter Eight, which witnessed an inflation rate in excess of 42% in 1974 (Lim Young-il, 1981); gross mismanagement of the company by its founder and other members of his family; stock manipulation; secret sub-contracting; massively excessive borrowing, and the flight of loan capital and liquid assets to the United States, all combined to give great cause for concern on the part of the YH workforce which, by 1975, had shrunk to less than half of its 1970 figure (YH Branch Union History, 1984). Driven primarily by a desire to stem the increasing tide of wage cuts, job relocations, and mass redundancies, and in the face of substantial opposition from management, the YH women succeeded in forming a democratic union on 24 May, 1975.

We had been attending the Christian Academic Education Programme (see Note 13) and had met women leaders from other democratic unions. The women from Chonggye, Ban-do, Dong-il, and Won-pung shared their experiences with us and we used them as a model for our own union and for

an education programme of our own. Without their encouragement we could easily have given up when life became difficult (Interview, Choi Soon-young, first president of the YH Union, December, 1998).

The company management had a hidden agenda to cease trading as surreptitiously as possible and disappear abroad leaving behind huge debts and equally substantial un-repaid government loans. Countering this prospect was a new and inexperienced democratic trade union fighting for the continued employment of its membership. Nevertheless, and despite the company's many devious attempts to divert their endeavours, the YH Union did manage to achieve some improvements to working conditions.¹⁷ The nature of the struggle gave the appearance of being one of trying to stave off the inevitable rather than prevent its occurrence, however, and at the end of March, 1979, by which time the workforce had been reduced to a mere three hundred women, the management declared that the company would cease to trade at the end of the following month. The imminence of the loss of their jobs, allied with the fact that many of them had not received any wages for almost three months and that the threatened closure rendered it likely that they would never be paid what was already owed, persuaded the YH women that they must take positive action to oppose the company's decision to close. The union executive committee decided to stage a sit-in strike as a delaying tactic while they formulated a plan to publicise their plight. Although the company called in the police to break up the strike on 13 April, 1979, a mission that was fulfilled with obvious relish and considerable violence (Interviews, women participants in the strike, December, 1998 and January, 1999), the decision to close the factory at the end of April was rescinded. The YH Union negotiators were left in no doubt, however, that the company was not going to be diverted from its plan to cease trading at the earliest opportunity (Interview, Choi Soon-young, December, 1998).

The following three months were turbulent in the extreme, with the company trying every ruse it could think of to persuade the remaining women workers to abandon their opposition to closure and accept their redundancies. Encouraged and supported by other democratic unions, however, the women refused to give way and, at the beginning of August, began another sit-in strike, this time in the company dormitory.

We knew that we had to continue with our struggle because we believed that we were doing it not only for ourselves but for all workers who had been taken advantage of by government and entrepreneurs. We also owed it to the union, because without the union we would have been expelled and wandering the streets of economic depression much earlier. The company cut off the telephone to the dormitory, our only means of communicating with our supporters outside, so our vice-president acted as a link with some people in the solidarity movement.¹⁸ They cut off the electricity and the water, and they stopped any food coming in. We were united in our decision to starve to death rather than submit to being abandoned like worn out shoes (Interviews, Choi Soon-young and Park Tae-yun, President and Secretary YH Union, and other participants, February, 1999).

Although the strikers had barricaded themselves in, they were all too conscious of the precariousness of their situation and the imperative to take their struggle into the wider community. Following a failed attempt by the YH Company security staff to break into the dormitory and evict them on the evening of 8 August, the women finally accepted that they must find a more propitious location for their action. Members of the union executive also came to the shrewd and crucial conclusion that whichever site they chose, it must serve to raise the political profile of their case, and not allow it to remain as a purely industrial and localised dispute. Their conflict was not simply one between YH workers and the YH owner, it was a microcosm of the divide between the Korean working class and the punitive Yushin reforms.¹⁹ Four alternatives presented themselves: the American embassy, because by then Chang Young-ho, the founder of the YH Company, had fled to the United States; the Cho Heung Bank, the 'manager' of the company's finances and a major creditor; the headquarters of Park

Chung-hee's ruling Democratic Republican Party, the political home of the 'villain' of the piece; and the headquarters of the New Democratic Party (NDP), the main opposition party, led by Kim Young-sam.²⁰ All except one of the alternatives posed serious doubts about ease of entry, the likelihood of physical violence, and overall effectiveness. The decision was made, therefore, to shift the locus of protest from the YH Company dormitory to Kim Young-sam's NDP headquarters, a building situated in central Seoul, some forty-five minutes by bus from the YH factory (Interview Choi Soon-young, February, 1999; Rhee Jong-chan, 1994; Helgeson, 1998). At 4am on the morning of 9 August, 1979, the two hundred or so YH women began to make their way, in two's and three's, across the city. Lee Moon-young, the dismissed professor from Korea University, recalls:

I received a telephone call at about 5 o'clock in the morning of 9 August from the vice-president of the YH Union asking if we could meet urgently. I agreed to go to the Korean Missionary Education Centre in Ma-po²¹ accompanied by my colleague Ko Un. The vice-president explained to us what was happening and asked us if we would go to see Kim Young-sam and try to get his support. It was clear to us that the YH workers had no alternative, and we agreed to do everything we could to help. Three of us, myself, Ko Un, and Professor Moon Dong-hwan,²² hurried to Kim Young-sam's house in Sangdo-dong and arrived there at about 8.30am. When we explained the reason for our visit Kim Young-sam agreed immediately to offer every assistance. He said that he would make the strongest possible representation to the government on behalf of the YH workers and he also telephoned to his headquarters and instructed his staff to let the YH women into the building and to look after them until he arrived (Interviews, Ko Un, December, 1998; Kim Young-sam, December, 1998; Lee Moon-young, January, 1999, Im Myong-jin, February, 1999).

The protest at NDP Headquarters gained widespread attention from the Korean national media and increasing support from the Korean public. Front page photographs and headlines, as well as in-depth coverage on radio and television, encouraged large crowds of well-wishers to gather outside the building. Other democratic unions were also noticeable by their presence, with volunteers from Dong-il, Ban-do, Won-pung,

Control-Data Electronics and, of course, Chonggye, ensuring that their embattled colleagues were provided with all the necessities of life. Religious groups, academics, journalists, and civil rights activists all lent their physical and moral support, whilst the national and industrial-level trade union institutions, the FKTU and the NTWU, were most conspicuous by their absence²³ (YH Branch Union History, 1984).

Upon reflection it might be construed that, if negotiation was out of the question, the most expedient and, indeed, the most politically astute response on the part of government to a sit-in protest by some two hundred girls and young women, conducted at a location where they were welcomed, would be to simply allow them to get on with it. As the novelty wore off, the media and the general public would likely shift their attention to some other news story, and the protestors would be left isolated and irrelevant. The YH Company management, no longer troubled by the irritating presence of its disenchanting workforce, would be free to put its closure plans into effect, whilst the main opposition party would be burdened with the day-to-day care of two hundred protestors. After eighteen years in power, however, and having manoeuvred himself into a position of absolute, dictatorial, rule for the previous seven years, Park Chung-hee's facility for such reflection had long since deserted him.²⁴ Thus, in the early hours of 11 August, just as the protest was entering its third day, more than one thousand riot police stormed the NDP building and set about the young women with boots, fists, truncheons, and tear gas.²⁵ In the process of beating the protestors into submission and throwing them bodily into waiting police vans, nineteen year-old Kim Kyung-sook was killed, more than one hundred others, including thirty opposition party MP's and twelve journalists, were wounded, and Kim Young-sam was arrested (Dong-

a Ilbo daily newspaper, 12 August, 1979, and interviews with Kim Young-sam and YH participants, December, 1998).

As news of this extraordinarily heavy-handed and brutal event spread, so did the feelings of anger and affront among all levels of Korean society (Choi Jang-jip, 1983). Much in accord with the intentions of the YH women protestors, the ‘YH incident’ had voiced a rallying cry to coalesce the radical, anti-Park Chung-hee, factions within that society, and the first tangible signs of what was to come occurred, as has so often been the case in modern Korean history, on the campuses of many Korean universities.²⁶ Student demonstrations in Taegu, the capital city of North Kyongsang province, led to fierce street fighting between students and police on 4 September (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989); with the added significance that this event took place in the ‘home province’ of Park Chung-hee, and in the very heartland of his political support.²⁷

It was clear, even to the most casual observer, that only one more act of provocation on the part of government was required to ignite the shortened fuse of popular rebellion, a rebellion that would embrace not only volatile and idealistic university students and the long-oppressed and exploited labour force, but the erstwhile ‘conservative’ middle class as well. It would not be long before Park Chung-hee, with his customary arrogance and haughty disregard of reality, committed that act.

From the moment of his release from custody following his arrest at the eviction of the YH women from his headquarters, Kim Young-sam launched a persistent and vociferous attack against Park Chung-hee in the media and in the National Assembly. The YH incident was the focus of his onslaught, and he repeatedly

denounced Park for the way his reaction to the protest had confirmed the extent to which he had lost touch with the will of the people, and exposed the bankruptcy of his moral authority to govern (Interview, Kim Young-sam, December, 1998). As Oh Kie-chiang (1999) records:

Park's fury in return was unleashed in a hitherto unprecedented parliamentary move. While the police blocked opposition legislators from entering the National Assembly chamber, the pro-government assemblymen slavishly voted on 4 October, 1979 to punish Kim [Young-sam] by stripping him of his Assembly seat. As a result, on 13 October, an event that the Park regime probably did not foresee occurred. All sixty-nine opposition assemblymen resigned their seats – an unprecedented event in the history of the Korean legislature. Political paralysis resulted. The floor of the National Assembly was the only arena in which criticisms of the Park government could be voiced. Now even that outlet was blocked (Oh Kie-chiang, 1999).

There was, of course, one remaining arena in which popular opposition could find a voice; it was what Purdie (1990) referred to as 'politics in the streets'.

Immediately upon learning of their representative, Kim Young-sam's, banishment from the National Assembly, residents of Pusan, the southern city port and Kim's legislative district, poured out into the thoroughfares. Rioting began on 15 October, two days after the mass resignation of opposition assemblymen, and observers noted that the participants appeared to come spontaneously from all strata of society; workers, students, church figures, business people, intellectuals, the young, the old, everyone (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989). Furthermore, the demonstrations were no longer restricted to the shouting of slogans and calls for Park Chung-hee to stand down: on this occasion the nightly confrontations included hand-to-hand fighting with the police and organised attacks with missiles and firebombs on police stations and government buildings. Entirely in character, Park Chung-hee's response was to declare a State of Martial Law in Pusan on 18 October but, by then, the nation-wide situation had got out

of hand and any initiative that the Park regime had previously held was now lost. No sooner had the army taken over responsibility for public order from the police in Pusan, than rioting of similar intensity erupted in the nearby city of Masan. Immediately a 'garrison order' was placed on Masan, civil disorder and violence broke out in Taegu, Park's 'home city'; Chongju, a city in central Korea and the political base of the wily *eminence grise*, Kim Jong-pil (see Chapter Eight), and Seoul, the capital city, itself (Oh Kie-chiang, 1999). Anyone witnessing the scenes, and who had experienced the uprising almost twenty years previously that had overthrown the First Republic of Rhee Seung-man would, inevitably, have been struck by a distinct feeling of *déjà vu*. The major difference between April, 1960 and October, 1979, however, was that within a few days the President of the Republic of Korea would not only be deposed, as was the case with Rhee Seung-man, he would be dead.

10.9 The Assassination Of Park Chung-hee

(NB. The events described below derive mainly from four sources. First, the official Investigation Report on the Assassination of President Park, published by the Combined Investigation Headquarters on 6 November, 1979. Second, the Indictment Against Kim Jae-kyu and Seven Other Codefendants, published on 4 December, 1979. Third, the Court Martial Verdict on the Assassination of President Park, published on 20 December, 1979; and finally, a tape recording of the trial of Kim Jae-kyu, which took place between 4 December, 1979 and 20 December, 1979, which has come into the hands of the author).

At a few minutes after 6pm on the evening of 26 October, 1979, and in a Korea where the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary had been rendered all but impotent, and where civil disorder was raging out of control, the four most powerful men in the nation sat down to dine in a restaurant in the KCIA annex in the Blue House compound. The four diners were: President Park Chung-hee; his chief bodyguard, Cha Ji-chol; the Chief Secretary to the President and former Director of the KCIA, Kim

Gae-won, and the current Director of the KCIA, Kim Jae-kyu. All were ex-senior army officers who had played central roles in the military coup of May, 1961 and who had remained in positions of great influence throughout the succeeding eighteen years. Completing the party were two young women, one a model and the other a singer, who sat either side of the President at the dining table. Shortly after 7.40pm Kim Jae-kyu drew a handgun from the waistband of his trousers and shot Cha Ji-chol, hitting him in the right wrist. Cha Ji-chol scrambled into the *en suite* bathroom in an attempt to escape further injury. Kim Jae-kyu then shot Park Chung-hee in the chest. On hearing the shots, KCIA subordinates of Kim Jae-kyu, who were waiting in an outer room and who had been pre-briefed by their Director, killed three other members of Park Chung-hee's security staff and seriously wounded another. Having exchanged his .32 calibre handgun, which had jammed, for a .38 calibre weapon, Kim Jae-kyu returned to the dining room where he encountered the wounded Cha Ji-chol, whom he dispatched with one shot to the stomach. The KCIA Director then approached the President, who was lying on the floor being attended to by the two young women, and shot him behind the right ear. These facts are undisputed. What has never been fully resolved, however, is why Kim Jae-kyu killed Park Chung-hee.

According to the 'official' version, Park Chung-hee had become increasingly dissatisfied with Kim Jae-kyu's performance as head of the security services, and was especially unhappy that Kim had failed to anticipate the Pusan-Masan uprisings and, once they had occurred, had not dealt with them in a sufficiently robust manner. The investigation report states:

During the dinner, the President reprimanded Kim Jae-kyu by asking whether developments in Pusan occurred because the KCIA had no prior information on them.... At around 7pm the President's chief bodyguard Cha assailed Kim Jae-kyu for incompetent handling of the situation in

Pusan, in conjunction with the declaration on October 18 of martial law in the second largest city in Korea Kim Jae-kyu had been also fearful that he might be dismissed in connection with the then developments, in a rumoured impending cabinet reshuffle (Investigation Report, 6 November, 1979).

At the dinner, Cha Ji-chol who, by that time had become the president's main advisor in addition to his role as chief of the presidential security guard, openly berated Kim for his failure to foresee the Pusan-Masan situation and for being 'soft' on demonstrators. He added that tanks should have been sent in to mow down the protestors (Oh Kie-chiang, 1999). Thus, the explanation that was presented to the Korean people was that the president's trusted and long-term friend, fearful that he was about to lose his job, and embarrassed and angered by aspersions being cast, in the presence of two women, on his professional competence and the manner in which he had dealt with the Pusan-Masan crisis, lost control of himself and murdered his most outspoken critic, and his president.²⁸

In the early hours of 27 October, 1979, some four hours after the shootings, Kim Jae-kyu was arrested on the orders of the Minister of Defence and the Army Chief of Staff, General Chong Sung-hwa.²⁹ His trial in the military court began on 4 December, 1979 when, in company with six alleged accomplices, he was accused of 'murder and attempted insurrection'. A seventh alleged accomplice was charged with 'hiding evidence'. Kim Jae-kyu's appeal to the military court, which had imposed the death penalty, was heard on 24 - 28 January, 1980, and his appeal to the Supreme Court began on 28 February, 1980, and the verdict to uphold the death penalty was passed down on 20 May. He was hanged in Serdaemoon Prison, Seoul on 24 May, 1980.

Kim Jae-kyu's version of the events leading up to the assassination differ markedly from those outlined above. According to him, his concern about the manner in which Park was running the country began almost immediately after the 1961 military coup. In the early years, however, Kim was prepared to continue to give his friend and superior the benefit of the doubt, and only occasionally attempted to intervene with suggestions to modify or ameliorate policies being introduced by the president. The introduction of the Yushin reforms in 1972, and the accompanying added constraints on the democratic process, made Kim increasingly uneasy and fearful for the future of Korea, but it was not until he was made Director of the KCIA in 1976 that he felt sufficiently able to make more forceful representations to Park Chung-hee. Kim claimed that he confronted Park and voiced serious reservations on at least four occasions; in 1976, 1977, and twice in 1978; each time being met with angry rebuffs, and an apparent determination to act even more harshly.

In his evidence Kim Jae-kyu makes special reference to the 'YH incident' and declares that although such occurrences were not normally the concern of the KCIA, he decided, as Director, that this was not a run-of-the-mill industrial action that could be left safely in the hands of the police but was, in fact, an event with potentially serious political consequences. Kim states that he believed that the YH women had reached the stage where they were genuinely prepared to die for their cause, and that he instructed his subordinates to ensure that the number of injuries inflicted on the protestors were kept as low as possible. Matters came to a head at the time of the Pusan-Masan riots:

The situation in Pusan was far more serious than I thought. Before I went to see the scene of the demonstrations for myself I had been under the impression that they were being controlled by impure elements. What I found was that the protestors were angry civilians. For example, out of the first 160 people we arrested only 16 were students, the rest of them were ordinary people. Residents were bringing food and drinks out for the

demonstrators and welcoming them into their houses to hide from the police. The whole civilian population was collaborating. About twelve of the police stations were burned and thirteen police cars were set alight. The main complaints of the demonstrators were a comprehensive discontent with the Park government and a deep anger at the expulsion of Kim Young-sam. I became certain that this rebellion was going to spread over the entire country (Transcript from recording of Kim Jae-kyu's trial evidence, December, 1979).

Immediately upon his return to Seoul from Pusan, Kim states that he reported to Park Chung-hee in the Blue House and briefed him on the salient points of his trip:

The President had just finished his supper and Cha Ji-chol was with him. Park Chung-hee went into a tantrum when I told him what I had seen in Pusan and Masan. He said that if the situation gets any worse he will give the order to open fire. He added that although in 1960 Choi In-kyu ordered the shooting of demonstrators and that he and Kwak Young-ju³⁰ were both executed for their troubles, he, Park, was the president, who could execute him? Then Cha Ji-chol spoke up and said: "Look at the Cambodia case, the state remained intact despite killing five million people. If we kill one or two million demonstrators it will not make any difference to us". I could hardly believe my ears but, in truth, my judgement was that these were not just empty words, and that Park was actually going to do it. I knew him better than anybody else, and he meant what he said. He was from an army background, and he was a person who could never take a backward step. The protests and demands of others would not move him one inch (Transcript from recording of Kim Jae-kyu's trial evidence, December, 1979).

Kim Jae-kyu completed his evidence by declaring that he believed in the principles of liberal democracy and that it was the duty of government to protect not only the capitalist and the entrepreneur but the workers as well. During the preceding eighteen years, however, all that had been achieved was that the rich had got richer while the poor had got poorer. In destroying the 'fountainhead of the Yushin system' he had successfully completed his 'mission'; immediately after Park Chung-hee's death, the Prime Minister and acting-President, Choi Kyu-ha, had announced the abolition of the Yushin reforms.

Whichever account of Kim Jae-kyu's motives for killing Park Chung-hee is closer to the truth is immaterial in the context of this study; although, having studied both versions in detail, and having noted the number of obvious inconsistencies in the case put forward by the state, the author is inclined to accept Kim's testimony in preference to that of prosecuting counsel. What is of crucial importance, however, is the pivotal role, in both versions, of the civil uprisings in Pusan and Masan. The single trigger for those riots was the expulsion from the National Assembly of Kim Young-sam, and the reason for his expulsion was his outspoken attack on Park Chung-hee that was precipitated by the treatment meted out to the YH women protestors demonstrating in Kim Young-sam's NDP headquarters. The chain of events linking the formation of the first democratic trade union in Korea in 1970, to the assassination of Park Chung-hee, the end of the hated Yushin reforms, and the spread of democracy in the workplace nation-wide in the 1980's, is manifest and incontrovertible. The defining characteristic of that chain is similarly unequivocal – it was forged by women. As Ogle so perceptively observed:

When, in the mid-eighties, the male workers began to take action on their own, they found that they were standing on the shoulders of women who had struggled for justice for over ten years (Ogle, 1990).

NOTES

¹ Choi Chong-in would later become President of the Chonggye Union from 1971 to 1976.

² Lee Sook-hee's husband, Kim Young-dae, would later become President of the Chonggye Union (1987), and is currently (2000) Vice-President of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). Lee Sook-hee still works as an *oya-machinist* in the Peace Market (Interview, Lee Sook-hee, March, 2000).

³ All of the Chonggye Union officers were under 24-hour police surveillance from the day the union officially came into being; it is, therefore, not inconceivable that it was the police who provided factory owners with advance information of the movements of union staff (Interview, Yi So-sun, March, 1999).

⁴ From January, 1971, these joint union-management meetings were held on a monthly basis.

⁵ To the best of the author's knowledge, and that of all those with whom she has been in contact, nothing more was ever heard of, or from, Kim Song-gil. It is known that his brother was a member of the state's military intelligence service, and it is open to conjecture whether or not Kim Song-gil was warned in advance that renegeing on his mission had given rise to much displeasure at the highest levels of government, and that it would, therefore, be in his best interests to 'disappear'.

⁶ The details of this event are abstracted from a series of interviews conducted with members of the Chonggye Union executive committee and Yi So-sun, November, 1997 – January, 1998; December, 1998 – February, 1999.

⁷ Yook Yung-soo was assassinated in 1974.

⁸ Ham Suk-hun was of a wealthy family and had lived in Canada for many years. His growing disquiet with Park Chung-hee's Yushin reforms precipitated his return to Korea, where he founded a 'progressive' magazine that was highly critical of Park. Ham Suk-hun was a Quaker, and an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King (Interview, Ham Suk-hun, 1987).

⁹ Lee Sung-chul had been a friend of Chun Tae-il and a member of the Society of Fools.

¹⁰ It is of interest, and an example of petty vindictiveness, that when the KCIA went to Lee Sung-chul's office to take him into custody, they began by chastising him for having a photograph of Chun Tae-il next to that of the President on his office wall, and ordered him to replace it with a picture of the First Lady (Interview, Lee Sung-chul, April, 2000). It should be noted that throughout Park Chung-hee's incumbency it was mandatory for all offices, private and public, to display a photograph of the President in a prominent position (Clifford, 1994).

¹¹ The iconic status afforded to Chun Tae-il by the democratic labour movement in Korea and, to some degree, world-wide is well evidenced. What has not been commented upon, however, is the effect his self-sacrifice had among the employer and entrepreneur communities in Korea. The author is unaware of any research conducted in this sensitive area but it does not appear unrealistic to presuppose that Chun Tae-il's action at least caused alarm bells to ring, and may well have precipitated serious introspection on the part of individual employers with regard to the treatment of their employees, and the serious threat to their businesses if Chun Tae-il's example were to spark off popular rebellion.

¹² Random examples of industrial disputes attended and supported by Chonggye Union activists include: Nam-Yang Mulsan leather export company – 1973; Dong-Ban garment company – 1974; Poong-Chun textile company – 1976; In-Sunsa print

company – 1977; Sabuck coal miners – 1980; Min-Young taxi company – 1984 (Interviews, Chonggye Union activists, November, 1998).

¹³ Although the most readily accessible to workers at the time, the education programme organised by the Chonggye Union was not the only ‘academic’ situation in which Chonggye activists could share their experiences. For example, from the mid-1970’s the Kyungdong Presbyterian Institute conducted a Christian Academic Education Programme (CAEP) which included leadership training for middle-level trade union officers. Women from a number of unions attended and representatives from Chonggye frequently gave lectures which were considered the highlights of the course (Interviews, Kim Sae-kun and Lee Kan-taik, organisers of the CAEP, January, 1999).

¹⁴ As an indication of company size at the time of the formation, or transformation, of the five example democratic unions, the total employee establishments, and the number of women employees at each company, were:- Chonggye (1970) – 27,000/c.23,000 women; Dong-il (1972) – 1,338/c.1,200 women; Won-pung (1973) – 2,000/c.1,700 women; Ban-do (1974) – 3,000/c.2,700 women; YH (1975) – 2000/c.1,700 women (Individual branch union records).

¹⁵ Park Chung-hee’s series of Five Year Plans began in 1962 and included extraordinary ‘export promotion policy tools’; tax incentives, tariff incentives, financial incentives, preferential loan arrangements, and other export discount schemes, which all shared two fundamental characteristics; first, they represented extremely attractive inducements to entrepreneurs to enter, and become highly cost-efficient in, the export field and, second, they were open to the most excessive and corrupt exploitation (Lim Young-il, 1981).

¹⁶ The full account of the rise and fall of the YH Company provides a fascinating commentary on the industrial and economic climate in the 1960’s and 1970’s, as well as a detailed insight into the ready corruptibility of Korean business and the Korean state under Park Chung-hee. It is, however, beyond the scope of this study and space permits only a truncated version. A comprehensive account is to be found in *The History of the YH Branch Union* (1984).

¹⁷ Examples of the YH Company’s concept of industrial relations include the offer in July, 1977 to the union president, Choi Soon-young, of a sub-contracting factory of her own, and assistance with her marriage expenses and the fees for her younger brother’s education if she would abandon her trade union activities. Later in the same year the union vice-president, Kwon Soon-gap, was offered a cash payment of 4 million *won*, approximately \$US8,000, on similar conditions. Both women refused the offers (Interviews, Choi Soon-young, December, 1998 and Kwon Soon-gap, January, 1999).

¹⁸ Principal among these were Lee Moon-young, a dismissed professor at Korea University, Moon Dong-hwan, a professor at Hanshin Presbyterian Theology College, and Ko Un, a ‘progressive’ poet (Interview, Choi Soon-young, December, 1998).

¹⁹ Unlike the ‘Dong-il incident’ in the previous year (see Chapter Eight) which, despite world-wide publicity, had been, to a large extent, contained by the Park Chung-hee government and represented as a localised, purely industrial, issue with no political connotation (Choi Jang-jip, 1983).

²⁰ Kim Young-sam was President of South Korea 1992-1998.

²¹ Ma-po is a district on the western side of central Seoul; the NDP Headquarters building is also located in Ma-po.

²² All three sympathisers, and two Protestant ministers who accompanied the YH vice-president to the meeting with Kim Young-sam, were subsequently arrested. They were all released without trial after the assassination of Park Chung-hee.

²³ Kim Seung-ho, a full-time officer at the NTWU in 1979, was ordered to write a press release for the NTWU stating that the YH women's industrial action was communist inspired (Interview, Kim Seung-hoon, January, 1999).

²⁴ Ha Bong-gyu (1989) records:

In the Yushin System, Park Chung-hee was at the centre of a vast patronage system..... Whether by conscious design on the part of Park Chung-hee, or because the decision-making style minimises the propensity for taking responsibility at the lower levels and maximises the reluctance of higher personnel to delegate authority, *the most minute decisions must cross the president's desk.* (author's italics)

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that even if Park did not prescribe personally the magnitude of the police response to the action of the YH women, he did approve it.

²⁵ The almost incredible number of riot police employed on this mission is confirmed in a wide body of literature, including Oh Kie-chiang (1999) and Choi Jang-jip, (1983). A photograph in the possession of the author shows the almost farcical disproportionality of the number of riot police compared with the number of girls and young women sitting on the floor of the NDP conference room.

²⁶ Among the major campus demonstrations in September were: Kangwon University, 3 September; Seoul National University, 11, 20, and 21 September; Ehwa Women's University, 26 September; Yonsei University, 27 September; Korea University, 28 September (Sohn Hak-kyu, 1989).

²⁷ The 'home provinces' of politicians play a more important part in the political process in Korea than is the case with the 'constituencies' of MP's in many western countries. In Korea, home province voter loyalty is very strong indeed; thus, the slightest critical reaction from the home province sends a serious signal to any Korean politician.

²⁸ The contrast between the intense reaction and ongoing conspiracy theories generated in the United States by the assassination of John F Kennedy in 1963, and the almost complete absence of interest or curiosity among Korean people about the true circumstances surrounding the assassination of Park Chung-hee, is startling. Kennedy had been in office for less than three years, whereas Park had ruled for eighteen years and, in less than a generation, had changed his country from a devastated agrarian society to being among the world's leading industrial economies. His assassination must rate among the most important single events to have occurred in Korean history, yet the reasons for it remain a matter of supreme indifference even to those who suffered under his governance.

²⁹ On 31 December, 1979 Chong Sung-hwa was himself arrested and charged with 'aiding an attempted rebellion' (Court Martial of the Ministry of Defence document, 5 March, 1980).

³⁰ Choi In-kyu was the last Home Secretary in the Rhee Seung-man administration and Kwak Young-ju was a senior member of the presidential staff.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION

“One owes respect to the living; but to the dead one owes nothing but the truth”

(Voltaire)

11.0 Introduction

The objective of this thesis has been twofold: first, to demonstrate that the process of the democratisation of the labour movement in South Korea was begun by women workers in the textile and garment industry in the decade of the 1970's and, second, that their achievement has gone unrecognised and unrecorded. This final chapter will draw together and catalogue briefly the salient points made in previous chapters. Although the magnitude and lasting significance of the contribution made by the women of the 1970's has been established, to merely locate their contribution in its rightful place in the history of South Korea does those courageous individuals an added injustice. In order to present a fully coherent analysis of their struggle, it is also necessary to explore the reasons why their contribution has remained, until now, unacknowledged and uncelebrated.

11.1 Salient Factors

This study is focused upon an era that began and ended with a violent and symbolic death, and women workers were inextricably interlinked with both events. In 1970, a young man who had dedicated his life to relieving the suffering of the thousands of girls and young women who laboured in the textile and garment industry, and whose plight he had assiduously researched and graphically recorded, sacrificed himself in their name. In 1979, the autocratic head of state who, above all others, bore the brunt of

the responsibility for the inhuman conditions endured by those who had made the 'Korean miracle' possible, was assassinated by his oldest friend. The first link in the chain of events that culminated in this act was the deliberate and determined politicisation of labour protests staged by women.

Evidence has been presented in the main body of this work which establishes the following:-

From 1948, statute law governing all aspects of labour organisation and worker protection had existed in South Korea. This body of instruments followed closely the pattern set by the United States in post-World War II Japan but, unlike Japan, the legislation was not complementary to the social and industrial circumstances pertaining in South Korea. From the moment of the successful execution of the military coup on 16 May, 1961, Park Chung-hee regarded national economic development as the only means whereby his regime might gain domestic and international legitimacy. In pursuance of this imperative, the government of Park Chung-hee found it both expedient and penalty-free to collude with employers in the routine evasion of even the most fundamental requirements of the law.

The combination of a ruthless drive for economic expansion, led by a government that regarded contravention of employment law with equanimity; an emergent 'class' of first generation entrepreneurs presented with the opportunity to accrue unprecedented wealth; a society that held the status of the female to be little more than that of a slave, and a mass of poverty stricken, naïve, and poorly educated girls and young women desperate for work, resulted in the most appalling and degrading working and living conditions being regarded not only as acceptable, but as normal.

As part of its root and branch remodelling of South Korean institutions, Park Chung-hee's Supreme Council for National Reconstruction dismantled the disparate and factionalised trade union organisations and rebuilt them 'in his own image'. Overseeing the resultant 'official' labour organisation structure was the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), led by the regime's placemen, and dedicated to the furtherance of Park Chung-hee's economic ambitions. All attempts at extra-institutional labour organisation were branded automatically as communist, or communist inspired, and were, thus, categorised as serious threats to national security. The FKTU's positive achievements on behalf of its rank and file membership were negligible, and any concept of the democratic involvement of those for whom the organisation was supposed to be representative was entirely foreign.

From 1961 until at least the middle of the 1970's, the textile and garment industry was the spearhead both of Park Chung-hee's imperative for the rapid industrialisation of South Korea and of his extraordinarily successful penetration of overseas export markets. From the mid-1970's onwards the industry remained among the most crucial elements of economic progress. The great majority, certainly in excess of 80%, of the workers in the textile and garment industry were girls and young women, mostly from rural backgrounds. Although, by the 1970's, some eighty years had elapsed since Confucianism had ceased to be formally recognised as the national creed, its deeply ingrained and all-pervasive influence, especially in regard to gender relations, remained virtually undiminished.

Whilst the image of ‘modern industrial South Korea’ transmitted abroad; the emergent ‘employer class’ of first generation capitalists, and the leadership of the officially sanctioned trade union institutions, at both national and industrial-level, were all beneficiaries of the explosive expansion of the Korean manufacturing economy, the disparity between the life circumstances of the working people and those of ‘the authority’, in whatever guise, grew increasingly stark. In concert with this exacerbation of the demarcation between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ was a growing sense of collective dissatisfaction within the new ‘working class’. All that was required was a catalyst to trigger off positive action. The self-sacrifice of the young, male, Peace Market garment worker, Chun Tae-il, on 13 November, 1970 provided that catalyst.

Spurred on by Chun Tae-il’s desperate example, and encouraged and assisted by fellow members of his Society of Fools, women workers in the Peace Market, with Chun Tae-il’s mother, Yi So-sun, in the vanguard, came together within days of his death and formed the first fully democratic trade union organisation in the history of Korea. Apart from those few young men who had been close associates of Chun Tae-il, and who had assisted in his painstaking research into conditions in the Peace Market, the support and co-operation of male textile and garment workers was conspicuous by its absence.

Despite concerted and protracted efforts on the part of employers and departments of state to impede and restrict the activities of the Chonggye Union, the leadership succeeded in not only surmounting every obstacle placed in its path, but also in encouraging and actively facilitating the spread of democratic trade unionism throughout, and beyond, the manufacturing sector. The achievements of the Chonggye

women, taking place as they did during the most socially oppressive period in South Korean history, constituted a beacon of hope for countless other exploited women, whilst the provisions put in place by the Chonggye Union for the education of workers, from both personal and vocational self-improvement perspectives, empowered and enabled those others to spread the democratic gospel.

The most elusive element in this brief resume is the quantification, in tangible form, of the legacy bequeathed by the women workers of the 1970's. It is, therefore, timely that, at the moment of completing this thesis, the national celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Chun Tae-il took place in South Korea. Timely, that is, because the underlying and self-perpetuating dynamic of these annual ceremonies of remembrance encapsulates the character and the substance of his legacy. Commemorative events extended over a period of three weeks and included mass rallies, academic symposia, church services, theatrical performances, and readings in public of extracts from his diaries. The celebrations culminated with the joining up of many separate processions at the graveside in the cemetery where Chun Tae-il is buried. But who are the tens of thousands of people who attended and participated, and what precisely were they celebrating? The first question is easy to answer for, in common with previous years' events and the degree and content of the wide media coverage, it is clear that no single sector of Korean society dominated the representation. Just as the civil uprisings across South Korea in 1979 united all elements of the population and precipitated the downfall of the Park Chung-hee regime, those who publicly and privately paid their respects in November, 2000 constituted a microcosm of the whole nation. It would, however, be erroneous to construe that the object of their collective remembrance is simply the premature and self-inflicted death of a 22 year-old male

garment worker, of whom no-one outside his own immediate circle knew anything, however brave and dramatic it may have been. In the minds of the Korean people; workers, politicians, religious groups, the poor, the rich, the elderly, and the youthful, the image of Chun Tae-il's sacrifice represents a beginning, rather than an end; a birth rather than a death. These annual celebrations are symbolic tokens of the widespread recognition that Chun Tae-il's final, despairing, gesture provided the seed from which democratic trade unionism and the emancipation of Korean women would grow.

11.2 An Anomaly: The Invisibility Of Struggle

This study began by drawing attention to two extraordinary lacunae in the collective psyche of the people of South Korea: this final chapter will dwell upon a third anomalous circumstance, the substance of which is revealed above. On the one hand we have nation-wide annual celebrations on the anniversary of the death of 'the father of democratic trade unionism', celebrations which cut across the entire grain of South Korean society whilst, on the other, there is a marked reluctance on the part of writers and historians to acknowledge the significance of the contribution made by the very people about whom Chun Tae-il was most concerned and who, in turn, were most inspired and motivated by his example. What compounds the anomaly is the fact that although few, if any, works on the period fail to refer to Chun Tae-il's death, without exception they locate the birth of democracy in the labour movement as having taken place not immediately, or even shortly, after the event, but almost two decades later. No-one questions the illogicality implicit in the recognition of the crucial importance of an event that apparently had no tangible effect for the better part of twenty years. Quotations illustrative of the 'collective amnesia' concerning the struggle of the 1970's women activists are presented below:

That date marks a watershed in Korean history. The country's political and social climate changed virtually overnight, but nowhere was the change more dramatic than in the conduct of labour relations (Kearney, 1991).

This extract could, and should, have been in reference to the formation of the Chonggye Union in November, 1970 and the emergence of Korean women as a force in their own right. It refers to neither; instead it is a commentary upon the 'birth of democracy' announced in a statement made by President Roh Tae-woo in June, 1987.

A kind of '*minjung*', or 'people', power had become apparent throughout the weeks of protest, as Koreans of all backgrounds sent a powerful message to the government demanding immediate democratic reforms Moreover, Korea's middle-class citizens demonstrated a willingness to risk their futures for democracy and human rights. The government learned that the nation risked a bloody civil war. Thus, South Korea's democratisation movement appeared irreversible (Lee Man-woo, 1990).

This extract could, and should, have been in reference to the nation-wide civil uprisings which began in October, 1979, initiated by the actions of Korean women, and which are described in the preceding chapter. It is not; instead it is a commentary upon the 'birth of democracy' that, allegedly, took place as a response to Roh's statement in June, 1987.

Interestingly, and tellingly, examples of the misplaced location of the 'birth of democracy' in South Korea often contain the seeds of their own contradiction. On the page previous to that from which the first of the above quotations is extracted, an account of an incident experienced by the author is recorded:

The five radical unionists do not seem a hard lot. But in their early twenties, these women are already seasoned veterans of two exacting economic campaigns. In the first, the launching of Korean goods into the world marketplace, they are late recruits. In the second campaign, to win basic workers' rights from Korean employers, they are the shock troops. For their efforts they have been harassed and threatened and finally fired from their jobs. They have stood up to their male managers in verbal confrontations and in pitched battles Several of these young women

have been roughed up, and they have photographs to prove it. Here, in the offices of the Federation of Korean Metalworkers Trade Unions, the president of the union and several of her rank and file detail their grievances (Kearney, 1991).

The incident took place in 1988, and what seems to have been unworthy even of comment is the fact that not only were the 'radical unionists' female, but the president of their union was also a woman. The extract includes blatant absurdities. Firstly, if the women were, indeed, in their 'early twenties' in 1988, they were not 'late recruits' to the 'campaign' of the 'launching of Korean goods into the world marketplace', whatever that may mean, they were not even born in 1961 when Park Chung-hee began to focus attention upon export-oriented policies. Furthermore, the women activists from Chonggye, Dong-il, Ban-do, YH, and all the others who suffered through the 1970's would be baffled and, with every justification, take some exception to young women in 1988 being referred to as the 'shock troops' in the struggle to achieve basic rights from Korean employers. The Dong-il women, in particular, might be excused for finding it ironic that these 'shock troops' of 1988 merited commendation for 'standing up to their male managers' whilst their own experiences of a decade before, which aroused world-wide protest, and which brought about the downfall of Park Chung-hee, by implication go unacknowledged. As Lee Chong-gak (see Chapter Eight), a female activist throughout the 1970's and president of the Dong-il Textile branch union from 1976 to 1978, remarked when interviewed in January, 1998:

It cannot be denied that the Korean labour movement has made tremendous advances since 1987, but somehow outsiders have got the impression that it all happened overnight. The easy life that union leaders are enjoying nowadays is not due to their own efforts but is the result of the struggles of a previous generation. For some reason the sacrifices made by our senior workers in the 1970's have all been forgotten.

It is the history of Lee Chong-gak, of Yi So-sun, of the Chonggye women, and the Dong-il women, and of all the other Korean women who fought so hard, and who sacrificed so much in the 1970's, that this thesis aims to recover.

11.3 Why Are The 1970's Women 'Invisible'?

Having presented an exposition of the irrefutable circumstance wherein the truly seminal nature of the contribution by women workers of the 1970's to the democratisation of the South Korean labour movement has remained unrecognised, and having also indicated the implicit denial that the process of democratisation began in that decade, it is important finally to explore some of the prime reasons for such outcomes. As with most societal phenomena, the underlying explanation for these incidences of dismissal and denial comprises a number of diverse strands, each of which, or a combination of which, has exerted varying degrees of influence, dependent upon specific circumstances and particular personalities. With that caveat in mind, it is submitted that there are three pre-eminent factors which have contributed most to the distortion and misinterpretation of history which this study seeks to rectify. First, the nature of the political succession to Park Chung-hee. Second, the ever-present influence of Confucianism in South Korean society and, third, the ideological agenda of university students in the 1970's and 1980's.

11.3.1 Korean Politics After Park Chung-hee

This study has shown that from the time of the military coup in May, 1961, until his death in October, 1979, Park Chung-hee controlled a regime that developed increasingly authoritarian characteristics, and introduced social and economic policies which made life harsh and oppressive for all but the 'chosen few'. There is every likelihood that had his successor been democratically elected, been sympathetic to the

plight of the working population, and taken immediate steps to put in place measures to improve the circumstances under which ordinary people had been forced to survive, the momentum built up by women in the labour movement in the 1970's would have gathered additional pace. The spread of democracy in the workplace would have won growing support from male workers as the women's successes became impossible to ignore and, because of a 'democratic continuum', the fact that women had started it all in the first place could not have gone unrecognised. Such was not to be the case, however, for the demise of Park Chung-hee did not herald a new dawn of freedom and liberalisation. Instead, far from enjoying the privilege of choosing their next president, the Korean people were to witness yet another military take-over and endure twelve more years ruled by corrupt and autocratic army generals.¹

The administration of General Chun Doo-hwan, from 1980 until 1987, was in many respects even more onerous than that of his predecessor; indeed, it was not long after his accession before the bitter aphorism "he's more Park than Park" entered into common parlance, echoing popular disappointment and frustration. Chun exhibited a virulent antipathy toward the elements of democratic trade unionism that had taken root and begun to blossom since 1970. Within months of his assumption of the presidency he had dissolved more than 100 local unions and forced almost 200 union officers to resign their posts. Those who refused were sent to army 'purification' camps where they endured the most brutal of punishments for periods of anything up to six months. Needless to say, the Chonggye Union did not escape these strictures and, in January, 1981, immediately prior to his first visit to the United States as the new President of South Korea, Chun dissolved the Chonggye Union by administrative decree.² For the following six years the Chonggye women were forced to conduct their 'illegal

activities' underground. As a further demonstration that, as far as the democratic organisation of labour was concerned, he meant business, Chun Doo-hwan created a white-helmeted squad of *'paekkol'*, or 'white skull', strike-breakers trained in martial arts and equipped with motorcycles and dressed in specially padded uniforms. They would arrive promptly and in considerable numbers at the scene of any worker protest and wade in with clubs and shields (Cumings, 1997). During the early years of the 1980's, workers arrested under the provisions of the National Security Law constituted one-third of all political prisoners, while human rights organisations estimated that as many as 1,000 former union full-time staff remained blacklisted by the Chun administration for periods in excess of five years (CISJD, 1987).

Chun Doo-hwan was all too aware of the direct connection between the actions of the YH Union women and the death of his mentor, Park Chung-hee, and he was determined to isolate the democratic activists and nullify their organisations to ensure that there was no repeat of the events of 1979. He speedily introduced new labour legislation aimed at banning 'third party intervention' which effectively precluded the possibility of solidarity between individual unions (KCTU, 1992). So, from 1981 until 1987 exceptionally repressive measures were employed to restrict the activities of the democratic trade union activists. This bore the inevitable consequences of reducing substantially the unions' practical effectiveness on behalf of their now 'outlawed' membership, and acted as a very real deterrent to uncommitted workers who might have considered joining. It seriously countered the high public profiles that the female-led unions had attained previously, and drove them underground. Against this background, it is not difficult to conceive how relatively easy it was to erase entirely the achievements of that decade.

11.3.2 The Influence Of Confucianism

Frequent references are made throughout this study to the practical effects of Confucianism in South Korea, and the statement by Song Young Song Yoon (1977) is recorded affirming that sinologists have been surprised to discover that, in many areas of social life, Confucian ideals were observed even more strictly in Korea than in China. Within a culture steeped in the concept of male superiority; where females are traditionally denied any marked degree of individual or intellectual autonomy, and where it is manifestly in accord with the natural order that all matters outside the private domestic sphere are the preordained preserve of men, any encroachments by women into the 'male domain' are regarded, by Korean men, as being presumptuous, abhorrent, and in direct contravention of natural law.

The female textile and garment workers of the 1960's and 1970's had already participated, albeit as a matter of necessity, in a fundamental departure from the cultural norm by leaving their homes prior to marriage and travelling, often great distances, to live in the city. This radical shift in social circumstance and demographic pattern was unsettling enough from a conservative male perspective, but for many of those girls and young women to begin to 'behave like men'; to show initiative, courage, individuality, intelligence, and determination, was a shock of even greater proportion. Not only that, but by the end of 1970 women were actually outmanoeuvring male authority and establishing themselves as a collective force of some consequence. The women had not only escaped from the controlling authority of the head of the family, but they were now seriously undercutting the very bases of male superiority. Ally this eventuality with the uncomfortable awareness, on the part of male workers and male observers, that men had shown a marked and consistent reluctance, or inability, to exhibit similar qualities of

spirit and resolve, and the precursors for a process of belittling, or outright denial, of the achievements of those women are in place. Throughout the Park Chung-hee era, and with relatively few notable exceptions, some of which are highlighted in this thesis, Korean male trade unionists have little of which to be proud; it is, therefore, propitious for them to erase it from the 'official memory'.³

11.3.3 The Ideological Agenda Of Activists ('Hwaldongga')

The history of the Korean student movement's involvement in political affairs dates back to February, 1919 and a demonstration staged in Tokyo by Korean students protesting against the annexation of Korea by Japan. However, its most dramatic achievement was in 1960, when the 'April 19 Student Revolution' brought down the government of Rhee Seung-man. The student population is divided roughly into two factions; one of which holds to the view that the task of a student is to study as assiduously as possible, putting aside all other considerations and distractions until after graduation. Meanwhile, the other faction is more inclined to the view that, as a force of intellectualism and enlightenment, the student body has a duty to lead public opinion and show the older generations the errors of their ways. Of the latter group, Kuah Kwang-man, the then President of Pusan National University, wrote in 1968:

With this event [the April, 1960 Revolution], the Korean students instantly drew the focal attention of the world, and they posed as young heroes. From then on, students began to take issue in trivial matters to such an extent that it appeared to them that nobody else could straighten out the social order; a way of thinking that more often destroyed than corrected the social order. the Korean students, being prisoners of their own heroic psychology, became so sensitive to realities that they tended to interfere with all governments policies and projects. when they are confronted with a national crisis, they tend to have a strong subjective consciousness that only they can save the nation from the crisis, and they have a stronger sense of 'elitism', beyond comparison with that of their counterparts in advanced countries. So instead of taking their college life as a preparatory process for their future participation in society, they rather take it as the very centre of social participation, and hastily reach the conclusion that the college

campus is the home ground for social reforms. Present day student movements [in Korea], which more and more tend to interfere with international issues to find a means of escape from trivial intercampus problems, have helped change and reform societies, but they have also caused in many cases the destruction of the existing social order they professed to uphold and straighten out. We have witnessed many examples in which the extreme students, assuming themselves infallible, have achieved more harm than constructive results in their search for drastic ideals instead of gradual results (Kuah Kwang-man, 1968).

It was the members of this element of the university population that viewed the labour movement as a convenient vehicle for the furtherance of their political ambitions, and who set about infiltrating it at every level. Whilst it must be conceded that some students did make meaningful contributions to the workers' cause, especially where they involved themselves in the education programmes discussed in Chapter Ten; others, perhaps the majority, did not. What became common practice was for individual students to lie about their backgrounds and qualifications in order to gain employment in a textile and garment factory, or in some other industry. Clearly, the reason they had to lie was that even the most unwary of employers would have cause to be suspicious if, for example, a university graduate applied to work as a *shida* in the Peace Market. Once engaged as an 'ordinary' worker, and after carefully taking time to settle in and become accepted by their fellow workers, the infiltrator, or '*hwaldongga*', would begin to 'organise'.

. . . . the workers do not know about my identity. I do not tell them because the relationship we built on the basis of equal status changes once I tell them, "I am a college graduate and I came down here to help you to organise". Rather than preaching to them about what to do from the outside, I would bury myself among them and make changes from within (A female *hwaldongga* who infiltrated an electronics factory in Masan in the 1980's, quoted in Kim Seung-kyung, 1997).

Radical students who professed Marxist/Leninist provenance, and whose hidden agendas were focused more upon anti-capitalism, national unification, and civil

revolution, failed in their efforts to manipulate the labour movement to their own ends. Although, as has been stated, some positive contributions were forthcoming, the presence of these *dilettantes* was not welcomed by working people.

The problems with these so-called *hwaldongga* are many. First, they are impatient. They would like to do something very quickly. They feel that they have to do something, so they start a strike that cannot succeed. And then they just leave. No wonder many politically conscious workers despised students and did not want them (Interview, woman worker in Inchon, quoted in Kim Seung-kyung, 1997).

I hated the way students got involved for a limited period and also hated that the workplace became their experimental ground (Interview, female Vice-President of a Seoul garment factory union, quoted in Kim Seung-kyung, 1997).

The fact that they had failed in their project to use the democratic labour movement as a convenient means of achieving their revolutionary ends came, as events were to show, as the most profound shock to the radical young 'intellectuals' who had joined the labour movement and who, until then, had been convinced of their infallibility. One example of the way in which they vented their frustration was by orchestrating very public 'character assassinations' aimed at leading figures in the democratic movement. At the annual workers' rally in May, 1986, for example, they presented a theatrical drama, the script of which was constructed around a personal and virulent attack upon Yi So-sun, the 'mother' of democratic trade unionism. In the play she was accused of betraying, through her ignorance, the 'scientific' principles of the labour movement because of her opposition to the students' demands to disband all trade unions so that workers could be free to fight for their rights in the streets. The high, or low, point of the diatribe was the most hurtful and distressing accusation that her behaviour in regard to her son, Chun Tae-il, equated to that of Judas Iscariot's to Jesus Christ.

But how does this affect the conventional view? What relevance do those hot-headed, and ideologically radical, university students of the 1960's, the 1970's, and the 1980's have to the absence from mainstream South Korean history of the exploits of women garment workers in the 1970's? The answer lies in the means by which public opinion is formed, because 'public opinion' is merely another way of saying 'conventional view'.

Reference has been made in this thesis to the fact that Koreans have a deeply ingrained respect for scholastic attainment, and hold academic personalities in the very highest regard. Even in the 21st century, the unquestioned order of personal hierarchy in South Korea remains: King, Teacher, Father. In such a social atmosphere it is possible for poorly substantiated theory to assume seminal status solely on the grounds that it appeared in print and bore the imprimatur of a highly qualified academic. Paradoxically, and as the result of bitter experience, female activists from the 1970's lost their traditional respect for academics and intellectuals and, instead came to regard them with suspicion, and their agendas with distrust (see Chapter Four). The combination of these two circumstances: the preparedness on the part of its readership to accept as fact the published theories of academics, and the reluctance of women trade unionists to participate fully in research conducted by those academics, can result in the presentation of research which contains a clear potential for the distortion, or misrepresentation, of history.

Because of their wide circulation, and the greater social depth they permeate, newspapers and periodicals share with more specialist academic works the power to shape public perception. Professional journalists who write in the popular press upon

social and political matters not only tend to come from academic backgrounds themselves, but are equally susceptible to the influence of flawed research. They usually have deadlines to meet, and the opportunity to embark upon independent investigative journalism, even if it were deemed necessary, is frequently precluded. The alternative is to draw upon evidence that has emanated from a respected source, and which accords with the individual journalist's prejudice.

Thus, public opinion and, by association, the 'conventional view', is informed to a large extent by the endeavours of academic writers and journalists. To establish a direct connection between contemporary unargued assumption and erstwhile thwarted radicals, it is necessarily only to ask; "Where now are those university students, those *hwaldongga* of a generation ago"? The answer is that many of them are professors, university lecturers, the authors of academic works, politicians, and journalists.

11.4. The Bases of Collective Workers' Struggle

In seeking to redress the flawed portrayal of the role played by women in the democratisation of the South Korean labour movement, this thesis has revealed, or reinforced, three important social truths. First, there is the extent to which planned social change can have unanticipated and far-reaching consequences. Prior to Park Chung-hee's radical and rapid industrial development initiatives, absolute male dominance in both the public and private spheres was culturally embedded and unchallenged. For centuries, women had not only been forced to occupy the subordinate position in society, but they were, to all intents and purposes, devoid of personal identity. It is not surprising that, in a culture such as this, Korean men did not anticipate that the abandonment of one tradition; that is, the imperative for unmarried girls to

remain in the paternal home until they became the ‘possessions’ of their husbands’ family, would lead to such a radical shift in the balance of gender relations. What triggered the liberation of Korean women, and enabled them to begin to realise both their identity and their potential, was that suddenly, and almost *en masse*, their life circumstances changed. At one moment they were living in the strictly controlled and relatively isolated domestic environment, one that had remained virtually unaltered for many generations and, at the next, they were working and living in the city, beyond the limits of immediate parental influence. Although, as this thesis has demonstrated, the lives of the girls and young women in the textile and garment industry were far from leisurely, they did, nevertheless, gain the unprecedented opportunity to share experiences and relationships with many other women whom otherwise they would never have met. This inevitably broadened their perspectives and kindled their self-awareness. It was through this novel circumstance, more than any other single factor, that the bonds of the past began to weaken.

The second important component of collective worker struggle, and one upon which emphasis has been placed in Chapter Nine, is the frequently disproportionate, and crucial, impact of charismatic personalities and symbolic events. This consideration is especially relevant for projects or campaigns attempting to challenge forces of opposition which are powerful, brutal, and unremitting. In such difficult circumstances it is to be expected that collective determination and application may flag during periods when little progress is evident, or when the opposing force is reacting in a particularly harsh manner. At times such as those, it is vital to the success, or even the continuation, of the collective endeavour that the timid are strengthened and the doubters are reinvigorated. The charismatic leader is able, by sheer strength of personality, by

example, and by the power of persuasion, to instil a similar fervour in those who are as yet uncommitted, and rekindle motivation and optimism in those who may be on the verge of apostasy. The pivotal importance of symbolic events is also explicit in this account of the Korean women workers' struggle, and it is clear that they can serve to provide at least three significant benefits. First, they represent tangible indicators of actual achievement and, thus, add to confidence and determination: the inauguration of the Chonggye Union in December, 1970 and the opening of the Labourer's Classroom in April, 1975 are but two of many examples which are recorded in this thesis. Second, particular dramatic events which 'punctuate' the history of a social movement become part of the folklore of that movement, and are the sources of justifiable pride for participants who are able to say: "I was there". This is not as trivial as it might appear, for pride in association is one of the basic ingredients of loyalty. Finally, symbolic events can 'electrify' entire communities and draw them together in common cause: it is necessary only to mention Chun Tae-il in this context in order to make the point.

The third 'lesson' that emerges from this recovered history, and one that is especially pertinent for labour movements in undeveloped or developing countries, is the importance of the systematic organisation of collective education programmes. Such arrangements can have a number of advantages. It is clear that for a trade union to flourish it is essential that membership and active support is seen to be positively beneficial by each individual member, and every prospective member. In simple terms, workers will not join if it is not worth joining. Furthermore, benefits thus gained should not be confined only to improvements in working conditions. That the young *shidas* in the Peace Market wanted more than anything else to improve their education is described in Chapter Ten, and the fact that the first classes to be organised were

substantially oversubscribed is testament to their sincerity. The important point to note is that improving the academic and vocational skills of its members is as much of an advantage to the union itself as it is to the individual. Ignorance is frequently the main reason for apathy, and an apathetic membership is little better than no membership at all. On the other hand, properly conducted education programmes which include vocational and academic instruction, and which also focus upon developing an awareness of the objectives and functions of trade unionism, reap many rewards. Regular classes provide the opportunity for social interaction, a forum for the exchange of ideas in a structured setting, the fostering of individual self-confidence through achievement, and the development of the sense of community. Most importantly, they also help to supply the basic foundations for nurturing the trade union leaders of the future.

11.5 The Future

In truth, little can be said with confidence or certainty about the prospects for the future of the South Korean labour movement. As discussed above, the end of the Park Chung-hee regime did not herald a bright new beginning for Korean trade unionism. On the contrary, there were to be many more years of conflict and suppression. The success of Kim Dae-jung in the 1997 presidential election might well have been the watershed in Korean industrial relations. For the first time in its brief history South Korea had a leader who had personally fought as hard against authoritarian governments, and had suffered as much, as any of the democratic trade union activists of the 1960's and 1970's. One of his first initiatives was to officially recognise the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, the 'umbrella' organisation of the democratic trade unions. Regrettably, Kim's inauguration coincided with the virtual

collapse of the Korean economy in December, 1997. The International Monetary Fund was called in and the strictures imposed by its representatives reduced almost to nothing Kim Dae-jung's room for manoeuvre with regard to national labour policy. The imperative for radical industrial restructuring, allied with a labour movement now forced onto the defensive and deeply divided by political and ideological differences, has resulted in an unstable trade union movement that is signally lacking in direction and purpose. The future is unclear.

What can be declared with absolute certainty, however, is that the democratic principle is now firmly embedded in the South Korean labour movement, and it is due to the efforts of the female textile and garment workers of the 1960's and 1970's that this is so. Just as the full extent of the achievements of those pioneers can no longer be denied, the 'genie of democracy' that they so courageously liberated can never be put back into the bottle.

NOTES

¹ In December, 1995 former Presidents Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1987) and Roh Tae-woo (1987-1992) were sent to trial charged with bribery, treason, and murder. Chun was sentenced to death (later rescinded) and ordered to repay \$US 283 million to the state, and Roh was sentenced to 22 years imprisonment and ordered to repay \$US355 million (Oh Kie-chiang, 1999).

² Yi So-sun and thirteen full-time union officers, including her remaining son Chun Tae-sam, were imprisoned for periods ranging between one and two-and-a-half years.

³ It is recognised that 'male chauvinism' is often an all too easy hook upon which to hang sometimes unwarranted grievances. In Korean society, however, where the ethos of the dominant male flourishes as much at the beginning of the 21st Century as it did in the 1960's and 1970's, it is a tangible entity. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to assume that such bigotry is restricted to the lesser educated and more narrowly experienced sections of the populace. For example, whenever Korean academics congregate, whether it be in Korea itself or abroad, it is noticeable even to the most unjaundiced eye how difficult and uncomfortable it is for male academics to relate on anything approaching equal terms with similarly qualified females. Whatever subjects the female academics are specialising in, they are trivial, at best, in comparison with those being studied by the males. The inherent insecurity of Korean males manifested here translates precisely to their inability to concede any degree of respect for the achievements of the 1970's women trade unionists.

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