

WOMEN IN KOREAN CULTURE AND HISTORY

GRADE LEVEL: High School

SUBJECT: Social Studies

TIME REQUIRED: Three class periods

OBJECTIVES:

- Identify women who held positions of power in Korean government during the Silla era.
- Answer the question of why the early kingdom of Silla had several notable queens.
- Describe the Confucian values that have created barriers for Korean women during the Chosŏn era.
- Evaluate the role of women in the resistance movement against Japanese colonization.
- Compare the role of Korean women historically with the role of Korean women today.

MATERIALS:

Included handouts: The Queens of the Silla Era, Statements to be Considered, Korean Codes for Women During the Chosŏn Era, Shimch'ong, Korean Women in Resistance to the Japanese, and Charts 1-8

PROCEDURES:

1. Distribute and read handout The Queens of the Silla Era.
2. After reading the handout, have students in groups try to decide why the Silla kingdom had female rulers. To guide this exercise, each group will need a copy of Statements to be Considered.
3. After each group has determined which statements would be a possible reason for the Silla kingdom's female rulers have them share their findings with the class.
4. Set up a brief timeline of Korean history identifying the Silla era on through the modern one. As you move on to each new handout, indicate its place on the timeline. Be sure students are aware of how much time has passed.
5. List Korean Codes for Women on the board. Have students read the summary of Korean folk opera, "Shimch'ong"
6. Answer the following questions as a class or in groups:
 - What were the major acts that illustrated filial piety?
 - What parts of society and religion are shown to approve of Shimch'ong's behavior?
 - Who in the story does not follow proper Confucian behavior?
 - What elements of the story show male control?
 - What parts of the story seem contradictory to Confucian ideals?Address as a class: What has changed between the Silla era and the era of the folk opera and why?
7. Have students read handout Korean Women in Resistance to the Japanese with the following questions in mind:
 - In what way did women try to resist Japanese colonization?
 - Compare the kinds of power Queen Min and Yu Kwan Sun had. Compare their fates.

- In what way might patriotism have allowed women to break out of traditional roles?
- Explain the current controversy over comfort women.
- 8. Using the charts numbered 1-8, have students in seven groups (charts 6 and 7 are combined) examine the changing role of Korean women. Each group should be given a chart with the accompanying questions to answer and report back to the class on. Prior to answering each question the groups should hypothesize about what the chart will show.

Chart 1:

- What change has there been in arranged marriages?
- How likely is a Korean woman to decide on her own about marriage?

Chart 2:

- What seems the most likely pattern of decision?
- In 1980, how did the categories of "usually the Husband" compare to "usually the wife?"

Chart 3:

- What changes occurred in taking a concubine?
- What category increased the most in the 1980's?

Chart 4:

- How have the views of the patriarchal family changed?
- With whom are parents likely to live?

Chart 5:

- What percentage of women were in control of family finances?
- How do Korean women feel about the importance of bearing children?

Charts 6 and 7:

- How do men and women compare in graduate programs?
- In what professional school do women outnumber men?

Chart 8:

- What general trend is there in the percentage of women's employment compared to men?
- In what occupation do women outnumber men?
- 9. Have the groups report back to the class and generate a theory about the changing roles for Korean women. (What traditions remain the same and what seems to be changing?)

THE QUEENS OF THE SILLA ERA

Background: Throughout most of its history, Korea was ruled by males. But, in the Silla era, there were several notable queens. Korean women often had real influence on royal events, as queen-regents and mothers of the emperor. But, for a limited time, they were also queens in their own right. Three queens occupied the Silla throne: Sondok reigned from 632-647, Chindok reigned from 647-654, and Chinsong reigned from 887-897.

Queen Sondok: She was generally known as a strong queen who continued Silla's conflict with the two other Korean kingdoms of Kogury and Paekche. She formed an alliance with China to protect Silla's independence and chose an able general, Kim Yusin to direct the military. Continuing her relationship with China, Sondok encouraged students to go to China to study.

Today, she is perhaps best known for the cultural impact of her reign. Korean monks, back from studying Chinese Buddhism, encouraged the study of Buddhism. Sondok furthered this revitalization by having the Buddhist temples at Punhwang-sa and Yongmyo-sa finished, and the nine tiered pagoda of Hwangnyong-sa was built in her reign. One of the other lasting monuments from this era is the oldest observatory in Asia. Her tomb is part of the major grave sites in Silla.

Queen Chindok: She continued Queen Sondok's alliance with the Chinese and emphasized the dress, organization, and literary cultures from the Tang Dynasty. She started the use of a Chinese calendar and put down rebellions against her pro-Chinese policy. While some criticized her closeness to the Tang government, later historians have seen her reign as giving Silla a "breathing space" to grow strong against her enemies.

Queen Chinsong: Unlike the previous queens, she ruled during an era of Silla decline. Local warlords were increasing in power and Chinsong was unable to collect the taxes needed for a central army. Most of her reign was spent in putting down rebellions. One of the warlords managed a successful rebellion against her.

Source: Yung-Chung Kim. *Women of Korea*. Seoul: Ewha Woman's University Press, 1976.

STATEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED:

A. Generally, Buddhism provided more of a sense of equality for women than did the Confucian system. Confucius had the concept that women were inferior to males of the same status. Therefore, women could not rule men. Buddhism stressed personal search for the truth. Nuns as well as monks might be religiously trained. There were no outside roles for women in the Confucian system of a male-led hierarchy.

B. Female shamans (or religious leaders) had long been a tradition in Korea. Before religions like Buddhism and Confucianism had been brought to Korea, native Koreans had religions that stressed a female or male getting in touch with the spiritual and animal world.

C. Silla was the southern-most kingdom in Korea and was somewhat protected from the continual wars and invasions that Kogury and Paekche had faced.

D. Silla's system of royalty was based on a bone rank system. A ruler had to belong to the sacred bone branch of the royal family. These bone branches stretched back into past tribal systems and were a major part of Silla's history.

E. The Tang Dynasty in China was noted for a number of fine female poets and was ruled from 655-705 by the Empress Wu, who was a strong supporter of Buddhism. The Tang Dynasty had been notable for the political roles court women had played and for its fine female poets.

F. Some historians have suggested that women leaders are most often to arise when warring forces are roughly equal. Rather than see another male on the throne, men will submit to a female leader as a compromise.

G. Some women have such exceptional talent that they are accepted and then become role-models for later women rulers.

H. These queens were just more visible accidents; women had ruled quietly for years. For example, Munjong Taebi was regent "behind the screen" for her son for 20 years. Silla was just more open about what happened when a young or inadequate male ruler was on the throne.

I. In Paekche and Kogury , a woman was not a head of the family inheritance. In Silla law, a woman could be the head of the family if there were no legitimate males to inherit. In Silla, both men and women paid taxes. In other states, male heads of households paid.

KOREAN CODES FOR WOMEN DURING THE CHOSŬN ERA

Korean women were expected to follow male leadership in the following ways:

A. *Sam-jong-jido*: women must serve three males: the father, husband and son.

B. *Ch'il-go-ji-ak*: women must not do any of the seven evils (disobedience to parents-in-laws, infertility, adultery, jealousy, bad illness, talkativeness and stealing).

C. *Pu-haeng-pyon*: codes for women's behavior include: 1) women should stay in their assigned status 2) must not go outside of their own houses for social activities 3) should make food and clothing for men 4) should not become involved in political affairs 5) accept marriages arranged by parents.

If a woman failed to follow the above code she might be expelled from the house or divorced.

Source: Chung Sei-wha. *Challenges for Women*. Seoul: Ewha Woman's University Press, 1984.

“Shimch'ong: The Embodiment of Filial Piety”

The following story is a summary of one of Korea's well-known and loved folk operas.

A long time ago in North Korea, an old blind man and his wife lived in poverty. Though they came from a noble birth, they had fallen on hard times. But they loved each other and would have been happy, but they had no child. One night a fairy appeared in the wife's dream and nine months later a daughter, Shimch'ong, was born. But the wife died in childbirth.

The blind man begged milk for his daughter and eventually she grew, pretty, bright and able. She spent her time going house to house begging rice for her father.

The example of the daughter showing such respect for her father impressed a local lady, Lady Chang. She wished to adopt the girl, but Shimch'ong said that she would stay with her father. One day, however, he got hungry, and went to find her so he could eat more quickly. But he stumbled and fell into a deep creek.

A monk heard the blind man's cries and said he would rescue him if he paid the temple 300 sacks of rice. The blind man agreed and was rescued. He later told his daughter about his promise. She said she would save her father's honor. Shimch'ong knew that the dragon king of the sea required that a young virgin be sacrificed to him each year. She arranged to be the victim in return for the 300 sacks of rice. But she told her father that Lady Chang had adopted her and given the rice to the temple. Thus, her father's honor has been saved.

Shimch'ong, then, went on board ship and in a raging storm threw herself into the sea. But because of her filial piety (devotion to her father), the King of Heaven overruled the dragon king and sent her back to life. Found on the shore by the Emperor, Shimch'ong was so beautiful that he married her. Even in her new luxurious life she could not forget her father. He, however, took up with a low class woman who yelled at him, took his money, and made fun of him. The new Empress sent word throughout the kingdom that all blind men should report so that she could find her father again. When she found him eventually, she told him of her fate and said, "As my filial piety was insufficient, I came back to life again, but, alas, I cannot make your eyes open. So, I will die once again and ask the King of Heaven to restore your vision."

The father was so relieved to see his daughter again that he begged her not to die again. With this imploring, his eyes began to tear, and when he rubbed his eyes, he could see. The court singers then began to sing, "Filial piety is indeed the root of all human behavior. Oh, how wondrous it is! Ah, how truly wondrous it doth be!" Shimch'ong invited her father to live at court, where he did happily for the rest of his life.

Source: Kim Hak-do. "Shimch'ong: The Embodiment of Filial Piety." *Koreana*. Vol. 3, No.2: 20-25, 1989.

Korean Women in Resistance to the Japanese

In the late nineteenth century, Japan seemed the greatest threat to Korean independence. Many Koreans resisted Japanese occupation. Two notable Korean women who resisted were Queen Min (1851-1895) and Yu Kwan-sun (1904-1920), one the wife of a ruler, the other a sixteen-year old student.

Queen Min had not had an easy court life. Her husband, King Kojong, faced threats from China, Japan, and Russia. Further, there were internal revolts as the monarchs tried to westernize their country and still retain control. Generally, Queen Min tried to get Russia and China to aid Korea as she took more and more power from her unsure husband. The Japanese minister decided that Queen Min was an obstacle to Japanese plans and decided to remove her. A group of Japanese were sent into Kyongbok Palace in Seoul and ransacked the palace, stabbing the Queen. Isabel Bishop, an English visitor, was told the following account by the Crown Prince:

The whole affair did not occupy much more than an hour. The Crown Prince saw his mother rush down a passage followed by a Japanese man with a sword; there was a rush of assassins toward her sleeping apartment. In the upper story the Crown Princess was found with several ladies, and she was dragged by the hair, cut with a sword, beaten and thrown downstairs. Yi Kyong-jik, Minister of the Royal Household, seems to have given the alarm, for the Queen was dressed and was preparing to run and hide herself. When the murderers rushed in, he stood with outstretched arms in front of Her Majesty, trying to protect her, furnishing them with the clue they wanted. They slashed off both his hands and inflicted other wounds, but he was able to drag himself along the veranda into the King's presence, where he died.

The Queen, fleeing from the assassins, was overtaken and stabbed, falling down as if dead, but one account says that, recovering a little, she asked if the Crown Prince was safe, on which a Japanese man jumped on her breast and stabbed her through with his sword.

Source: "Isabella Bird Bishop," *Korea and Her Neighbors*. Fleming Revel: New York, 1898, 273-274.

The killing of the queen shocked the public and public opinion for the Japanese minister was low. The Japanese minister disclaimed responsibility for the action.

In 1905, Japan colonized Korea. Korean women had, by then, begun to receive Western-style education. Some of the first schools for women were founded by Christian missionaries. It was in one of these schools, Ewha, that students began an underground society called the Patriotic Women's League. These women, with many others, took part in the March First Movement in 1919, to protest Japanese occupation. Many women were wounded or killed in demonstrations and others were imprisoned. The young woman who came to symbolize the new Korean women's activism and patriotism was Yu Kwan-sun. She was a student at Ewha in 1919, and took part in demonstrations at Pagoda Park in Seoul. She was arrested, but later released. Despite the danger, Yu Kwan-sun led another demonstration and waved the national flag of Korea. The Japanese military police fired on the crowd, killing Yu Kwan-sun's parents. She was arrested and

tortured; she died in 1920, at the age of sixteen. Today, in Pagoda Park, a series of bronze friezes show Yu Kwan-sun speaking to the crowd, waving the flag, trying to comfort her parents, and being dragged away by the Japanese.

These two women are examples of the many women who tried to preserve Korean independence. Groups, such as the Women's Patriotic League, continued to raise money to aid those arrested, to write about Korean values, and to resist attempts to destroy Korean culture. The Japanese, for example, did not particularly encourage women's education, but Korean women struggled to keep schools open. During World War II, some Korean women faced a harsh fate when they were taken as "comfort women" for Japanese troops. It is not known how many Korean women died as a result. One estimate is that 70,000 to 200,000 were taken. But, in the past few years, some women who did survive have told their stories. They have shown courage in facing a terrible part of their history and making it public. Part of the reason they have done so is to make that part of the Japanese occupation recognized by both countries' history. The Japanese government has understood that in forcing Korean women into prostitution, a wrong was done. It is not yet resolved as to how the surviving women shall be compensated. But, in some of the poems and plays of today, the women's courage in speaking out is praised as another example of Korean women's resistance.

Source: Yung-Chung Kim. *Women of Korea*. Seoul: Ewha University, 1976.

Chart I. Changes in Spouse Selection

Method of Selection	1958 (%)	1980 (%)
Parents made the decision	178 (62.0)	50 (18.2)
Parents made selection and asked my opinion	75 (26.1)	104 (37.8)
I decided and asked parents' consensus	18 (6.3)	89 (32.3)
I decided and asked for advice from parentes	5 (1.7)	17 (6.2)
I decided on my own	8 (2.8)	14 (5.1)
No answer	1 (0.4)	1 (0.4)
Unmarried	2 (0.7)	0
TOTAL	287 (100)	275 (100)

Data: Lee Dong-won (1981) p.212

Questions:

1. What change has there been in arranged marriages?
2. How likely is a Korean woman to decide on her own about marriage?

Chart II. Decision Making Concerning Children

Method	1958 (%)	1980 (%)
Husband decides everything	9.2	2.2
Usually husband decides	9.6	7.7
Always confer together	67.3	79.9
Usually wife decides	8.4	7.7
Wife decides everything	3.2	2.2
No answer	2.0	---
Other	0.4	0.4
TOTAL	100.1 (287)	100.1 (274)

Data: Lee Dong-won (1983) p.77

Questions:

1. What seems the most likely pattern of decision?
2. In 1980, how did the categories of "usually the husband" compare to "usually the wife"?

Chart III. Actions in Case of No Son

Attitudes about Children	No Children		Daughter – No Son	
	<u>1958 (%)</u>	<u>1980 (%)</u>	<u>1958 (%)</u>	<u>1980 (%)</u>
Take a concubine	110 (38.4)	6 (2.2)	78 (27.2)	5 (1.8)
Adopt a son	78 (27.2)	89 (32.4)	46 (16.1)	7 (2.5)
Live as it is	72 (25.1)	163 (59.3)	127 (44.3)	246 (89.4)
Permit a divorce	14 (4.9)	4 (1.5)	4 (1.4)	1 (0.4)
Make son-in-law a son	---	---	26 (9.1)	5 (1.8)
Others	6 (2.1)	8 (2.9)	3 (1.0)	1 (0.4)
Don't know	6 (2.1)	3 (1.1)	3 (1.0)	1 (0.4)
No answer	1 (0.3)	2 (0.7)	---	1 (0.4)
Keep trying to have son	---	---	---	8 (2.9)
TOTAL	287 (100.1)	275 (100.1)	287 (100)	275 (100)

Data: Lee Dong-won (1981) p.215

Questions:

1. What changes occurred in taking a concubine?
2. What category increased the most in the '80's?

Chart IV. Attitudes Toward Living With Children in Old Age

<u>Attitude</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1980</u>
Wish to live:		
with eldest son	46.0	27.4
with other son(s)	15.7	0.7
with a daughter	-	0.4
independently	35.6	64.6
don't know	2.4	6.9
no answer	0.4	-
Reason to live together:		
no other support	-	7.9
lonely	-	64.5
children want it	-	11.8
TOTAL	100 (287)	100 (274)

Data: Lee Dong-won (1983) p.89

Questions.

1. How have views of the patriarchal family changed?
2. With whom are parents most likely to live?

Chart V. Findings from the Korean “White Paper”

The following are some findings for Korean women from a government report in 1991:

100%:

-92.8%	said there should be children in the family
-74%	of women said they quit work after marriage
-68.1%	of wives managed household finances
-53%	said having a son was important
-43%	thought wives were responsible for household work even if they worked outside the home
-34%	of female employees have faced sex discrimination

Charts VI & VII: Education for Men and Women

Number of Students by Education Level

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Female Composition</u>
Nursery/Kdgn.	414,532	217,690	196,842	47.5%
Elem. School	4,868,520	2,506,470	2,362,050	48.5%
Middle School	2,300,978	1,194,462	1,106,516	48.1%
High School	2,346,736	1,236,353	1,110,383	47.3%
College/Univ.	1,403,898	969,947	433,951	30.9%
Grad. School	86,911	67,361	19,560	22.5%
TOTAL	11,421,575	6,192,273	5,229,302	45.8%

Number of Students Enrolled in 4-Year College and Univ. in 1989

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Female Composition</u>
Arts & Literature	225,193	116,889	108,304	48.1%
Social Sciences	286,814	167,013	119,801	41.8%
Natural Sciences	419,891	327,763	92,126	21.9%
Medical/Medicine	40,430	26,371	14,059	34.8%
Teaching Prof.	67,838	28,740	39,098	57.6%
TOTAL	1,040,166	666,776	373,390	35.9%

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Education, 1990

Questions:

1. How do men and women compare in graduate programs?
2. In what professional school do women out number men?

Chart VIII. Women in Occupations (Percentage of Women)

	<u>Prof. & Tech.</u>	<u>Adm. & Mgr.</u>	<u>Clerical</u>	<u>Sales</u>
1966	20.5	1.4	11.0	35.3
1970	22.9	3.1	17.0	33.6
1975	25.2	3.9	23.3	36.1
1980	30.5	1.5	33.3	35.2
1985	29.1	-	34.5	46.3

	<u>Service</u>	<u>Agriculture</u>	<u>Production</u>	<u>Others</u>
1966	56.3	34.4	23.2	50.0
1970	56.8	41.5	24.0	8.0
1975	57.0	47.3	27.9	1.0
1985	61.2	43.7	27.5	-

Source: EPB (Population and Housing Census Report)

Questions:

1. What general trend is there in the percents of women's employment as compared to men?
2. In what occupations are there more women than men?