

Preface

My interest in the Korean past was sparked over a decade ago with a simple exchange during office hours, when I asked my Chinese history professor about possible careers in the discipline. “How is your Korean?” he asked. I replied, “Not bad.” He then posed, “How about Korean history?” I exited the meeting with a list of names and titles and headed to the library. Little did I know then that my past in Korea would serve as a stepping-stone to my future. Little did I know then that disentangling the intricacies of Korean history would require a knowledge of the cultures and languages of China and Japan, as well as an understanding of the peninsula’s economic and political relations with Russia and the United States. It was also during my undergraduate years at Johns Hopkins that Vernon Lidtke and Jack Greene introduced me to historiography, microhistory, and the “Mary Paul Letters.” Ron Walters inspired a love of feminist theory and style, showing me how to extract not only paragraphs but pages, without hesitation. I am grateful for the advice and encouragement provided by many former professors and, in particular, Bill Rowe, which continues to influence my analytical and interpretative outlook.

It was also in Baltimore that I first became intrigued by the correlations between gender, labor, and modernity. Impressed by Joan Scott and Louise Tilly’s work among others, I sought to further investigate two discursive themes: “debates among feminists about women and work,” and “debates among historians about social and economic change.”¹ To grasp the idiosyncrasies of Korean women’s history, however, required recognizing the tenacity of Confucianism in modern society and the contested character of

Korea's economic development. External pressures influenced relations among Koreans, and at no point were those forces more prominent than after the institution of Japanese colonialism in 1910. To fully appreciate the "intertwined histories and overlapping territories" that comprised modern Korea, I myself had to cross waters to other territories new and old.²

As a graduate student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, I benefited from the input of an impressive array of scholars. I had the good fortune of meeting early in my graduate career Kenneth Wells of Australia National University, who referred me to a range of colonial periodicals, which furnished a background of the workings of gender in colonial Korean society. Research trips to the Library of Congress and the Harvard-Yenching Library during 1997 and 1998 facilitated my acquisition of preliminary sources and offered other leads. Carter Eckert of Harvard University introduced me to mentors in Korea, and it was also at Yenching that I became acquainted with Soon-Won Park's research on colonial labor history. Since, I've considered myself fortunate to have at hand Soon-Won's expertise and guidance. Mentors and colleagues at and around SOAS including Remco Breuker, Frank Dikötter, Keith Howard, Stefan Knoob, Roald Maliangkay, Satona Suzuki, Sem Vermeersch, Carl Young, and the late Ralph Smith were valuable discussants. Nevertheless, this project could not have been accomplished without Martina Deuchler's unyielding interest and assistance. I would like to record my gratitude for her continuous encouragement as well as the standard of quality she inspired.

Much of the research for this book was conducted during 1998 and 1999 when I was a special research student working with An Pyŏngjik at Seoul National University. With his sponsorship, I was given access to the imperial archives of the Seoul National University Library as well as other, now "hard-to-access," collections. Chu Ikchong of Seoul National University and Pak Sŏngch'ŏl of the Kyŏngsŏng Spinning and Weaving Company escorted me to the company archives. These scholars and others affiliated with the Naksŏngdae Institute for Economic History extended much appreciated support in acquiring and comprehending the details of the primary sources.

More extensive source collection would also not have been possible without the assistance of Kim Kyŏngil of the Academy of Korean Studies, Chŏng Chinsŏng of Seoul National University, Chŏng Kŏnsik of Chŏnnam

University, and Yi Chŏngok of Hyosŏng Catholic University. Kang Isu of Sangji University went so far as to lend me two of her interview tapes, which are mentioned in this work. Nonetheless, most of the informants referred to in this study were located with the help of Kim Ŭnsik and Yi Hija of the Society for the Survivors and the Bereaved Families of the Pacific War (T'aep'yŏngyang chŏnjaeng hŭisaengja yujokhoe). Of course, the finer details of working women's histories could not have been recovered without the testimonies of the following former factory workers: Han Kiyŏng, Kang Pokchŏm, Kim Chŏngmin, Kim Chŏngnam, Kim Ŭnnye, Kim Yŏngsŏn, Pak Sun'gŭm, Yi Chaeyun, and Yi Chungnye. I would like to sincerely thank these interviewees, as well as other activists and scholars in Korea, whose generous assistance offered insight and shed light on the everyday experiences of factory women in colonial Korea.

My colleagues in Toronto have been vital sources of stimulation and support during the later stages of revision. Bettina Bradbury made Canada warm, Tom Cohen indulged my questions on syntax and "How," Josh Fogel furnished practical advice, and Joan Judge, much-needed doses of optimism. Although I am much obliged to these and other historians at York University, I am perhaps most indebted to Bob Wakabayashi, who let me know, more importantly, "what *not* to do." Also invigorating has been having a modern Korean historian in town. Andre Schmid of the University of Toronto, to whom I owe many hours of reading, writing, phone calls, and e-mails in return, has been charitable to a fault with his time, candid feedback, and tireless encouragement. Colleagues who have either directly or indirectly extended feedback include: Charles Armstrong, Donald Baker, Bruce Cumings, Henry Em, Dong-Sook Shin Gills, Merose Hwang, Mi-hyon Jeon, Ken Kawashima, Seung-Kyung Kim, Dennis McNamara, Janet Poole, Mike Robinson, David Steinberg, Jun Yoo, and the late Jim Palais. Just as significant, acknowledgment is needed for those friends, including Jo Hirst, Jim Soriano, Sophia Darling, Ki Jackson, Jason Blake, Mark Morris, and the late Nupur Srivastava, who listened to and helped me refine my ramblings on silkworms, spindles, and other sedation-inducing subjects.

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I am also indebted to the many reviewers who have commented on my work as well as Muriel Bell for her interest in the book's publication. Although I thank colleagues, friends, and family for making this endeavor enjoyable, I alone bear responsibility for its final outcome.

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Although my curiosity about gender and labor in Korea was piqued with the assistance of professors, colleagues, and friends, in retrospect, I see that it originated with the Korean women I knew long before I entered university halls. I am grateful to Cho Jai Kyung, who accompanied me on my interviews and provided me with a home in Korea. Chung Hak Jae taught me to appreciate the subtler nuances of the Korean language. Yang To Dam, the family matriarch, tolerated the inconveniences of my unexpected return to Seoul in the last years of her life. I am most obliged, however, to Cho Jai Seong, who furnished daily examples of the bounds of women's productivity. I thank and, in particular, I owe much to, the precedents of my family in Korea, most notably the women, who have set incredible standards for industriousness and strength. While working for wages, caring for children, cooking meals, and cleaning homes, I remember these women instructing us, the next generation, "Study hard. Work hard. Time is precious. To live is to work!" Indeed, by living to work, my mother afforded me opportunities few could merit, and without her support this project could not have been completed. It is to her, Cho Jai Seong, and to the Korean women of her generation and before, this book is dedicated.