

# Revisiting the Era of Hamel and the Legacy for European–Korean Relations

Christine Sylvester\*

## CONTENTS

- I. Intro
- II. Hermit Kingdom?
- III. Like Europe, the "hermit kingdom" is now heavily implicated in the externally-driven, nonexclusivist post-cold war world of globalisation

## I. Intro

- A. Altho I work in NL, am not expert on Dutch history, and altho I work on Korea, am not expert on Korean history
- B. Nevertheless, here I go
- C. Along with Kyoung-Hee Moon, my PhD student at the Australian National University, I want to use time today to revisit one legacy of the Korean encounter with the Dutch crew of Sperwer in 1653: The hermit kingdom under challenge.
- D. Two aspects of that challenge: one macro and one micro-social
  - 1. International relations and the divided state --where is Europe?
  - 2. And gender and work in Korea an era of globalisation: Where to look for interesting trends and where is Europe in the picture?

---

\* Professor of Women, Gender, Development, ISS

## II. Hermit Kingdom?

- A. Whether Korea as a hermit kingdom comes from western or from Korean understandings depends on who you read and talk to.
1. Hiuk Kim describes Korean history as exclusionist --obstinately autonomous and showing a deep desire for independence.
  2. Hendrick Hamel's diary clearly suggests that the Dutch crew faced exclusionist practices in the years around 1653.
    - a. It tells of the Dutch being kept separate from Koreans --not ill-treated so much as excluded from Korean life.
    - b. Seen as showpieces or grotesques --or guest workers.
- B. Of course, this exclusionism not absolute.
1. Around 1630, a solitary Dutchman, Weltevree, washed up in Korea and lived out his life there under the name Pak Yon --case of assimilation.
  2. And in earlier periods of Mongol invasions --Korea thought very worldly. Arab travellers speak of Korea's many interactions with China, Japan and Southeast Asia during Koryo period.
  3. After that, China was acceptable, with Korea in tribute to it, and exclusion seemed more the norm when it came to Europeans
    - a. Basil Hall, captain of Brit man-of-war that anchored off Korea later, in 1816, reported that beyond taking some interest in our clothing, the chief concern of Korean officials was to get rid of him and ship as soon as possible.
    - b. In late 19<sup>th</sup>, French and US gunboats tried to "open" Korea, as was the imperial practice of the times. Japan prevailed in 1876 with an unequal treaty --with Russia and China looking over its shoulder.
- C. From then, it is said that Korea shaped more by events outside it than events from within --but that is a contested claim. Certainly we can find European influence throughout 20<sup>th</sup> c.

1. Even as the Hermit forced out of its shell, it also sought to engage Europe through international relations, as its efforts to be included in the Peace Conference of 1907, in The Hague, shows.
  2. Under Japanese colonial rule from 1910-1945, the bureaucratic-authoritarian, developmental state came to Korea, alongside socialist resistance movements influenced by Bolshevik Rev in Russia, something that affected Cheju.
  3. Division of Korea into two entities after WWII was a typical post-war, cold war "solution" to contested territories and shaped Korea extensively. But Korea was not alone in this, as the solution was also applied to Germany and Vietnam.
  4. Europe had only modest involvement in civil/international war involving Koreans. American and Chinese troops, but with the cease-fire came the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission composed of four European countries maintaining it Sweden, Switzerland, Poland, and Czechoslovakia (latter two no longer there)
- D. Today, all of Korea exists in the militarized environment that characterises 20<sup>th</sup> C international relations --w US troops still here.
1. That climate has created two hermits with respect to each other, their relations more often than not mediated through international channels.
  2. That each is "the other" in a 60 year drama of identity politics as strong as geo-politics is not difficult to see.
    - a. In Panmunjong the N broadcasts the supposed virtues of life on its side. "Come over here. Identify with us rather than with the South."
    - b. Many southerners taught that northerners have horns on their heads and were forbidden contact with them by the state.
    - c. The irony, of course, is the equally strong myth in the South that the Hermit Kingdom is one --that Koreans are homogeneous
    - d. Seems the geopolitical division encourages that myth of unity in the South with imagined northerners shorn of their horns of communism --at some point in the future.
      1. Realities of homogeneous Korea can be a different matter. For when some

northerners do make it to the south to live. they tell of being lonely, unhappy and ill-treated.

3. Korea not alone in this contradictory situation -- of being one and being divided by identity politics.
  - a. During the cold war, western Europe saw eastern Europe as "other."
  - b. The Balkan wars of the post-cold war 1990s involved a deadly identity politics and some of the cruelist warfare of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> C.
  - c. Now European unity is being reasserted by the enlargement of the EU and western Europeans tend to see the USA as the "other"-- another region comprised primarily of people with European backgrounds.

### **III. Like Europe, the "hermit kingdom" is now heavily implicated in the externally-driven, nonexclusivist post-cold war world of globalisation**

- A. South Korea is a model of what globalisation can do for you and North Korea finds itself an anachronism, out of step, left out.
  1. South Korea proves to certain streams of development thinking that international economic engagement, coupled with state involved industrialisation and export efforts. and outside infusion of funds (thru troop expenditures) can be an answer to underdevelopment.
  2. With or without Asian values the much debated issue of Confucianism in East Asian economic development. With or without extensive travel abroad until recently.
  3. Now Korea is impressing us with its new sectoral development plan, Korea Bio-Vision 2010, which promises to move the country into seventh place in biotechnology from its current impressive 13<sup>th</sup> place again, thru state promotion.
    - a. Korean gvt has increased finance to this sector over past 4 yrs by 400%.
    - b. It received 8% of the total R&D budget in 2001.
- B. Of course, with each new push there's also a set of stresses, strains, and bottlenecks.

- C. Want to mention one strain of that crisis that I've investigated in Korea with help of my colleague here, Ms. Moon: gender, globalisation, and the Korean economic crisis.
1. At issue is the centrality of women in Korea's rapid industrialisation as workers and as entrepreneurs.
    - a. Hagen Koo tells of the estimated two-thirds of workers in Korea's export-oriented factories at the height of industrial success (1987), and how they were working more hrs per week than male counterparts and being paid on average one-third less. (Women Factory Workers in Korea, in Eui-young-Yu and Earl Phillips, eds Korean Women in Transition)
      1. This is the usual picture --women at bottom of heap of urban industrial workers.
    - b. More specific to Cheju are studies by Haejoang Cho and others (most recently Soonhee Kim in the Asian Journal of Women's Studies, 9, 1, 2003) on the Jeju Jamsu --entrepreneurial women.
      1. From 1980 to 1990, the Jeju Jamsu women --professional divers for shellfish, seaweed, and some types of fish --accounted for between 62% and 69% of marine exports from Jeju.
      2. Jamsu numbers dropped from from 23,081 in 1965 to fewer than 8,000 today --alarming in a profession that women and their associations controlled.
        - a. Some lured from this work to the new industries --part of larger trend away from primary sectors and into low paid factory work
        - b. But also a tale of development policy and its unintended consequences: gvt sponsored tourism and aqua-culture has reduced jamsu decision making power over fishing, which means a reduction in their autonomy and ec independence.
  2. Ten years after Hagen Koo's study and well into the period of decline of jamsu as individual entrepreneurs, Ms Moon and I looked into the situation of another group of women entrepreneurs: bun-shik owners (small family-style restaurants) around the university area of Pusan.
    - a. It was Dec 1998, after full force of crisis of 1997 had been felt.
    - b. I learned their business strategies at the height of an officially difficult time in the Korean economy, a period of national retrenchments and belt tightening, a time when PNU, for example, urged everyone to walk up to their classrooms/offices rather than ride an (expensive) lift.

- c. Thru 15 open-ended, conversational interviews conducted in Korean by Ms Moon, we learned how hard some women were working and how the returns on their labour were diminishing:
1. "Last Spring my husband's business failed and he had no money to start another business. So I quit my job at the factory, where I had worked a long time, got severance pay and looked for a business that could make money. When we first opened in September 1997 we used to work w my husband's brother and his wife bc we needed their hands for the many customers we had. But then we lost two-thirds of the customers after the ec crisis started, even tho we are open from 11 to 1am now. We try to do new things, like deliver food or advertise, but it doesn't help."
    - a. Interesting aside on innovation. In the early 1990s, competitors in Korean consumer industries were better known for imitating each other than engaging in innovative entrepreneurship.
      1. Coffee shops, bun-shiks, and small groceries all looked alike and offered the same products.
      2. During the 1997 crisis, some women broke from mold to innovate, but crisis too severe to overcome in this way alone:
 

"I work from 10 to 10 seven days a week, but I'd say that I make half what I used to. I think I have the same number of customers as I used to have, but now have to spend more money paying for all the ingredients."
  2. The remaining interviews repeat this story of long hrs and reduced income from businesses on verge of bankruptcy bc of the international world (dis)order of finance.
  3. These woes are predictable under the circumstances. Still, women's business innovations need to be noticed, encouraged and studied more.
    - a. Am concerned that earlier studies of Korean industrialisation have set a pattern of seeing women mostly as victims of economic change
    - b. Also concerned that attention focuses on the Korean development model, on Chaebols and banking reforms and there's still relative inattention to the energy, labour, and skills of workers, women workers in this case.
  4. European countries not always more attentive. Both Korea and the Netherlands

have relatively low levels of women in full-time professional jobs.

- a. Korea has very low number of women professors and Netherlands joins Portugal in having fewest number of women professors in EU.
  - b. So some comparability on this factor, unfortunately.
5. Now to another angle explored by Ms Moon, which does draw our attention to workers within reform plans of the Korean labour relations system inspired by the Dutch.