

**Color from Shadows:
A Narrative of the Life and Work of
Hyun-Sook Lee Kim of Korea**

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Acronyms

| | |
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| AFSC | American Friends Service Committee |
| DMZ | Demilitarized Zone |
| DPRK | Democratic People's Republic of Korea |
| KCIA | Korean Central Intelligence Agency |
| NCPKP | National Council of Peace on the Korean Peninsula |
| NGO | Nongovernmental Organization |
| SOFA | Status of Forces Agreement |
| WMP | Women Making Peace |

Dropped Apples

It was a London autumn in the late 1950s. The school principal from Korea passed by a park and within it, a large apple tree. He was curious because there were several apples that had fallen to the ground, but nobody gathered them. The man continued on, encountering smiling Englishmen and women, saying “Hello” or “Good morning,” even to this stranger from a distant land.

The principal returned to Korea and shared his experiences with his young students at a morning gathering.

It was so impressive to him. At that time our economic situation was harsh after the end of the Korean War. If you find any apples under the trees, you take it for food. At that time people were still in the middle of suffering from the scars of war and poverty. Why was he smiling like Englishmen?

However, when I heard the story of this principal, I felt that we Koreans were so bad and inferior. Why don't we smile? Why do we always look angry? Why do we pick up dropped fruit under the tree without any hesitation?¹

Hyun-Sook kept these thoughts in her mind. But when she was older, she had the chance to travel to Britain for a year. She, too, observed the pleasantries and the lack of want in British society.

The social welfare system was well-organized; they did not need to get angry like us. Now in Korea, our society has developed toward economic prosperity and people are starting to laugh. It means that we are OK now. We are no longer starving. So, these days, we never take any dropped apples, you see?

¹ All quotations not cited in the text are taken from interviews with Hyun-Sook Kim Lee between September 29 and December 5, 2003.

Tough Elegance

Korea is situated on the Korean peninsula in East Asia. It borders China to the northwest and Russia to the northeast, with Japan to the southeast across the Korea Strait. The founding of the kingdom of Gojoseon marks the beginning of Korean history in 2333 B.C. Beginning in the seventh century, Korea was a single, independent country, but the Japanese began its occupation in the late nineteenth century and formally annexed the peninsula in 1910. Koreans were violently subjugated, with over five million people forced into labor, tens of thousands of men conscripted into the military, and tens of thousands of women and girls made to be sexual slaves for the Japanese military.

When Japan was defeated by the Allies in World War II, the country was divided along the thirty-eighth parallel, with the United States disarming the Japanese troops south of the border, the Soviet Union disarming those to the north. The two powers installed governments of their own liking, effectively dividing the peninsula in the late 1940s into North Korea (officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK) and South Korea, or the Republic of Korea.

But a war between the north and south broke out between 1950 and 1953, and ended with a ceasefire agreement, but no permanent peace treaty was ever signed. The effects of the war were devastating, killing thousands of troops and civilians and “creating ten million separated families” as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) along the thirty-eighth parallel became the truce line and the official border between north and south.

Hyun-Sook Lee was born into this situation, in the small county of Yongdong, Chungchong Province—in the middle of South Korea. In 1946, the year of her birth, the wounds of World War II and the end of the Japanese occupation were gaping, the aftershocks potent, and

were made even more so after the war in the early 1950s. “Everything was so gloomy. After the war we suffered from want, a lack of things.” The aid clothes from the U.S., which were “too big, too strange, too colorful,” were distributed at church and school, and even the civilians wore used military uniforms in daily life because of the lack of clothing. Hyun-Sook and her classmates “were always supplied with milk powder. But as it became a lump of hard milk, they boiled it to make it a liquid, and the taste of the milk was not good. We had to drink it because it was mandatory for our nutrition.”

Poverty was extreme and widespread. But Hyun-Sook’s family never went hungry. Though her father was a public servant, his income was meager, so they relied on a provision of grain from her grandparents who were farmers.

Always we had some beggars at our door. They never knocked. In Korea, in old times, doors were open. Anytime you could get in any house. People knew why they had become beggars, so we had deep sympathy for them and always shared some food with them, even though we did not have enough food for ourselves. Compared to others in a worse situation, my family was OK, but still suffered from shortage of other things.

With the stench of devastation surrounding her in the post-war landscape, Hyun-Sook relished in new material goods.

When I was given new shoes, rubber things, it was a big joy, so I always would smell them. But the smell was kind of oil-ish, like gasoline. And also, when I got new books that were supplied by the school, by the government, I smelled them. I really enjoyed this smell. It was a kind of new thing to me—new things and a new world. It was a sign of a new world. There must be a new world.

But the old world of violence, the legacy of occupation and war, still pervaded her young life. As a middle school student, Hyun-Sook took the train to school in the city of Daejeon each day—one hour each way. In the train were many former soldiers, now disabled—some were amputees who had metal hooks where their hands used to be. Driven to aggression by their poverty and anger, the wounded soldiers used their metal hook “hands” to intimidate the other

riders, even the child Hyun-Sook, into giving them money or a bit of anything that would alleviate their plight.

During this time, school gates were covered with placards of anti-communist slogans, such as “Beat down the Communists,” inciting its readers to violence. “When I saw the placards on the gate of the elementary school, they were very tough words. I really, really disliked that. I was so afraid of these kinds of militaristic and violent things.” Her fellow students nicknamed her “Elegance.” “I don’t know why, but from a young age I was always pursuing elegant things, even though my situation was so different. Always I was dreaming of elegant things.”

Sitting in cinemas with her class on school field trips, Hyun-Sook watched films that exposed the terrors of the Japanese occupation, replete with explicit torture scenes. The true story of a sixteen-year-old college student and activist, Yu Kwan Soon, tortured to death by the Japanese, jarred the young spectators. “The whole school went to the cinema to see this film. We were so surprised and shocked by the fear from this film. I cannot forget it. There was a scene of torture—taking off all the nails, electric shock. It was so cruel.”

Home, in contrast to the prevailing poverty and cruelty on the streets and at school, was a haven for Hyun-Sook. Her father, while stern on occasion, was not violent, not “so patriarchal,” and the young Hyun-Sook, unlike so many other girls in Korea, had no restrictions or limitations upon her ambitions. Within the walls of the house, she never felt the patriarchy that was so entrenched in the society—quite the opposite. As the eldest child in the family, she felt valued and respected within the home, and grew up the designated “hope” of the family.

Hyun-Sook’s mother planted the first seeds of potential in her daughter’s mind. Despite lacking a formal education, “she was quite an intellectual woman. In the old times, women were not allowed to study. I heard that when she was young, always over shoulders she studied

something, like when her brother was studying.” Her mother subscribed to the newspaper, one of the only families in the neighborhood to do so because of the poor economic situation, but “she always read the paper and a monthly magazine and listened to the radio,” because of her concern with political matters in the post-war climate and the newly developed democracy of South Korea. One night, the beginning of a new year, her mother turned on the radio to hear the state of the union address. Hyun-Sook watched her mother thrill at the sound of a woman journalist covering the presidential press conference after. “It was unique to have a woman journalist at this kind of political meeting. My mother liked this lady so much. Whenever she was on, she always turned on the radio and listened and told me, ‘This lady is a special person.’”

Outside the Walls

In 1966, a year after her mother’s untimely death—she never recovered from a debilitating stroke—Hyun-Sook moved away from Yongdong to enroll in Hanshin Theological Seminary in the capital city of Seoul. Her enrollment in Hanshin was motivated by an inspiring lecture on Christian faith—given by Helen Kim, the then president of Ewha Women’s University—at a church in Yongdong, and by the works of Albert Schweitzer, a German theologian and doctor who lived much of his life as a missionary in Africa and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952.

At the beginning of the decade, General Park Chung-Hee had overthrown the civilian government in a coup and imposed martial law for a time. His crackdown on political dissent, as well as the normalization of relations with Japan in a hurried and “rough-and-ready method,” spurred steadfast resistance from pro-democracy university students and intellectuals. Many

students from Hanshin, Hyun-Sook among them, were involved in the increasingly frequent demonstrations against the regime.

The 1960s was the “revolutionary era” of the American anti-war, civil rights, and women’s liberation movements, as well as the national liberation struggles across the developing world. The “new paradigm” in theology was also an emerging trend. Traditional theological teachings were characterized by a rather narrow focus, but the movements for rights and freedom across the international spectrum had a profound influence on theology in the 1960s.

This new trend came up and it affected the religious field as well. In early times, theologians focused on the church itself. [In the 1960s], they approached it differently, from the church-centered to the world-centered. They began to see where God was working. Before the ‘60s, they thought that God was working in the church. But since then, they began to see that God is working in the world, in history. So, they began to have much more concern about social issues. In short, it was a theology on how to change this unjust world into a just and peaceful world. It was called a theology of *Missio Dei*. It was a profound paradigm shift.

Dictatorship

Hyun-Sook graduated from Hanshin just as Korean society was on the crest of an expansive wave of demonstrations on behalf of workers’ rights and an end to Park’s military dictatorship. The same year Hyun-Sook received her diploma, a young factory worker named Jun Tae-II was working fourteen-hour days for meager wages, not enough to support his family. He had tried all means of redress, but was repeatedly frustrated by the lack of attention to the conditions of workers in the country. To bring attention to his plight and thousands like him, he committed suicide by setting himself on fire.

In the nearly ten years since the military coup had brought Park to power, Korea had been run with militaristic discipline in order to create an efficient industrialization machine. The economy surged forward as rural dwellers were drafted to work in urban factories. The rapid

move to industrialization and urbanization brought with it serious social issues, manifested in human rights violations, lack of freedom of speech, corruption, pollution, the unequal distribution of wealth, and inhumane working conditions. When challenged on these issues, however, the military regime would respond that personal freedoms and human rights could not be addressed until the country prospered economically.

But it was only with the tragedy of Jun's death that citizens became fully aware of the magnitude of the problems; university students and intellectuals, in particular, were shocked by his self-sacrifice. They began to see their society through the eyes of the working class. As the students had done in the 1960s in opposition to Park, so they organized on the grassroots level to call for an end to Park's rule, and this time, also to improve the working conditions of the people, mainly through reduced hours and greater pay, or "the right to live." But in 1972, Park declared *yushin*, or "renovation," and scrapped the old constitution to create a legal space in which to revoke basic civil rights. In the name of "national security," countless citizens who were protesting were arbitrarily arrested, tortured, or murdered by the authorities. The progressive Christian churches became central actors, along with university students and workers, during this period, initiating a mass democratization movement and forcefully calling for the fair treatment of the working class.

At a young age I was like a frog in a well: trapped. It was a small world. But in the 1970s, I was *in* the world. I was fortunate to go through this period. I used to say that this severe situation saved me from the frog situation. In those days, formal education did not give us much enlightenment on social contradictions. This, our social situation, gave me enlightenment on democracy, human rights, and grassroots issues. It really saved me.

In the atmosphere of unrest in South Korea, Hyun-Sook followed her theological training and began working in the church as general secretary for a Seoul chapter of a women's organization associated with Christ Presbyterian Church. There was no progressive women's

movement in South Korean society in the 1970s, yet members of Hyun-Sook's group, the Church Women's Association, along with another leading organization, Church Women United, became immersed in the democratization movement.

Whenever the protestors waged this kind of demanding demonstration, the government always suppressed the demonstrators in the name of national security, so during this time, so many students and religious leaders were arrested. It was daily life. At the time, I was working in the church women's organization, and we collected money to help the prisoners' families or the prisoners themselves, and we also had a prayer meeting to demand their prompt release and publicize what was happening.

Under the Park dictatorship, all media was state-controlled, so the role of groups like Hyun-Sook's in delivering information to citizens was critical. "We organized prayer meetings and publicized what the real facts were, who was arrested." If and when the cases would go to trial, the women gathered outside the courthouses to support the prisoners and demonstrate to the regime that the movement was not dead, singing "We Shall Overcome" or chanting "Overthrow the military dictatorship!"

Another issue which quickly drew the organization to activism was a legal case of hiring discrimination. A Korean resident in Japan, Park Jong Suk, applied for a position at Hitachi, passing the first stage of the process; but in the final one he was identified as Korean and denied employment. One of Hyun-Sook's former professors, Woo-Jung Lee, learned of the case Park was filing against the company, and the women's group "quickly made it a national issue through a press release." They organized a boycott of Hitachi products, which also meant a refusal to buy anything from Goomsung Electronics, a Korean company and Hitachi's partner.

Professor Lee also made it an international campaign. Actually, the church has a very good international network. If we campaigned in one place, it spread quickly all over the world. When it reached the U.S., Hitachi in the U.S. got such strong pressure from these churches, and this influenced the court ruling. Women are so strong. Finally, Park Jong Suk won the case and sent us a thank-you letter. It was

a good experience for me. Struggles to bring about democracy, human rights, and the right to live were daily life for us in the 1970s.

Naming

Apart from their advocacy for prisoners and legal redress for discrimination, the association also worked for women's empowerment at the grassroots level. In conjunction with the urbanization of the economy was the presence of many young women in the slum areas of Seoul, most often the wives of migrant men who came to work in factories and markets. Hyun-Sook's group began educational programs for these women and set up a daycare center so the women could attend the programs. The church group aided the women in establishing credit unions to address their financial needs and took up collections for their children's school fees. They also began focusing on the needs and education of bus conductors, a popular occupation among the young migrant women. "They suffered from very mean working conditions. Sometimes it became a social issue when they were abused by their male managers; sometimes they experienced some kind of sexual abuse. So, we were counseling these bus ladies about women's issues."

Though Hyun-Sook was working on improving the status of women in Korea, she still felt confinement within society, but she "couldn't name it." In 1974, the United Nations declared that the following year would be designated "International Women's Year." The Korea Christian Academy responded to the announcement by initiating a series of seminars directed at young women intellectuals and leaders throughout the country. The initial aim of the program was broad: to create an awareness of the gender issues that exist within any given society, and to provide young Korean women with the theoretical tools to examine their own positions as subordinates in a patriarchal Confucian society.

Confucianism first took root on the Korean peninsula in the fourth century. Central to this thought is the precept of order and hierarchy, dictating the place of each person in society and his or her relationship to others. Confucianism taught that through the course of a woman's lifetime, she was beholden to "Three Obediences" and must submit to the males in her life: first her father, then her husband, and finally, her son. Man is heaven, the philosophy teaches, while Woman is the earth below.

In accordance with this tradition, whatever humiliations, discomforts, or abuses a Korean woman might encounter, she invariably returned to the entrenched belief that her life's lot was unchangeable.

When you face a man crossing in front of you, you must wait until he passes by because you are female. Men are more important. And also, you must be quiet; if you laugh too loud, you are not feminine. I obeyed this kind of teaching, but in my mind, it was not fair. But I couldn't say it because I had to obey these teachings. This kind of thing made me feel very confined. I had felt some kind of resentment from this treatment, but I couldn't name it. Always I felt that this was my fault.

The program at the Korea Christian Academy, however, enabled its participants, including Hyun-Sook, now in her 30s, to view their lives from outside of this Confucian perspective. Freshly exposed to feminist theory, the young women put a name to the invisible struggles they endured and the subtle, "tricky" ways in which women were oppressed in Korean society.

Hearing, Speaking, and Seeing in a New Family

On the eve of her marriage in 1974, Hyun-Sook's father handed her a letter, a traditional lesson that parents passed down to their daughters in Korean culture. She opened it to read his words of advice: In relation to her new in-laws, she should be deaf for three years, dumb for three years, and blind for three years—otherwise, she would "face a lot of difficulties." With her

new feminist education from the Korea Christian Academy, she dismissed the lesson as patriarchal and “old-fashioned.”

But as she discovered that her new husband, a childhood acquaintance and now a journalist with a leading Korean newspaper, and his family were extremely warm and caring toward her, she also found that their perception of marriage differed greatly from her own. Hyun-Sook regarded the events that occurred in a marriage to be a private matter; her new family-in-law, however, believed the union to be merely an extension of the family’s communal life. “They were not ready to acknowledge a certain distance between new family and their own.” They would visit from their home in the countryside at any time without giving notice of their plans. Her husband, the eldest of seven, decided to welcome his youngest brother to live in the house. In addition, her husband’s “absolute loyalty” to his parents kept him from acting as a mediator to help his family understand Hyun-Sook’s discomfort with the new environment.

Hyun-Sook found that she was entirely unprepared for what marriage entailed, and that her husband’s family had been just as unprepared for welcoming a new member into their lives. For her, the revolution of marriage was analogous to “planting a grown tree in different soil.” One evening she asked her husband to join her in the kitchen to peel and chop garlic while she prepared the rest of the meal. Her mother-in-law, astounded that her son would be asked to do tasks in the kitchen, ordered him not to follow the request. Fortunately for Hyun-Sook, her husband was “not an authoritative person” and respected his wife’s views, but because of her liberal inclinations and new understanding of feminism, Hyun-Sook was regarded as an “indiscreet follower of Western culture.” Her belief in the women’s liberation movement seemed radical and rebellious to her husband’s family, who stood steadfast in their Confucian traditions. “At that time, I did not know how to handle marital life, conflict resolution, and family life.

Nowadays there are many books, but back then there was nothing. I think I had no skills to handle these things.”

Within two years of her marriage, Hyun-Sook bore a daughter and a son, and continued working for the church’s women’s organization. The 1970s was a decade of navigation for Hyun-Sook as her eyes were opened to the democratic and women’s movements; but she still had to meet the challenges of implementing her new ideals into a traditional, conservative society.

The period of the 1970s was gray for me. Before that was a dark period which came from a war-torn situation, poverty, and fear. But in the 1970s, the marital life and social struggle in the movement for democratization made my life very gray—as well as enlightened.

Dictatorship II

In October of 1979, a tectonic shift in the political landscape in Korea came when General Park was assassinated by a member of his inner circle. In the vacuum of power, South Koreans hoped the democracy they had been calling for would now emerge. But when another military leader, General Chun Doo-Hwan, claimed Park’s seat in late 1979, the promise of democracy died as limited martial law was installed, allowing General Chun unlimited powers.

As the country spun into a renewed cycle of turmoil, Hyun-Sook, armed with a newly-earned master’s degree, accepted a position in January 1980 as chief of the Women’s Desk at the Korea Christian Academy, the same institution which had sparked her interest in feminism during International Women’s Year. Because of the academy’s liberal-oriented “awareness-raising” programs, it had been labeled a communist organization by the military government. Many staff members from the academy were arrested during a crackdown on democracy proponents following General Park’s assassination; when Hyun-Sook joined the group, it was in

the throes of reconstruction. In her new role, Hyun-Sook developed educational programs directed at women. Though the programs were “powerful and attractive,” would-be participants were reluctant to come to the academy because of the staff arrests and the label affixed to the institution. They were concerned they would likewise be charged with violating the regime’s anti-communist law. “This was regarded as the most fearful charge by Koreans. People were afraid of coming to these programs.”

When General Chun took control of the country, Hyun-Sook’s husband was the vice-president of the Korean Reporters Association; newspapers throughout the country suffered under strict governmental surveillance. At midnight on May 17, 1980, full martial law was declared across the country. That evening, Hyun-Sook’s husband came home late after a night of drinking. They quarreled, but before going to sleep, he expressed concern that something unforeseen would happen to Hyun-Sook.

They were both startled from their beds at five o’clock the next morning. Without explanation or apology, armed agents of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) burst into the house—still wearing their shoes, displaying an utter lack of respect—ordered Hyun-Sook and her husband not to move, and then rummaged through bookshelves and drawers. The agents then grabbed him and dragged him away, while a single officer remained in their bedroom for the rest of the day, rifling through books and family documents.

The next day, citizens in the southern city of Kwangju were in the middle of a sustained demonstration when the military used the declaration of martial law to swiftly and fiercely suppress the democracy advocates. Hundreds of demonstrators were killed and many more detained. But Hyun-Sook was not aware of the occurrences in the south; the media was so tightly controlled that external observers knew more about the Kwangju massacre than Korean citizens.

Furthermore, Hyun-Sook was preoccupied with the whereabouts of her husband, who had been taken away; no one had informed her about where he was or his well-being. She had the eerie feeling of being constantly watched; crossing the street, she would notice a man standing on the corner, everything but his eyes covered by a newspaper.

After twenty-five days, her husband returned—but his behavior was extreme, full of fear and paranoia. He would not discuss where he had been taken or what had transpired, but they would receive threatening phone calls, with an anonymous voice warning, “Be careful not to say anything. We are watching you.” Her husband pleaded with Hyun-Sook to resign her position at the academy. During his detention, he had seen a list of persons deemed “dangerous” by Korean intelligence. Hyun-Sook’s name was on the list. She and her husband both resigned their positions.

Hotline

Martial law was finally lifted in 1981 and with her and her husband’s fears somewhat assuaged, Hyun-Sook rejoined the academy and her post at the Women’s Desk. At the academy, Hyun-Sook deepened her study of feminism and began forging bonds with other women who had similar interests.

The Korea Christian Academy was an intellectual gathering. Selected leaders, activists, politicians, and scholars who had concerns about social reformation and change came for various programs of the academy. Therefore, the academy was very influential in Korean society.

I was responsible for training women leaders who would bring about social change and create a new women’s movement. So, my knowledge of feminism and my human relationships were growing wider through the training programs and contacts.

Hyun-Sook sought a wide spectrum of women; program attendees were in senior positions at banks, directors of nationwide women's organizations, leaders from churches, housewives, and many others.

But while occupied with those programs, she simultaneously began to consider the development of a new strategy in the women's movement. She had learned of church seniors who had recently introduced a movement known as "Lifeline" (a kind of hotline) in order to address the increasing numbers of suicides and the inability of society to deal with mental health issues. Hyun-Sook surmised that such a hotline, but one that dealt with women's issues, would be an opportunity for cooperation between academy-trained and local-level women to meet together and collectively solve some of the problems facing women in Korea. She believed phone counseling could be an efficient tool to provide women some much-needed social support.

Hyun-Sook and the other organizers of the hotline knew that in order to be initially successful, they needed to isolate a particular issue to focus on, rather than trying to tackle all the problems that Korean women face. The academy's vice director advised that they begin by tackling domestic violence. But the women were shocked at his suggestion—"How could it be possible that a man would beat his wife?" Hyun-Sook and the other women developed a survey to investigate whether or not violence in the home was a pressing concern in Korean society. Co-authored by professors and the academy staff, the survey was disbursed in socially and economically diverse areas in and around Seoul. When the data was collected, the women were stunned once again: forty-one percent of the women surveyed indicated they had experienced some form of domestic abuse. The women released their findings to major Korean news outlets and soon, Seoul was abuzz. The public response was a mixture of a sense of relief by the victims, and by conservatives, discomfort with social intervention into family matters.

To provide support to these victims of domestic violence, Hyun-Sook and three other colleagues and friends officially opened the Korea Women's Hotline on June 13, 1983. Ke-Kyung Lee, who later became president of the Women's Newspaper; Hee-Sun Kim, a future congresswoman; Hwa-Su Lee, a professor at Ah Ju University; and Hyun-Sook helped train volunteer counselors to staff the two telephone lines, situated in a makeshift office on the roof of a four-story building in downtown Seoul. From the outset, the hotline volunteers and Hyun-Sook were overwhelmed with the volume of calls received. There were frustrating calls, such as one from a woman who was not able to avoid beatings from her husband: "He provides for me, even though he beats me often," she reasoned. But there were also voices on the line that were grateful for the hotline's work. One caller commented, "This is wonderful, but why, oh why, did it take so long?"

The hotline not only provided an outlet for battered women to seek guidance and counseling, but also, it ignited a true "progressive women's movement" in Korean society and expanded beyond its initial scope of domestic violence. In 1990, the organization initiated a broad movement with other women's organizations to create legislation on gender violence, the culmination of which was the 1994 Act on the Punishment of Sexual Crimes and the Protection of Victims, followed by the Special Act for the Punishment of Domestic Violence and the Victim Protection Act of 1997. The hotline has also worked with other women's organizations to change discriminatory laws that do not effectively protect women, including enforcing the implementation of the Equal Employment Act. The group that began in a makeshift office expanded, as of 2003, to twenty-one branches, including fifteen sexual violence counseling centers, five women's shelters, and one "house for working women." The women and men staff

and volunteers have watched and participated as the phrase “women’s rights are human rights” has become entrenched in Korean society.

A Common Education

Since the Kwangju uprising in 1980, the Korean social movement continued agitating for democracy, but also began focusing on the very ideas of nationhood, or *minjok*, and the people, *minjung*. Students and progressive Koreans became more and more resentful of American involvement in Korea; the sense of anti-Americanism was a direct result of U.S. support for both General Park and General Chun, the leader during the Kwangju massacre.

While working at the academy, volunteering her time at the hotline, and lecturing part-time in women’s studies at a local college, Hyun-Sook learned of an opportunity through the United Church of England to travel to the United Kingdom for a year to learn English and take classes through the consortium of schools known as the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham. At Selly Oak in 1984 she encountered diverse people: human rights and peace activists and scholars from over forty countries, many of whom were religiously diverse as well—fellow Protestant Christians, Catholics, Muslims, and Buddhists. It was Hyun-Sook’s first opportunity to understand global issues from a variety of perspectives, and her first chance to see how these issues compared to and influenced the issues she faced in Korea. Moreover, the distance from the peninsula allowed her space for “self-reflection and an objective view of Korean society.”

Often in the halls and sidewalks of Selly Oak, Hyun-Sook heard about a group of women who were permanently protesting nuclear weapons. With the Cold War at its height, the U.S. had deployed a set of medium-range cruise missiles at Greenham Common in England, about eighty miles south of Birmingham, in order to deter Soviet aggression. The peace movement in the UK

had protested prior to the deployment, and continued its advocacy against them by camping out just beyond the barbed-wire fence that surrounded the weapons. The women planned to stay at the settlement in relay shifts, year after year, for as long as they needed to—many of them facing fines, court dates, and even imprisonment for their participation.

One early morning, Hyun-Sook and a Korean friend, a visiting scholar at Selly Oak, climbed into a van with two women ready to take them to Greenham. Ever since she had heard of the sustained demonstration, Hyun-Sook had wanted to witness it with her own eyes. Several of her friends had cautioned her about visiting, thinking it might be too dangerous for a foreigner; Hyun-Sook thought she would be safe with her scholar friend, a man, accompanying her. The group stopped at various houses all along the drive, the women jumping out to accept donations and contributions—mainly in the form of food, firewood, and blankets—from supporters of the peace activists. Soon, the van was full to its roof with provisions for the campers.

With the common in sight, the two women stopped the van and informed Hyun-Sook's escort that only women were allowed to the site. He would have to wait along the road until the women returned later that day. When Hyun-Sook asked why no men were permitted, one explained that the organizers of the protest had decided that in order for women to have control of the demonstration, they had to exclude men—wherever men were present, “women's autonomy could be broken. We want to be independent. We want to see how women can manage these tough things.”

As they approached the camp, the barbed-wire fence was covered in posters and decorations, colorful and festive, standing in stark opposition to the intimidating soldiers and weapons just on the other side of it. Women milled all around the encampment, laughing and

talking while chopping wood, making coffee over campfires, or even dancing. Despite the joviality, the appearance of the women highlighted the hardships they faced camping for so long. But even so, Hyun-Sook was moved, thinking, “The power of women makes a difference.” She remembered the saying in Korea that you become a patriot while away from the country—she wanted to figure out how to transfer her new experiences and knowledge to her own land.

I couldn't forget the women in Greenham Common. I heard some stories of what they did during their protest. Everything was new and surprising. I found strong women's power there. I thought we needed this kind of strong peace movement in Korea, still under the division.

On her way to Birmingham, Hyun-Sook was calculating when she could begin living this new passion for peace issues in Korea.

I was counting when I could be free from most of my heavy jobs and responsibilities I assumed as a mother, wife, and daughter-in-law. I found that at the age of fifty, I can be an independent person, because at that time my children would be grown up and my capability and flexibility to handle things would increase at that age.

New Media

Since the 1980 government crackdown on dissent, Hyun-Sook's husband had been out of a job. As the time of his unemployment was prolonged, he started a course of study for a doctoral degree. Returning home from Birmingham in 1985, Hyun-Sook continued lecturing at various colleges. She also began writing. Her former organization's headquarters, the National Church Women's Association, asked her to co-author—with her former professor and mentor, Lee Woo-Jung—a detailed history of the group for the occasion of their sixtieth anniversary. Before writing, she began an intensive study of modern Korean history, considering this work a self-designed doctorate course. Her husband, whose major study was history, tutored her on Korean and world history.

When you write the history of some organization, it can't be isolated from the social context. This Church Women's Association, with the Church Women United—they were the most active organization operating at that horrible time in the 1970s. So, when I described the activities of this organization, I needed to study the whole historical background of this time.

The study of history also allowed her to understand her own life and thought in a fresh light. As time went on, however, her situation was getting worse economically and in her relationship with her husband. "I really couldn't bear the seven-year unemployment of my husband. Sometimes we discussed divorce. That made our situation tough." Fortunately, in 1987 he returned to work as General Chun's reign was ended by the democracy movement. The new leader, Roh Tae-Woo, lifted governmental control of the media and many journalists found their way back to the field.

Following the publication of the book in 1989, Hyun-Sook was asked to write a history for Church Women United for its twenty-fifth anniversary. Published in 1992, Hyun-Sook was the sole author. Two years later she was again approached to author a book, this time as a ghostwriter for an autobiography of Gong Deokgwi, the wife of Yun Bo-Sun, the president of South Korea immediately preceding General Park's takeover in 1961. The couple had become leaders in the democratization movement in the 1970s and 1980s. The book was published in 1995, and within a period of ten years, Hyun-Sook had authored three books, all of which furthered her education on Korean history and how the seeds of history often sprouted conflicts that were still affecting the peninsula. The process of learning and writing history, "gave me more confidence in my work. I thought that I had to do something for the betterment of my society, for my children. That must be a peace movement."

But Hyun-Sook's desire "to do something" was put in check following the publication of the third book. She constantly felt sapped of energy, unable to tackle normal everyday

responsibilities. When she visited the doctor, she was told a thyroid disorder was draining her and she was put on medication, which caused her face to swell. She was reluctant to be seen in public. Hyun-Sook was soon offered a job that allowed her to maintain the privacy she needed while dealing with her illness: She became a radio host for a program of the Christian Broadcasting System. Despite being confined indoors, she was able to engage her mind and expand her knowledge of current affairs on a show entitled “Twenty-First Century Vision Mission,” in which she interviewed various guests, primarily church leaders, to discuss matters that would impact the church and the world in the coming century. Hyun-Sook emceed this program for a year; by late 1996, she turned fifty and had recovered from the thyroid disorder. “It’s like I cut off all the chains. So, I was free.”

The Fifties

From the ‘90s, I began to feel more freedom because society was developing into a democratic society, and also, most of the responsibilities for family—gone. My children were grown up, my husband’s retirement was nearly at hand. So, finally I got to the point that I was looking for. That was my fifties.

In 1996, Hyun-Sook attended a conference, the first meeting she had participated in since recovering from her illness. During the conference, she was asked by a woman leader to help establish a women’s peace organization. The woman explained that it would be the logical progression of three-party women’s exchange programs that occurred between 1991-1994, when individuals from South Korea, North Korea, and Japan came together to discuss the reunification of the two Koreas for the expansion of peace across the continent. These meetings had been held in Tokyo, Seoul, and Pyongyang, in turn. Hyun-Sook had participated in the Seoul meeting and acted as a moderator for one session of the seminars. Hyun-Sook now felt the time was “ripe” for

such a group and accepted the position of Executive Director of Women Making Peace (WMP) “as if I had been waiting for it.” Officially inaugurated in March 1997,

Women Making Peace is a women’s organization working for making the way to peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula from a feminist perspective. Accordingly, the vision of Women Making Peace is to accomplish a peaceful and reunified Korea to guarantee security and equality of women and peace in East Asia.

Though the political climate was more conducive to the development of such an organization than it had been in previous decades, the launch of WMP still occurred during a period of heightened tension on the peninsula. North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung died in 1994, and severe flooding the following two years in the north led to widespread famine, but the south was reluctant to provide aid because of hostile actions by the north’s military: North Korea sent troops into the DMZ and ran a submarine aground in the south, violating territorial waters. A severe humanitarian crisis continued in the north while the governments engaged in divisive rhetoric and actions. In mid- to late-1997, South Korea experienced its own financial crisis when stocks plunged, resulting in massive unemployment and a scattering of suicides across the country. With both countries desperate but still not excluding a military option to their situation, “it was the right time for both governments to seriously ask about what national security was.”

WMP launched its first campaign on its founding day. The “Sharing Food, Sharing Love” project aimed to gather funds to send aid to starving women and their children in the north. The campaign actively sought out the national media and the general public, “encouraging people and organizations to participate through lectures, phone calls, street campaigns, media interviews, contributions to newspapers, many meetings and collecting information.” WMP also carried out a signature-collecting campaign. The 717 campaign participants boldly made direct appeals to the governments of both Koreas, asking that the South Korean government immediately suspend

its policy of disengagement and send desperately needed grain to the north, without qualification. The statement also called on the North Korean government to admit the stark reality of starvation in the country and take measures to save the lives of its victims.

A few months later—on May 24, International Women’s Day for Peace and Disarmament—WMP began its second campaign, closely related to the first. They wanted to introduce the international women’s day for peace to Korean society and begin a street campaign on behalf of the situation in North Korea.

In the beginning of the street campaign, we had to bear insults or violent words from some people who were extreme anti-communists. In the worst cases, physical attacks happened and our placards were taken. The campaign was a shock for people who were accustomed to the enemy image of North Korea, whom they strongly believed in destroying.

The work of WMP and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) addressing the humanitarian situation frequently collided with governmental policies on dealing with the north. But with the help of a leading progressive newspaper, *Hangyerae*, in waging their campaign, WMP and other NGOs saw a rapid response and outpouring for assisting the civilians in North Korea. They received calls from around the nation, from “ordinary women, children, and grandmas” inquiring about the campaign.

One day an elderly lady who had left her children behind in the north visited our office, shedding tears, and took off her golden ring on her finger and gave it to us. She worried so much about her daughter and son’s safety from the starvation in the north and truly wished to see them before she died.

By August, the Sharing Food, Sharing Love campaign collected enough money to send clothes and twenty-six tons of milk powder across the DMZ. The donation was sent directly to two groups that had participated in the three-party women’s exchange programs: the Democratic Women’s Union of North Korea and the North Korean Women’s Association. The campaign not only sent practical help to the people of the north, but also it broke the taboo of assisting the

“enemy,” thus effectively applying pressure on South Korean leaders to adopt new official policies toward the north. “People’s power had laid a bridge over the DMZ for the first time since the division of Korea.” The project also laid a civic foundation for South Korean president Kim Dae-Jung’s 1998 “Sunshine Policy” of engagement with the north, for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize. An individual once told Hyun-Sook that the nationwide campaign for aid to the North Korean people, including the Sharing Food, Sharing Love campaign, was second only to the March 1st independence movement against Japan in 1919 in terms of important national social uprisings.

Dear President Bush

President Kim Dae-Jung’s Sunshine Policy toward North Korea cleared a path to the historic June 2000 summit between the leaders of the two countries. The first meeting between them since the division of the Koreas was the catalyst for a series of groundbreaking developments in relations, including the end of mutual public denigration, the reunion of families separated for over fifty years, the reconnection of roads and railways, and the holding of ministerial meetings. The summit and its outcome document, the June 15th Joint Declaration, raised the hope for peaceful coexistence and the eventual reunification of the two Koreas. However, to Hyun-Sook and many Koreans, the election of George W. Bush to the U.S. presidency in late 2000 turned back “the time clock of peace” on the peninsula to the Cold War era.

Posing a substantial challenge to Koreans’ aspirations for a genuine inter-Korean rapprochement, the Bush administration established a tough stance toward North Korea in an early 2001 summit meeting between Kim Dae-Jung and Bush. The two governments’ postures

toward North Korea were clearly at odds, and during the first half of the year, the reconciliation process that had commenced with the Sunshine Policy stagnated.

Alarmed by the stalemate, Korean peace NGOs, including WMP, with Hyun-Sook at its helm, gathered in March and compiled a declaration addressed to the South Korean and U.S. governments, demanding the continuance of an engagement policy toward the north. But Hyun-Sook felt the statement alone was insufficient.

We are the people who live on Korean soil, so our government and people should be consulted on all U.S. foreign policy toward Korea. The U.S. government should respect people's aspirations for peace. We had enough war, enough blaming each other, enough of hating each other for over half a century. We just embarked on a new initiative to change from hating and bullying to reconciliation and engagement, such as what Lee Dae-Hoon, a peace activist, was advocating. If the U.S. is really an ally to South Korea, it must support its ally to fulfill its wishes. This is what we wanted to say.

Hyun-Sook began meeting with her former boss at the Korea Christian Academy, Reverend Kang Won-Yong, a prominent religious leader and president of the Korea Peace Forum, about composing a letter to send directly to Bush. She wanted the president to hear the demands not only of NGOs, but also of well-known, prominent Koreans, such as celebrities and intellectuals from the fields of religion, civil society, universities, law, politics, the military, journalism, literary arts, and diplomacy. Given his strong contacts and networks, as well as his enthusiasm and dedication to peace on the peninsula, Reverend Kang was in the prime position to mobilize Koreans for the project.

He was around the age of eighty-five, but worked as hard as me. What do you think forced him to do that? He has a sister in North Korea whom he had not seen since the division of Korea. He was an eyewitness to Korean history through his commitment to the social movement, which made him a strong peace-seeker.

Hyun-Sook organized a drafting team of professors, journalists, policy experts, and NGO leaders to compose the letter, but it was a tedious process to write and translate the document.

When we had just finished translation of this letter from Korean to English, many people were not satisfied with it, and so we had to do it again, but time was running out and the right person was not found. One American professor teaching English in a Korean university whom I had met once came to my mind. Immediately I ran to his university without any notice and waited in front of his classroom with a bunch of flowers until he finished his class. Surprised by my sudden visit, but moved by listening to me talk about people's efforts for peace, he was generous enough to do it despite the short period of time we had. I will never forget his warm heart and cooperation.

As Hyun-Sook led the letter writing phase, Reverend Kang was busy gathering 100 signatures from influential Koreans in society. The Korea Peace Forum then held a press conference in the beginning of May to announce the "letter initiative." Reverend Kang, Hyun-Sook, and two other delegates representing the various segments of society who had signed the letter then met with U.S. embassy officials in Seoul; Hyun-Sook traveled with the delegation, representing the peace and women's sector. The delegates presented their letter to a chargé d'affaires of the embassy—though not to the ambassador, as the position was transferring to a new person—expressed their concern over the hard-line stance of the U.S., and asked that their letter be passed on to President Bush. They also left a copy of the letter for Assistant Secretary of State James A. Kelly, who was to visit the embassy in the following days.

The final letter sent to Bush made several demands: that the U.S. continue to support South Korea's reconciliation and cooperation policy toward North Korea, including backing the summit meeting between the leaders of the two Koreas; that the U.S. take a dual-track approach, in which the U.S. pursues missile negotiations with the north without foreclosing any other options, including the development of a national missile defense system; and that the U.S. initiate a U.S. and North Korea summit. The letter did make it to its intended recipient, but moreover, it drew extensive coverage in the Korean media, disseminating the message of positive engagement with the north. Hyun-Sook was satisfied as she was able to "finally voice

what had been in my heart. For the U.S. government, Korea-oriented foreign policy is merely a part of global strategies. For Koreans, however, it is a matter of life or death.”

Across the Divide

In 2002, a boat filled with South Korean women set out, heading north. Many of the women expressed their long-held fear that they would end their lifetimes without ever setting foot on North Korean soil. But they were now embarked on the twelve-hour journey to that very soil. Some wore traditional dress and carried a banner covered with their own handprints in many different colors of paint, alongside their individual wishes for reunification. At the end of their long boat ride, a night sleeping in the boat, and then bus ride to Mount Gungang the next morning, the North Korean women were waiting for them—also covered in the same traditional dress of Korea. They were sisters after all.

The core issue of the peace movement in Korea is the unification issue. This is because the division of Korea brought suffering to the Korean people for over half a century. You see, people in South Korea and North Korea were parents and children, brothers and sisters, before they became enemies. Who could dare to hinder their right to live together? Although we are sisters and brothers, we were educated in different ideologies by their proponents to maintain hostility and prejudice against each other. As long as Korea is divided into two and hostility, distrust, and threats exist between the two, there is no peace on the Korean peninsula.

Hyun-Sook and her 350 fellow South Korean delegates were traveling to a massive gathering, the “North and South Korean Women’s Reunification Meeting for Peace and the Implementation of the June 15th Joint Declaration.” Hyun-Sook, representing WMP and a women’s committee of the Korean Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation, had been a leading organizer of the meeting. Immediately after the June 15th Joint Declaration by Kim Dae-Jung and Kim Jong-Il in 2000, civil society in South Korea began to have renewed hope of contacting their counterpart in

the north and finally forming a grand coalition of civic groups. Following the agreement in the declaration that the two countries would “build mutual confidence by activating cooperation and exchange in all fields, social, cultural, sports, public health, environmental and so on,”² the coalition sought to initiate cross-border exchanges. When it materialized, Hyun-Sook became the only woman delegate to the negotiations between north and south in the preparations for the diverse co-events between the two Koreas. When she had opportunities to contact North Korean delegates, she persistently delivered the strong wishes of South Korean women to meet and discuss together with them how to build mutual trust and reconciliation. As she and her colleagues greeted their North Korean sisters at Mount Gungang, after over a year of intense preparation and negotiations for the event, their wishes became a reality.

Seven hundred Korean women—350 from the south, 300 from the north, and twenty from the diaspora—gathered at the North Korean mountain resort town with three goals in mind: “to raise gender as a mainstream issue in the peace process or reunification process between the two Koreas,” to exemplify the role of women as conciliators “to overcome the chronically hostile relationship between the two Koreas”—and to do so through “singing, dancing, knowing, helping together, building trust and sisterhood, and acting together”—and finally, “to strengthen the role of women” as peacemakers by urging their governments and other interested parties to resolve their conflicts through peaceful means “rather than military action.”³

At the opening ceremony on October 16, 2002, a flag was raised—but not a South Korean or a North Korean one. Rather, it was a “reunification flag,” with a blue Korean peninsula against a pure white background. It was ubiquitous throughout the two-day festivities.

² Quotation taken from “North-South Joint Declaration” on the Web site of the People’s Korea, http://www1.korea-np.co.jp/pk/142th_issue/2000061501.htm

³ Quotations taken from “Report on North and South Korean Women’s Reunification Rally,” on the Web site of WMP: www.peacewomen.or.kr/english

Also on this first day, an art exhibit was unveiled, showcasing paintings, embroideries, and more, created by women from both Koreas. In the North Korean women's art, a theme of beauty and delicacy depicted in representations of nature was prevalent—to Hyun-Sook, it seemed their art shied away from addressing their society, their lives, or even the human condition in general. The art of the South Korean women was full of primarily human scenes of joy, of suffering or anguish, and of love. Athletic and recreational contests and activities, as well as a grand banquet, rounded out the first day, with the women able to relax, get to know one another, and laugh.

The second day, the women met in groups according to occupational affiliation, such as South Korean businesswomen with North Korean businesswomen, to carry out dialogue on their experiences in the differing nations. After some song and dance performances, they climbed Mount Gungang. Many chose to join hands on their ascent.

Upon their return to the foot of the mountain, the closing ceremony began, with delegations from both nations releasing a joint statement. The two-day meeting ended with dancing, laughing, and crying together. “The massive women's meeting between the two Koreas took place for the first time since the division. There was our full desire and passion for the unification of Korea. It would not have been possible without the June 15th Declaration.”

Despite their often challenging differences that inhibited complete agreement on all reunification issues, the Korean women included several resolutions in their statement, including affirming the role of women in implementing the June 15th Joint Declaration; pledging to work together to prevent future wars and challenge existing ones, both domestically and internationally; promising to pursue future exchanges and cooperation between women to lay the

groundwork for reunification; and agreeing “to make every effort to establish a framework for a unified society with gender equality.”⁴

A half century of division has made each society and its people so different. Therefore we need to learn how to tolerate difference and how to live together with different people. We, the women in South and North Korea, just started to work together toward improving our situation and making the way to unification. It is a long way to go. As Lee Dae-Hoon, a friend of mine, said, a long period of confrontation through blaming, hating, and accusing each other for half a century did not work, so we are initiating alternative ways to peace. For us, it is a choice between continuing the hopelessly same old way and embarking on a new trust-building path.

Foreign Forces

In June [of 2002], Kwanghwamun Plaza and City Hall Plaza were covered by World Cup supporters. In November and December, they were covered by ordinary citizens, protestors from all strata of society, including young couples with children, even senior citizens. This was an unprecedented popular demonstration of anti-American sentiment in South Korea.

On the Korean peninsula in 2002, major events coincided with Hyun-Sook’s preparations for the Women’s Reunification Meeting. While soccer fans from all over the world descended on Seoul for the World Cup, two Korean schoolgirls were run over and killed by U.S. soldiers in an armored vehicle. According to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the United States and South Korea, “jurisdiction for crimes committed by U.S. troops while on duty was in the hands of the U.S. court-martial, not in South Korea’s courts.” The two Americans were charged with negligent homicide and tried by the military courts, but found not guilty, sparking mass protests by Korean citizens, including students, religious leaders, and civil society organizations. “Nobody took responsibility for the death of two girls in peace time. Then who should take responsibility? The armored vehicle? How could two servicemen who killed two girls get acquitted and transferred out of Korea?” Though President Bush and other U.S. officials

⁴ “Report.”

issued both formal and informal apologies, these platitudes did not subdue public outrage. Because of the SOFA, ordinary Koreans realized they “do not get any legal protection from their government. Then who should protect them? This was the case the ordinary people raised.” In theory, the foreign forces were there to protect the country from outside threats, but these same forces were posing threats to the people inside. The citizens, then, called for a revision of the SOFA—but this demand was not a new idea in the country.

Beginning in the late 1980s, a small movement had begun among the local citizens of Maehyang-ri, an area near Nong Island and the U.S. Air Force’s Koon-ni Range, a bombing range. The local communities endured agonizing noise and severe, sometimes deadly, consequences of the base’s placement. Hyun-Sook visited the area to learn more about the effects and the plight of the residents.

The ground-firing drill camp and sea-bombing drill camp were just neighboring a residential area, with a barbed wire fence in between them. Jun Man-Gyu, a leading fighter of this community, said usually they could see the American pilots’ faces from the ground—so, just right over the heads of residents and their houses, fighter planes were flying very low, and the flying noise and bombing noise severely frightened people. Because of this terrible noise, pregnant women often experienced miscarriages or gave birth to stillborns. When they were expecting a baby, first of all they had to prepare earplugs and medicines to calm startled babies. And many suicide cases happened. Jun said that people were becoming hysterical and cruel.

Another sad thing was that, during the last half century, people here had lived in a war-like situation, but they could not appeal or complain about it, for fear of being regarded as communists. The story of a mother whose son was killed by an accidental bomb dropping and who could not even complain, let alone get compensation, for fear of being accused of involvement in a communist case, got my heart broken.

Hyun-Sook’s experience in Maehyang-ri was the impetus for her eventual involvement in campaigns to revise the SOFA. By the time of Bush’s inauguration in 2001 and his hostile rhetoric to the north, she saw how U.S. foreign policy on Korea and the American military

presence in East Asia related not only to Korean national security, but also to the suffering of ordinary women and children in her country.

In June of 2000, as the U.S. and South Korea were carrying out negotiations on revising the SOFA, Hyun-Sook attended a women's summit on "Redefining Security," held in Okinawa, Japan and hosted by the East Asia-U.S. Women's Network Against Militarism. Women from East Asian countries that host U.S. military bases, as well as women from the U.S., met to discuss the issues often overlooked in traditional notions of security: crimes committed by U.S. forces (including gender-based violent crimes, such as rape and sexual exploitation), the abandonment of Amerasian children (children of women from Asian countries and men soldiers from the U.S.), environmental pollution and degradation by activities on military bases, and the severe effects of gross military expenditure by the U.S. government. Empowered by the conference, Hyun-Sook returned to Seoul ready to take action on these issues. Five women's organizations, including WMP, created a proposal for the Korean government, calling for the addition of articles protecting women's human rights to any revision of the SOFA. In addition, Hyun-Sook proposed to the NGO coalition that they conduct a speaking tour in the United States in order to voice their demands, just as the second round of SOFA negotiations were to begin in September 2000. Hyun-Sook and three other representatives traveled to Washington, D.C. and New York and secured audiences with congressional aides, the Korean ambassador to the U.S., and other policymakers and think tanks devoted to Korean issues. They hand-delivered their demands to the State Department, held a press conference, and conducted a seminar at a university.

The Korean and U.S. governments came to an agreement in early 2001 on amendments and changes to the SOFA, but they failed to meet all of the women's demands. "People only

asked for the protection of human rights, the environment, and the property of Korean citizens, and for fair treatment of G.I. criminals.” Though the revised SOFA gave greater jurisdiction to Korean courts for crimes committed by off-duty U.S. soldiers, the new amendments had nothing to say to the killing of the two schoolgirls nearly two years later.⁵

Direct Dialogue

On the eve of the U.S.-led war in Iraq in 2003, activists around the world designated February 15 as an anti-war action day. Korean civil society organized its own mass demonstration at Daehangro in downtown Seoul. While Hyun-Sook was strongly opposed to the war, her thoughts were elsewhere that night—back with the citizens of North Korea. After President Bush had declared the nation part of the “axis of evil” in 2002, talks between the U.S. and North Korea over the suspected development of nuclear weapons had become increasingly tense over the previous year, culminating with Kim Jong-Il withdrawing his country from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in January 2003. With the proposed invasion of Iraq, another member of the “axis of evil,” Hyun-Sook and many Koreans, from the north and south, feared that North Korea would be the next target of Bush’s policy of pre-emptive strike. Weighted by these concerns, Hyun-Sook took two of her fellow NGO leaders aside during the demonstration; together, they decided to form a new coalition to focus exclusively on a peaceful resolution to the nuclear crisis.

The National Council of Peace on the Korean Peninsula (NCPKP) was inaugurated in May of that year, and was composed of congress members from various parties, leaders of civic organizations, professors, artists, and many others. Hyun-Sook was promptly selected as one of

⁵ Editor’s Note: The U.S. Air Force’s Koon-ni Range closed on August 12, 2005.

four co-chairs and one of seven delegates in the council's first public outreach project: a major speaking tour of the U.S.

There has been a long history of relations between the two states. Through this long history, many Koreans bitterly remembered two times of betrayal by the U.S.: one in 1905 when Korea became a colony of Japan, and the other in 1945 when Korea was divided into two parts. There had been no consultation with Koreans about the future of their country in these tragic events. Now, we are unfortunately facing another crisis; we wanted the U.S. not to repeat this wrong history to the Korean people, not consulting us on our destiny.

The ten-day tour organized by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) took the team to eight locales, including the major cities of Washington, D.C., New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Eager to deliver policy proposals and relay the concerns of the Korean people, the group met with politicians, policymakers, think tanks, NGOs, religious groups, and other concerned citizens.

It was a kind of track two diplomacy for clarifying the position and demands of civil society organizations in Korea, especially at a time when there was such a possibility of another war crisis on the Korean peninsula. We emphasized that the Bush administration should listen to our voices and consult with Korean residents when the U.S. establishes foreign policy toward the Korean peninsula.

Their policy proposals were based on the founding principles of the NCPKP: that North Korea should not develop nuclear weapons, the U.S. should not consider using nuclear weapons on the peninsula, and negotiations between North Korea and U.S. should include security guarantees and the lifting of economic sanctions. The council's recommendations urged direct dialogue between the U.S. and North Korea; the U.S. disclosure of evidence of the north's highly enriched uranium project; the signing of a non-aggression treaty by the Americans in exchange for North Korea's abandonment of the pursuit of nuclear weapons; a North Korean commitment to international norms on peace issues; the abandonment of an American missile defense system; and a "readjustment" of relations between South Korea and the U.S., effecting "a fair and more

mature partnership,” including the consideration of the “redeployment and reduction” of U.S. troops on the peninsula and a revision of the SOFA.

While intrigued during visits to think tanks such as the Congressional Research Service, the Social Science Research Council, and the World Policy Institute, it was Hyun-Sook’s meetings with Representative Curt Weldon, a Republican from Pennsylvania, and Representative Charles Rangel, a Democrat from New York, which left a “strong impression” on her. Both had traveled on the peninsula—Rangel as a soldier during the Korean War, Weldon on a congressional trip just before the delegation’s arrival in the U.S. Rangel was impatient about resolving the nuclear crisis—he served on the congressional caucus for Korea and issued policy statements on legislation relating to the nations—and he was a staunch opponent of the war in Iraq. But as the delegation met with him, he criticized the South Korean parliament for passing a bill allowing their soldiers to be sent to Iraq. Rangel wondered aloud how South Korea proposed to gain allies to counter U.S. offensives in the north when they were participating with the Americans in the Iraq initiative. Though one member of the delegation, a Korean congressman, was slightly embarrassed at the question—despite the fact he had voted against sending Korean troops—the team found Rangel’s willingness to engage in discussion refreshing. Rangel also responded positively to the NCPKP proposals.

On his trip to Korea, Weldon said he found Pyongyang beautiful and the people warm and friendly. He met with top North Korean officials and suggested a two-phase peace plan to the foreign minister and vice foreign minister; the plan incorporated a non-aggression pact—a proposal received positively by Kim Jong-Il. But the congressman reminded his visitors from the NCPKP that he had not traveled to Pyongyang as an official envoy of the Bush administration, and that it had taken him nearly a year to gain clearance to go there at all—highlighting just how

difficult dialogue was in the tense situation. Even so, Hyun-Sook appreciated the significance of his efforts to enhance mutual understanding between the U.S. and the north, and to further the resolution of the nuclear crisis.

All along their speaking tour, the delegates were interviewed and made several media appearances, getting out their message of peaceful resolution on the peninsula—one sound-bite and article at a time.

I believe that the tour was successful and will have a long-term impact on how people in the U.S. understand Korea and the policy of the U.S. government toward Korea. Without the support of AFSC, it would not have been possible. I have a stronger belief again that solidarity amongst peace-loving people—especially women—in Korea and the U.S. can be the most powerful tool for making peace on the Korean peninsula and in the world, and that track two diplomacy should be intensified to change foreign policies of governments toward peace.

Just the Beginning

In my psychology, there has been a strong feeling of fear and containment, or being trapped, from my life surrounded by the dire post-war situation, patriarchal society, military dictatorships, and the division of Korea. I have been trying to be free from this feeling. I think this was a strong motive for my involvement in the women's movement and peace activism.

Through all these experiences of her childhood, education, family life, democratization of the country, and peace activism, Hyun-Sook continues to see that a free society can never come to fruition unless the Koreas are unified and there is an end to the deep-rooted militarism and patriarchy of the peninsula. While the economic situation of South Korea is a drastic, welcomed, hard-fought change from the devastation of the 1950s—citizens no longer have to “take any dropped apples”—Hyun-Sook is trying to demonstrate in her work and commitments that “still, we are not ideologically free. The division of Korea is an ideological barrier, one of the most severe factors that tempers democratic development.”

Hyun-Sook's hope for the future of the Koreas is a "common vision."

We established the hardware of democracy, but the software of it did not take root in daily life—in the interpersonal relationships and the social relationships. I want to see a more equal society. I want to see the society respecting human rights more. I want to see the society where much more people feel happy, much more people feel equal, much more people feel dignity in the unified land. That is my vision. It's not different from yours or others'.

It's a minor thing, but this is my observation: the color of clothes many people used to wear was very dark. But now, the whole society has become colorful. This is just the beginning.