

BOOK REVIEWS

Winds of Change

Korean Women in America

by Diana Yu

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND: WOMEN'S INSTITUTE PRESS, 1991
356 PAGES + APPENDIX + INDEX

Although the title of this book is a misnomer, it is a fortunate one. Diana Yu's study of Korean women is not just about Korean women in America. Part One contains substantial and interesting information about the historical as well as current conditions of women in Korea. Part Two considers different groups of immigrants to America, the behavior of both male and female Korean immigrants, and the experiences of the children of immigrants. Since many of the issues discussed are universal, the reader sees Korean women as participants in the global changes in women's consciousness which have occurred over the last twenty-five years. This book was written only eight years ago, and its historical descriptions are accurate and relevant, yet the behavior and conditions of women living in Korea today have moved observably in the directions advocated by Ms. Yu. When I was in Korea in 1988, for example, I noticed that women would cover their mouths when they smiled (a sign of female modesty, according to this book); yet today, Korean women are not afraid of laughing openly. A small matter, perhaps, but indicative of the immense changes in self-confidence which have taken place in a very short time.

The first half of *Winds of Change* (Part One) is devoted to a discussion of women in Korea. Chapter One, "Women and Korean History," flies through the 2500-year history of the country a little too fast, giving a bare overview of the historical periods. Chapter Two, "Women and Religion," however, reexamines historical periods in terms of major religious movements and their effect on women's lives. This chapter contains a great deal of information which could stimulate discussion in either a high school social studies classroom, or an undergraduate class in women's studies. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity each have had their effect on the place of women in Korean society. Comparisons of Buddhism and Christianity, or an examination of Confucius and his attitude toward women, would be appropriate in either a senior high school or an undergraduate class. Chapter Three, "Customs and Traditions," also contains material about Korean society which would be of interest to a high school class, and teachers could easily engage students with the examples given of boy versus girl hegemony in the family social structure. The gender issues presented in this book are highly relevant

to teen-agers on a personal level, as well as to college students on an academic level.

The rest of Part One concerns women in the larger society: "Women and the Law," "Women in Education," "Women in Politics," and "Women in the Work Force." Here, again, is relevant historical and political information about the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and especially the effects that Japanese occupation had on Korean women. One glaring omission is the issue of "comfort women" forced into prostitution by the Japanese military, an issue which has only recently been acknowledged. In 1989, under Noh Tae Woo, family law seems to have changed quite radically, and from that time women have been given more legal rights than they have enjoyed since before the Yi dynasty. Unfortunately, this topic is not discussed in enough depth.

Part Two of *Winds of Change* discusses Korean women and their lives in America. Two chapters on the causes of, and reasons for, immigration are interesting and valuable for their historical and sociological aspects. Korean men, in general, have not adapted to life in the United States as well as Korean women, and many men have opted to return to Korea, sometimes even leaving their wives to make a new life. The third chapter in this part deals with the female children of Korean women immigrants, and their reactions to both the men of their new country and the values instilled in them by their Korean mothers. These interviews make an interesting personal resource for students to compare and contrast their own experiences with those of individuals of another culture.

The last two chapters of *Winds of Change* fall into personal descriptions of Ms. Yu's experiences with community organizations. While they offer some dramatic moments in descriptions of her confrontations with Korean men, allowing us to feel her frustration as well as her determination, they are written with less clarity and focus than the rest of the book. The political ins and outs of the male-female relationship are explained, but they are difficult to translate into useful classroom material.

All in all, *Winds of Change* is a valuable book for understanding what is behind the gender relationships in Korean society, and would be easy to use in a high school or undergraduate classroom. What it lacks in depth and detail it makes up for in its clear presentation of interesting issues to stimulate discussion. ■

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