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The Soviet Authorities' Position toward the "Women's Question" in North Korea from 1945 to 1949

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ABSTRACT

This essay is an overview and analysis of the policies of the Soviet authorities toward the female population of the Korean peninsula, and the measures that the Soviet leaders used to support women's equality in North Korea during the immediate post-World-War-Two period. The main source of information of this work are archival materials available at the Institute for the Historical Study of Korea university and publications by Russian and other scholars. The methodological approach of the essay is comparative historical and hermeneutical.

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In August 1945, during the concluding act of the Second World War, the Soviet army attacked the Japanese army in East Asia and occupied the northern part of the Korean peninsula. The Soviet authorities liquidated the Japanese colonial administration in this region. According to an agreement about the East-Asian region between the Soviet Union and the United States, the Korean peninsula was divided into two zones of influence, a Soviet one in the north and an American one in the south. The Soviet and American administrations in Korea followed a political course toward the local population on the basis of their particular ideas about the region. Obviously, the USSR and US did not agree on a similar policy toward the Korean peninsula. Both sides several times tried to conduct negotiations with each other about coordinating their policies and agree on a common administration for Korea, but they remained fruitless.[2] The Soviet

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[1]The author likes to thank the journal's editor, Dr. Kees Boterbloem, who translated this article from the original Russian and provided some useful commentary to further contextualize it and embed it into the relevant historiography.

[2]Yu.V. Vanin, *Sovetskii Soiuz i Severnaia Koreia, 1945–1948*, Moscow: Institut Vostokovedeniia Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk [RAN], 2016. In general, the various works by Andrei Lankov and Kathryn Weathersby are good discussions in English on the early years of the history of North Korea (see for example Andrei Lankov, "Soviet Politburo Decisions and the North Korean State, 1946–1948," *Korea Observer* 3, 2005, 383-404; idem, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung: The Formation of North Korea, 1945–1960*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003; Kathryn Weathersby, "To Attack of Not to Attack? Stalin, Kim Il Sung and the Prelude to War," *Cold War International History Project* [*CWHIP*] Bulletin 5, 1995; see as well "New Evidence on North Korea," *CWHIP Bulletin* 14-15, 2003–2004; and some of the works listed below in the footnotes).

and American sides wanted to maintain their position and influence in each of their zones in Korea. In addition, the initial phase of the Cold War exerted a major influence in the region. The Korean peninsula obviously did not avoid the repercussions of this growing conflict. Policy in each zone had its specifics, calibrated according to which of the two camps in the Cold War its administration subscribed.

In this essay, we survey the developments by looking at the Soviet policy regarding the position of women in North Korea in the immediate postwar period. The Soviet occupational authorities very carefully studied the social and economic conditions of North Korea at this time, but often refrained from actively getting involved in them. One of their topics of study was the "female question." The Soviet leadership aimed to move toward equal rights for women with men in many respects. The key reasons for this effort had little to do with pity or compassion towards the fate of Korean women in a patriarchal society. It is evident that the Soviet leaders were not interested in supporting women's status in North Korea for its own sake. Soviet officials, however, exerted themselves in supervising the situation their zone of occupation and understood that women's rights needed support for economic and other reasons. In addition, they sought to link their policy with support from Korean society: They formally withdrew from the peninsula in December 1948 and needed to persuade the Koreans of the truth and benefits of the socialist equality of the sexes before they departed.

The materials used in our investigation are fragments of Soviet archival materials from the former Central Archive of the Defense of the Soviet Union (Tsentral'nyi Arkhiv Ministerstva Oborony SSSR or TsAMO SSSR), part of which are difficult to read because of inadequate preservation in Russia, with particularly the basic information regarding finding aids (fondy, dela, etc.) having become illegible: Some of the original documents were destroyed at TsAMO because of several fires and other incidents, making the identification of the documents' provenance extremely difficult. All the primary documents used for this essay have been received not long ago at the History Institute of Korea University as copies from originals preserved by the Ministry of Defense of the Korean Republic (South-Korea). They have been named by the Institute as the History of Russia (HR) collection.[3] Obviously, only a part of that collection concerns North Korea.

[3]Some of this archive's documents that have survived these hazards are now available in digitized form, see the website available at: https://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/indexes/values/511293, accessed 26 April 2025. Unfortunately, no documents thus made available are about Korea.

The economic situation of the Korean peninsula at the end of the Second World War was extremely difficult, but northern Korea faced graver problems than the south. The region's industry had been destroyed in the course of the Japanese army's retreat before the attack by Soviet units in 1945, although it had strongly suffered already before the advance of the Soviet military, as it had been laid waste by the extraordinary exploitation implemented by the Japanese colonial administration. Agriculture suffered from many problems, after almost all its yields had been transported to the Japanese islands during the Second World War.[4] As a result, the population lacked sufficient food, while inflation had risen sharply. In addition, the Soviet army was incapable of controlling all the northern Korean districts and did not wield sufficient food reserves to feed the local population as areas adjacent to Korea that were under Soviet control suffered similar problems. The economy of Manchuria had been destroyed as well as a result of the battles between Soviet and Japanese forces in 1945. The Soviet Maritime region, too, had been a center of a developed and diversified agriculture during the first half of the 1930s and had provided food (particularly vegetables) to all parts of the Soviet Far East. After the 1937 deportation of the Soviet-Korean population–which was heavily engaged in agriculture–to Central Asia, however, the economic situation in the Soviet Maritime Region had sharply deteriorated.[5] As a result of this and the challenges of the Second World War, the southern part of the Soviet Far East could not supply other regions with food. Moreover, after the war concluded, the Soviet Union experienced famine in 1946 and 1947.[6]

In order to support a rapid economic development of North Korea, its human potential needed to be used to the limit of what was possible, first and foremost toward an improvement of the material circumstances of Korean families and an increase of educational levels of those Koreans employed in industry and agriculture. Receiving the strong support from the local population to achieve such successes was necessary. Korean women were very good candidates to reach those goals. They were, however, extremely

[4]This was the state of affairs in 2020, at least. In the Institute's collection, materials can be found from several Russian archives such as TsAMO (nowadays under the Russian Federation's government, and located at Podol'sk near Moscow), the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (Arkhiv Presidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, or APRF, whose materials nowadays have been distributed at least in part to other archives in Moscow), and the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii, or RGASPI, in Moscow). In the 1990s, these materials were copied, and the copies transferred from Russia to South Korea; most of the documents are again classified in Russia. The authors express their gratitude for access to some of the copies of these materials to Professor Kyoung Hyun Min, who is the director of Korea University's Institute of History.

[5]Andrei Balkanskii, *Kim Ir Sen*, Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2011, 81.

[6]Alexander Kim, "The Repression of Soviet Koreans during the 1930s," *The Historian* 2, 2012, 267-85.

oppressed by Korean society's patriarchy.[7] Their rights were very limited in many ways and they occupied a subordinate position within the family, while they received a low level of pay for their labor when employed. Furthermore, Korean society of that period practiced polygamy and traded girls as commodities, which caused women to develop a critical attitude toward their communities.

The Korean women's reception of equal rights from the Soviet authorities could in various ways make the women into natural allies to spread Soviet influence. A massive influx of women into industry and education allowed for an increase of the labor force (subsequently, a similar strategy was applied by Pak Chung-hee, the South-Korean dictator who ruled from 1961 to 1979). A prohibition of polygamy and the trade in girls supported the position of women in Korean society. Equal pay for women and men could help the position of women in the family and improve the material well-being of the Korean family. Moreover, an active role for women would create opposition to the highly conservative men in politics and society, who interfered in the politics advocated by the Soviet representatives.

As is obvious from the reports written at the Soviet occupational forces' command, however, the Soviet authorities understood the specifics of Korean society's patriarchy and avoided causing a confrontation between men and women: We do not encounter in the archival documents any facts about public support by the Soviet administration taking sides in any conflict between men and women in North Korea. It is of great interest that the Soviet leadership pursued a social policy in North Korea that was more flexible and cautious than in the Soviet Union or East-Central Europe. This policy took popular opinion into account and very often closely monitored it in northern Korea. We can observe this in the accounts of the Soviet military command sent from all regions every month to Pyongyang. The Soviet administration very closely watched the situation with the women's question, enlisting agitprop and checking popular opinion every month. Soviet military officers and civilian officials tried to use several propaganda methods through mass media. They floated rumours and staged encounters, both of which methods were very important, as in those days many Koreans did not have primary education and could not read, and they looked for allies among

[7] B.F. Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946-1947 godov*, Moscow: Institut rossiisskoi istorii RAN, 1996. Stalin did not want to consider importation of food to relieve the scarcity, although in general much of postwar Europe and Asia faced shortages, so any sufficient supplies might have been difficult to find. But the Soviet leader wanted to project an image of Soviet strength, while whatever revenue that might have been collected by the Soviet state was largely earmarked for industrial development (not least the Soviet atomic-bomb project).

influential people in various communities in seeking support among the North-Korean population.

This policy of seeking greater rights for women was based on the social and political experience of the Soviet Union (even if the ideals were not everywhere practiced in the Land of the Soviets), but the Soviet representatives in northern Korea very well understood that during and after the Japanese occupation Korean society was more of a patriarchy than Russian society had been during the 1920s after the Russian civil war had concluded.[8] And any significant social changes without a thorough preparation within North-Korean society might create a great number of enemies to Soviet power and become a cause of a mass migration of the population to the southern part of the Korean peninsula, or lead to armed resistance. That might become a major setback for Soviet diplomacy not merely on the Korean peninsula, but also throughout eastern Asia. In addition, both Cold War camps, the Soviet and the American, still, until 1948, investigated the possibility of an "Austrian variant" of a unified country for Korea.[9] According to this option, the country would be allowed to find its own path toward democratic reform without being directly pressured by foreign powers.

This flexible and cautious policy by the Soviet representatives who took into account popular opinion had several causes. Firstly, northern Korea was located very far away from Moscow, through which its Soviet administration enjoyed a certain freedom to maneuver.[10] Secondly, translators within the Soviet administration played an important role in the northern part of the peninsula. They were almost all Soviet Koreans who had been recruited in Central Asia.[11] They were highly fluent in Korean, had a clear idea about the patriarchal structure of Korean society, and were convinced that North Korea needed to take a socialist direction. They did understand, however, that such changes needed to be aligned with local conditions and should not be undertaken too hastily. That is why they actively worked with the population, attempting to convince it of the importance of the reforms and the

[8]Patriarchy in Korea developed from the "Middle Ages" (from around the year 1000 CE) onward through Chinese cultural influence. As a result, still in the twentieth century in Korean society Confucianism and legalism dominated. In both systems of thought the role of men is very important, while that of women is secondary. That is why, while some women in Korean society enjoyed some influence, this only occurred in the shadows, informally, as for example with female shamans.

[9]Terentii Fomich Shtykov, *Dnevniki, 1945-1948*, Seoul: Kuksaphenchanvivonhae, 2004, 199-200, 261. On these diaries, see Hyun-su Jeon and Gyoo Kahng, "The Shtykov Diaries: New Evidence on Soviet Policy in Korea," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6-7, 1995-1996, 66, 92, 93.

[10]Different from Germany, whereas Austria was divided into military occupation zones in 1945, it was allowed to form a common national administration (under the social-democrat Karl Renner). Austria's fate remained nonetheless somewhat uncertain until 1955.

[11]Balkanskii, *Kim Ir Sen*, 82.

support for them by the Soviet Union. This will become evident from the archival materials discussed below. Thirdly, Soviet representatives needed to be very careful in their policy toward the population, because in the southern part of the peninsula an American administration was at work. US representatives in the north looked for any error committed by the Soviet authorities in Korea and could use them against the Soviets (the Soviets, vice versa, had a similar right to monitor in the south).[12] In addition, the Soviet government wanted to create a decent standard of living in North Korea, which might entice Koreans residing in the south to migrate northwards.

For work with Korean women, though, the Soviet authorities needed a Korean female leader, who was highly popular throughout the peninsula, who did not have a traditional psychological sense of inferiority when discussing various situations with Korean men, knew the Korean language and culture, would support Soviet policy, and would be loyal to the Soviet Union, and so on. While not one local Korean woman could fit this role, Russian women from the Soviet Union seemed equally unsuitable. Instead, the Soviet leaders found a Soviet-Korean woman to play this role. Her name was Pak Den-ai (also called Pak Chong-ae; 박정애/朴正愛), a Soviet-Korean woman, who had been long known as Vera Tsoi (in its Russian version).

Vera Tsoi enjoyed a good reputation on the peninsula as a Soviet representative and fighter against the Japanese occupation and for the Korean socialist revolution. From the 1940s to 1968, Tsoi/Pak Den-ai (1906-c.1970) occupied high positions in the leading bodies of the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea.[13] She was a Korean born in the Russian Pacific (Primor'e) province and received a degree from the pedagogical institute of Ussuriisk (Voroshilov). Somewhere during the late 1920s, she moved to Moscow and may have studied at Moscow State University. Subsequently, on the order of the Comintern (the [third] international organization of Communist parties), she traveled to Korea (occupied by Japan since 1910) to conduct revolutionary work. In this way, Tsoi avoided the mass deportation of Soviet Koreans to Central Asia in 1937. While participating in anti-Japanese and revolutionary activities (as well as working for Soviet intelligence) during the 1930s and 1940s, she changed her name several times, one of which was Pak Den-ai. The Japanese colonial administrators sought to apprehend her and she was twice jailed by them, in 1935 and 1944. In 1945, she was liberated from Japanese captivity by the Soviet army. She then became a member of the Korean Communist Party's Central Committee,

[12]Nobuo Simotomai, *Kim Ir Sen i Kreml*, Moskva: MGIMO-universitet, 2010.
[13]Shtykov, *Dnevniki, 1945-1948*.

which she formally remained until 1970, although her name vanished from the official North-Korean media before that year.[14]

From 1946 to 1948 Pak Den-ai was head of the women's department of the Communist (Workers) Party's Central Committee and from 1946 to 1965 she chaired the central committee of the democratic women of Korea. Pak Den-ai was a member of the Supreme People's Assembly of North Korea from 1948 to 1970 and concomitantly a member of its presidium. From 1950 to 1953, she was Central Committee secretary of the Korean Communist Party and, from 1953 to 1961, deputy chair of its Central Committee. Pak Den-ai was a member of the Central Committee's political committee (the equivalent of the Soviet Politburo) from 1951 to 1970, while from 1960 to 1962 she was also minister of agriculture of North Korea. From 1950 to 1970, she was deputy chair of North Korea's Military Committee. In sum, before her disappearance toward 1970, she was a leading North-Korean politician in Kim Il-sung's regime.

Before the arrival of the Soviet and American forces in 1945, Pak Den-ai had lived and worked for more than 15 years in Korea and knew the intricacies of the Korean society of her day. From 1945 onwards, she used the support of the Soviet authorities and was able to coordinate her activities with the Soviet military command in various parts of Korea, and she could explain various cultural phenomena to Soviet officers and come to the aid of Soviet translators. Until the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, she was considered fully loyal to the Soviet Union.[15]

In addition, the Soviet administration in Korea used her as the public representative of Korean women before Soviet journalists. Terentii F. Shtykov (1907-1964), the chief of the Soviet administration in North Korea, met with her repeatedly.[16] She was portrayed as a leader of Korea's progressive women, a fighter for women's equal rights.[17] Evidently, information about her Soviet (or Russian) origins was not shared with the Soviet journalists who depicted her. In the Soviet Union, many considered her to be

[14]See A.N. Lankov, "The Emergence of the Soviet Faction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 1945-1955," *Russian History* 2-4, 2202, 443-58: 445. A short biography is Suzy Kim, "Pak Chong-ae (1907-?), From Red Labor Unions to the Korean Democratic Women's Union," in Francesca de Haan, ed., *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World*, Houndsmills, Basingstoke: PalgraveMacMillan, 2023, 299-325. Different from Suzy Kim, we suggest that Pak was a communist before being a feminist, even when we agree that Pak stood for women's rights.

[15]The party was renamed Korean Workers Party in 1946.

[16]TsAMO, fond 142, opis' 540936, delo 1, listy 63-64.

[17]Shtykov, *Dnevniki, 1945-1948*, 220, 222-3, 288. Shtykov held the rank of colonel-general in the Soviet army, but was a political commissar, who had moved up the Leningrad Party organization under the aegis of Andrei A. Zhdanov (1896-1948). During the Second World War, Shtykov served at various fronts, ending the war in the Far East. He then was involved in the Soviet-American committee overseeing the occupation of the peninsula before becoming the first ambassador to North Korea (1948-1950). He was a good friend of Korean Communist leader Kim Il-sung.

a woman of North-Korean birth. It is clear that she handily demonstrated her high level of education, fluently spoke Korean and Russian, was versed in socialist theory and was seen as a model for the development and education of North-Korean women.

From 10 to 17 May 1946, the first congress of the North-Korean Women's Union took place in Pyongyang.[18] One hundred and fifty delegates represented its membership of 597,692. Pak Den-ai chaired the congress and delivered the main report "On the Work of the Women's Union in Korea." On the urging of its chair, the congress decided to change the name of the organization into "All-Korean Democratic Women's Union," replacing its former name of North-Korean Women's Union. In doing so, apparently, Pak wanted to attract South-Korean women into her organization. During the congress, a program and set of guidelines was approved and an executive committee chosen of 17 people, led by Pak Den-ai. This organization clearly politically followed the Soviet lead and transmitted the Soviet position to its membership in various ways.

The participants of the congress composed a letter addressed to Soviet women, in which they thanked the Soviet Red Army for liberating Korea and promised to create stable contacts beween North-Korean and Soviet women. The congress delegates fully supported in a resolution the actions of the provisional people's committee (government) of North Korea and the effort to create an independent democratic state on the basis of the decisions of the so-called Moscow commission [apparently meaning the Soviet authorities in Korea].[19] In addition, the union affirmed the resistance against "anti-people" individuals in the southern part of the Korean peninsula, such as Syngman Rhee and Gu Kim and their allies.[20]

The women's union also attempted to strengthen the organization's influence. Towards this goal the organization resolved to create a printing body, to increase its propaganda among the peasantry, to open an evening school in every village and to fully end illiteracy in the countryside. In the union's program a demand was entered about a state law that needed to be issued toward the protection of motherhood and to liquidate "feudalism" and superstition.[21] Union membership cost a fee of 50 Korean yen monthly and was exclusively

[18]Valentin Ivanovich Petukhov, *U istokov bor'by za edinstvo i nezavisimost' Korei*, Moscow: Nauka, 1987; Fania Isaakovna Shabshina, *Socialisticheskaia Koreia*, Moscow: Nauka, 1963; *Vo imia druzhby s narodom Korei*, Moscow: Nauka, 1965.
[19]HR 62: 62-3.
[20]HR 62: 62-3.
[21]이승만 (Syngman Rhee) (1875–1965) was the political leader of South Korea after 1945 and a fanatical anti-communist; 김구(金九) (Kim Gu) (1876 –1949) was an anti-communist South Korean political leader. He was probably murdered on orders of Syngman Rhee during the power struggle for control of the Republic of Korea after 1945.

reserved for women.[22] Union membership was for women eighteen and older.[23] The organization thus received revenue from its membership and become a key body for women who worked and received an income, or had some other source of funds.

As we mentioned earlier, the Soviet command assessed the situation in the districts on a monthly basis, while at its headquarters in Pyongyang it received additional information on the state of the women's movement locally, on the basis of which it tried to improve women's lot. The women's movement in its turn worked to support the Soviet authorities. For example, the army commander Fomin reported from Neibin district to the North-Korean capital that in the district the women's union counted 200 members in March 1946.[24] It shows how the women's union in North Korea very swiftly developed. Representatives of the Soviet military command in the district of Bakchen, the officers Grachev and Podgornyi, at various occasions in the summer and fall of 1946 reported to the capital that the majority of the local population agreed with having women enjoy equal rights, and that more than 1,000 women had joined the women's union in their district.[25] Decrees by the Soviet authorities on women's equal rights and labor conditions were therefore welcomed and supported by the local population.[26] According to these decrees, the labor day of adults was to be limited to 7 or 8 hours and for the underaged to 5 hours. Men's pay was to be the same as women's for similar work. Teenage (both boys and girls) pay was to be equal to that of adults, even when they only worked 5 hours per day. This sort of freedom for women did not please many men, but in the immediate postwar years the economic situation in the country was utterly dire and almost all families needed financial relief, because of which men had to accept the new reality. It is obvious that these measures by the North-Korean government and Soviet authorities supported the improved position of women and teenagers in society and in the family, and encouraged the agency of both groups. Both women and teenagers occupied increasingly important roles in society and the family. Women, however, had more time and possibilities to become involved, because young North Koreans had to go to school besides their work. Furthermore, the youth did not yet have the knowledge or insight about socially active roles. In August 1946 in Neibin district the women's

[22]HR 62: 64.
[23]Until 1947, the North-Korean population used various kinds of money, including foreign currency (such as the Chinese Red yuan, the Chinese Guomindang yuan, the Soviet ruble, the US dollar, the military dollar, the Japanese yen, the Korean yen, and so on). Eventually, North and South created their own currencies.
[24]HR 62: 65.
[25]HR 147: 3.
[26]HR 150: 241-2; 382.

union already counted 20,117 members.[27] Since March of that year, it had grown one-hundred-fold. Clearly, something worked in terms of the affirmative-action policies of the North-Korean authorities and their Soviet backers. The union's presence guaranteed a plethora of measures that were undertaken in Neibin district, from participating in the celebration of Korean independence day on 15 August or in music ensembles, to prophylactic measures against cholera, explaining questions regarding women's legal equality, strenghtening union locals, or explaining the necessity of rapidly delivering the agricultural tax in kind that was required by the authorities.[28]

The social composition of the union in Neibin is of interest: Of its members, 1,785 were identified as (factory) workers, 12,684 as landless laborers or poor peasants, 4,327 as middling peasants, 538 as wealthy peasants, and 346 as landlords.[29] Therefore, the majority of the membership came from peasant households. At this time, the women's union was a truly democratic organization in that it included women from all social strata. Soviet activists tried to attract women from all social categories, including landowners, as they considered women from the landholding class as belonging to a discriminated part of the population, who in general had received no education and were subject to a different kind of exploitation in the family and society, lacking equal rights with men.

In 1946, at a tobacco factory the first daycare was opened. In this workplace many women were employed. Concomitantly, as a result of the legislation about the equality of the sexes and of labor laws many more women entered the workforce. Good labor conditions for women at the factory might translate into them having more children. This development caught the attention of government and Soviet employees, who involved themselves in solving what had become a problem. As a result in 1947 four daycares with an additional 125 places were created, and in 1948 six additional daycares with 250 places, with plans to further add two daycares with 80 places.

Soviet representatives reported how, on 23 July 1946, a plenary session of the women's union was held, attended by 150 people. Pak Den-ai proposed to this meeting a draft of the bill "On the Equal Rights of women in North Korea."[30] Pak first described the lamentable fate of women in Korea during the Japanese occupation. She then proposed her draft project on the equal rights for women and explained each of its points to the attendees. Those at

[27]HR 147: 90.
[28]HR 147: 96.
[29]HR 147: 95.
[30]HR 147: 96.

the meeting had many questions about areas that had no direct bearing on Pak's presentation, but did have to do with women's situation in Korean society. Among the first questions raised by the women were when geishas[31] would be prohibited; how property was to be divided among divorcing spouses; whether men were entitled to a second spouse if they did not have a son-and-heir; and who should receive custody of children after a divorce. In the discussion after Pak's presentation many women participated. For example, Tae En-son (the head of a women's organization in Pyongyang) stated:

> My father had several wives. My mother considered this normal. But she said that women needed to be free. My mother raised us in this way. That is why we today work in the area of social justice. North Korea liberated itself from Japan with the help of the Red Army. The realization of my mother's dream nears now. A law about women's equal rights is a most progressive document.[32]

Ke Piak-son, deputy chief of a women's organization in the province of Southern Pyongyang said:

> The law on equal rights for women is a most just decree. When I heard about this law on the radio, I immediately wrote a letter to Kim Il-Sung in which I heartily thanked him. This law can only be introduced upon the end of the Japanese occupation. We, Korean women, thank the Soviet Army for this, for giving us freedom.[33]

The head of the women's department of Pyongyang's Communist Party Kim En-su reiterated how

> . . . thanks to the Soviet Army and the Provisional people's committee a law on women's equal rights could be adopted, which law can destroy the "geisha institute," which is just. This institute denigrates all women in Korea; the geishas can be shifted to socially useful work.[34]

The fifty-five-year-old homemaker Tae Tyu-ne stated how "the law on women's equality is like a sunny moon during a dark night [and] I am very happy with this law, I think about it in the same way as about a get-together with close relatives."[35] Another homemaker from Pyongyang, Tae En-su, said:

[31]HR 34: 63.
[32]In reality, geishas did not exist in Korean society and the reference in the source seems to be the result of an effort by the Soviet officers to depict the Korean, rather different, variation of female entertainers called kisen (기생) in terms understandable to their superiors.
[33]HR 34: 64.
[34]HR 34: 64-5.
[35]HR 34: 65; see note 32 above.

> Three years ago I moved from Manchuria to Korea. I had remained in Manchuria, because the Japanese had not allowed me to live in Korea. Life in Manchuria was extremely difficult for us, because the local population considered us vagrants and bandits. I have children, but as a mother I have not been able to offer them the possibility of an education. The law on equal rights for women gives mothers the option to give their children the education that she wants to have them. I support this law."[36]

As seems evident, the North-Korean women who took part in this 1946 gathering had the chance to discuss and ask about the measures aimed at improving women's fate in those days. They actively wanted to support women's position in various parts of Korean society (as in the banishment of kisen, child custody, and so on). That could be done because of the support of the Soviet authorities, who wanted to guide the women's movement.

Previously, the Soviet commanders of the town of Sensen, Babichev, and Sokhatskii had written to their superiors about approximately 300 Korean women who met in February 1946 and elected a women's committee, with the meeting stating that a woman needed to actively participate in political and economic life, and was entitled to equal rights and to freedom.[37] Likewise, commander Kolesnikov observed from the district of Fuchan' that the law about women's equality improved the life of the women in his district.[38] In February 1947, Soviet generals I.M. Chistiakov (1900-1979) and N.G. Lebedev (1901-1992) reported to Moscow that Korean women very actively took part in the elections for the rural soviets (government councils).[39] The year 1948 became a milestone in the development of a system for the defense of motherhood and childhood in North Korea. At the end of 1948 model consultation offices were established in Pyongyang. In the tobacco and textile industries, women's health centers were created.[40]

In sum, the conditions of motherhood and childhood notably improved in northern Korea when it was under Soviet rule from 1946 to 1948. The All-Korean Democratic Women's Union noticed that as a result there was a massive influx of women into North-Korean industry and the union requested the government for further construction of daycares and pediatric health centers at the factories.[41]

Indubitably, the role of women in North Korea had become extremely important. The congress of people's committees and the first session of the

[36]HR 34: 65.
[37]HR 34: 65.
[38]HR 151: 28-9.
[39]HR 169: 24-5.
[40]HR 281: 225-6.
[41]HR 62: 112.

People's Assembly of North Korea, which took place from 17 to 20 February 1947, was attended by 1159 delegates. In the course of this congress the equal rights of women were discussed and a law adopting them was confirmed by it. The congress by way of a secret ballot elected a People's Assembly which was to have 237 members, among whom 33 women were elected.[42]

Thus on the basis of the information he had received, the Soviet commander in North Korea Ignat'ev could sent a report to Moscow that men and women in North Korea legally earned the same wages.[43] Women enjoyed the same rights as men. The state prohibited polygamy and the sale of women. North-Korean women actively participated in social and cultural life. More than 1.3 million women had become members of the Democratic Union of North-Korean Women by 1948, of whom 89 per cent did not belong to the Communist Party.[44] The union had joined the international women's federation. In addition, almost 10,000 women had been elected to various organs of local government.[45]

The All-Korean Democratic Women's Union continued to flourish until 1950.[46] We suggest that the development of the organization stagnated, however, after the withdrawal of the Soviet army from the Korean peninsula at the end of 1948. After the 1953 truce the women's movement's situation changed and did no longer achieve great successes. That was the result of the political struggle between several social forces within the regime and the establishment of a totalitarian system by Kim Il-sung.

Pak Den-ai was highly involved in the internal struggles within the North-Korean Communist Party and initially supported Kim Il-sung, as during the conflict with Korean pro-Chinese or pro-Soviet supporters around 1960.[47] Her agenda for the position of the women's movement in Korea sharply differed from the other Soviet-Korean leaders in North Korea. Kim Il-sung had initially found support among the deported Soviet Koreans who Stalin had removed from the Soviet Maritime Province and sent to Central Asia in 1937, some of whom subsequently moved to North Korea. Pak was a Soviet Korean, although not one of those 100,000s deported in 1937. The support of the former Soviet Koreans was crucial within the struggle for power in North

[42]HR 62: 113.
[43]HR 138: 76.
[44]HR 298: 3.
[45]*Doklad ob itogakh raboty Upravleniia Sovetskoi Grazhdanskoi Administratsii v Severnoi Koree za 3 goda (avgust 1945 g.-noiabr' 1948 g.)* [Report on the results of the work by the Directorate of the Soviet Civilian Administration in Northern Korean over three years (August 1945-November 1948)], vol. 1: Political part, Pyongyang, December 1948, 134.
[46]HR 298, 4.
[47]HR 302.

Korea and became one of the sources of Kim Il-sung's victory in this conflict. Pak Den-ai failed to understand, however, that her position regarding the women's movement in Korea could only be strong if it was supported by the Soviet Koreans, as the pro-Chinese Koreans and the supporters of Kim Il-sung were utter traditionalists.

Soviet Koreans understood Pak well as they had been raised in Soviet society, in which the status of women was much higher than in East Asia: Soviet society was certainly not as traditional as Korean society before 1945. Kim Il-sung evidently used Pak to gather support among North-Korean women to strengthen his position as North-Korean leader. He was lukewarm, though, about her activities advocating women's rights. Conversely, Pak Den-ai used her ties to the North-Korean leader to strengthen her position in the Korean Labor Party. But this pact did not last long. Once Kim Il-sung decided that he did not need her anymore, the situation fundamentally changed. In 1968, Kim Il-sung began to criticize her, after which she lost all her leading positions in the North-Korean state and society and was jailed. Any further progress for the North-Korean women's movement then ended. The improvement of women's rights in North Korea in effect stalled. Pak's fate after 1968 remains uncertain. It seems very likely that she died in prison, but precise information about the circumstances of her death remain unknown.[48]

In conclusion, Soviet rule created and supported the women's movement in North Korea. Obviously, this was not feminism as understood today, but women fought for equal social and family status, and equality at work. This was in a sense its own type of suffragettism. Conversely, for economic, political, and social reasons, the Soviet representatives used the movement. It is clear that Pak Den-ai played a leading role in this development. Subsequently, Kim Il-sung destroyed the considerable strength of the women's movement in Soviet Korea.

We suggest that the first North-Korean leader was not fond of the women's movement, but that he needed the support of Pak Den-ai in the struggle for power. That is why, once he had established his autocratic rule, he no longer needed Pak and destroyed her and her organization. Kim Il-sung, nonetheless, preserved several elements that had been part of Pak's program (and been backed by the postwar Soviet occupational forces) supporting women within his state, such as the support for motherhood and childhood, because the state needed a growing population and labor force. Of course, the position

[48]Lankov, "The Emergence of the Soviet Faction."

of women in North-Korean society therefore weakened. This had an effect on things such as wages. Clearly, some women were selected for certain posts in the government, but their number decreased, and their positions were not very high within the state and Communist Party as they had been at the very beginning of the Korean People's Democratic Republic.

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