Chapter 2
Diverse Religions and Thoughts:
Their Influence on Feminist Perspective

I don't see why we are always concerned with the man, or even with their battles, the history of women is usually much more interesting. -Theodor Fontane, Beyond Recall, (Bock, Gisela. Women in European History, Blackwell Publishers. 2002)

Activity/Passivity
Sun/Moon
Culture/Nature
Day/Night
Father/Mother
Head/Heart
Intelligible/sensitive
Logos/Pathos
Man/Woman

1. Negative Aspects of Physiology of Women

In this chapter, I will analyze diverse religions, thoughts and socio-biological backgrounds that play a negative role for women's emancipation. My focus of study is to indict physiology, Christianity, Buddhism and Korean Confucian thought that have disseminated patriarchal notions and misogyny throughout our history. Therefore we can't deny that they have been major threats of women's growth and self-journey..

According to Cixous, as I illustrated above, her dichotomies finds its connotation in relationship between man-woman in which man is associated with all that is active, cultural, intelligible, head, or generally positive and woman is
associated all that is passive, dark, raw, natural, or generally negative. Moreover, the 
first term of man-woman is the term from which the second departs or deviates. Man 
is the self; woman is the other. Thus, “woman exists in man’s world on his terms. 
She is either the other for man, or she is unthought. After man is done thinking about 
woman, what is left of her is unthinkable, unthought” (New French Feminisms p.92) 
Thus, the way women have been taught to relate to their bodies and the subsequent 
characterization of their bodies in our culture are deeply problematic. Our society 
tends to think of the mental and the physical as two separate spheres, and, moreover, 
to value the mental more than the physical. Furthermore, they note that women are 
defined as more or less mindless and equitable with the base body, womb. “The 
womb dominates the female mind and produces uncontrollable lust: whether faking 
possessions, illness, or subject to the diseased yearnings of unfulfilled desire. (Levin, Joanna 
Lady Macbeth and the Demonologie, ELH 21-25, The John Hopkins University Press. 2002) It has been the belief that “a mother only feeds the 
living sperm in her womb, and the father is in fact the creator.” (Beauvoir, Simone de. 
base thing is not worth knowing about, and so we, women grow up ignorant, 
misinformed, unprepared. This ignorance leads women to develop an alienation 
from their bodies, and this alienation leads to feelings of disgust and loathing, 
feelings that are not just directed towards oneself, but also towards society where 
she abides. To make it worse, “Religious texts conflated woman with the realms of 
nature, the body, the physical, and above all, pollution, temptation and the 
irrational.” (Smith, Bonnie G. Women’s History in Global Perspective. University of 

Moreover, the society compounds this injury, first by encouraging women to 
remain physically unfit and, second, by objectifying women's bodies and teaching 
women to objectify themselves through the use of women's body. “Negative views
of female nature and sexuality are found in most of the world’s religious traditions and have been deployed to justify the naturalness of women’s subordination. By representing women as dangerous, weak, evil, lustful, and disorderly, their exclusion from position of religious authority or from full participation in society is justified." (Smith, Bonnie G. Women’s History in Global perspective. University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago. 2004. p.101)

Due to the alienation from and objectification of women's bodies where phallus is missing, women have been stripped of the right and the ability to make claims about themselves. Hence, women must fight back. They must reclaim their bodies. In taking up this challenge, the women will begin to overcome the forces of oppression.

To begin to conquer the ignorance that has crippled women in the past, information is a weapon without which women cannot begin the collective struggle for control over their own bodies and lives. Women should demonstrate a commitment to an epistemology that privileges personal experience and narrative approaches to understanding. In seeking to reclaim the power to define their own bodies and their own experiences, knowledge is born with their experience of themselves.

Cixous insisted that women writers have the ability to lead the western world out of the dichotomous conceptual order that causes it to think, speak, and act in terms of someone who is dominant and someone else who is submissive. She said that “if women explore her body with its thousand and one thresholds of order, she will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than more language.” (Cixous, Helene ‘The Laugh of Medusa’ in New French Feminisms, Elaine Marks and Esabelle de Courtvron,eds. New York: Schocken Books, 1981 p.259.)

She continues: “The id is the source of all desires. Oral drive, anal drive, vocal
drive—all these drives are our strengths, and among them is the gestation drive—just the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen body, for languages, for blood.” (Ibid.p.261) For Cixous, desire, not reason, is the means to escape the limiting concepts of traditional Western thoughts.

Sylvia Plath might foresee that the problem of what and how women write was to become such a crucial matter and was to be debated by so many other women. Adrienne Rich and Tillie Olsen have described the problem of the double bind for women—that the forms and language of poetry are determined and defined by a male tradition. In the literary history, women poets are described as minority, frequently also as a minor. Sylvia Plath started to realize that the language itself mirrors the male-dominated structuring of the world and the Logos, reason, learning, the world has come to be equated with the Phallus, symbol of maleness. Mary Jacobus summarizes this dilemma:

Can women adopt traditionally male-dominated modes of writing and analysis to the articulation of female oppression and desire? Or should we rather reject tools that may simply re-inscribe our marginality and deny the specificity of our own experience, instead forging others of our own? _reverting perhaps to the traditionally feminine in order to revalidate its forms( formlessness?) and preoccupation—rediscovering subjectivity; the language of our feelings. ( Jacobus, Mary. In Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986 p. 105)

An emphasis on knowledge born in women's body frequently is embraced in feminist theorizing. I argue for the development of new conceptual schemes that grow out of women's bodies, hence making intelligible the realities of women's lives. What has counted as knowledge in modern, Western cultures originates in and is
tested against only a certain limited and distorted kind of social patriarchal experience. The experiences arising from the activities assigned to women, understood through feminist theory, provide a starting point for developing potentially more complete and less distorted knowledge claims than do men's experiences. Similar views and concepts about human creation and women prevailed in Oriental societies. Like Helene Cixous' binary concepts for man-woman relationship, the two primary forces of creation, yin and yang, are the principles for all phases of creation in Korea. Creating was explained by heaven and earth, male and female, strength and weakness, which symbolized positiveness and passivity based on the yin and yang theory. Heaven(yang) and earth( yin) were described in this way: "All things obtain their beginning from Heaven. All things are born from Earth. Earth carries the burdens of all things. Its virtue is unbounded. The way of Heaven constitutes male, the way of Earth constitutes female. The heaven knows the great beginning, and Earth acts to bring things to completion, Heaven knows through the easy, and Earth accomplishes through the simple."(T’ae dong Kojon yon gu so Kyu bon, p.115.) The way of "ch’ien(heaven) constitutes male" and the way of “k’un(earth)constitutes female” appears to have much in common with Greek thought. A similar view is seen in a Korean proverb, "The male is a seed, and the female is a field." Thus, the concepts and ideology in Eastern and Western societies as to how human are formed have been based on the same domineering and biological foundations. But in the formation of humans, it has been claimed that the male is the element possessing the nuclear seed, contributing force, activity, movement and life as creator, while on the other hand, the female only furnishes a place to raise the nuclear seed and has nothing other than a nonfundamental and accidental existence, playing an incidental role for the absolute being, her mate. The notion that the two sexes differed in that “man, in consequences of that differentiation, is the active principle while a woman is a
passive principle, because she remains underdeveloped in her unity” (Beauvoir Simone de. *The Second Sex* p.36) was maintained and justified. Thus the hierarchical relationship between a man and a woman is fixed and rooted in our society.

Another scientist and biologist, Ancel, suggested in 1903 “the primordial germ cell is indifferent and undergoes development into sperm or egg depending upon which type of gonad, thesis or ovary, contains it.” (Beauvoir Simone de. *The Second Sex* p.38) Even after the egg had been recognized as an active principle, man still tried to make point of its quiescence as contrasted with the lively movements of the sperm. In the matter of heredity, the Laws of Mendel shows that “the father and the mother play equal parts. The chromosomes contain the factors of heredity and they are conveyed equally by egg and sperm and neither gamete can be superior to the other.” (Beauvoir Simone de. *The Second Sex* p.56) Thus, the fact that the notion of passivity of the woman is clearly false and prejudiced on the level of biological theory that has been recognized. Recognition is as follows;

The living spark is not the exclusive property of man or woman, but the new life springs from the union of the two gametes. The nucleus of the egg is a center of vital activity exactly symmetrical with the nucleus of the sperm. (Ibid, p.49)

Therefore the women first should articulate their commitment to reproduction not as an inferior activity but as privileged women's personal experiences

Women are experts on their bodies and sexuality in the sense that they are women sharing their experiences and insights. Women should be protagonists of their own body. They should come out of the burden of society where women’s
bodies are the property of men. Women should reclaim their bodies which are the core of their own notion and truth itself. According to me, it is by paying attention to woman's body that one generates knowledge. Also it is by paying attention to woman's experience that she comes to know.

2. Misogyny in philosophy and religion

As I mentioned in the introduction, we can't deny that women's lives have been affected and restricted by notion of misogyny and sexism in religions and philosophy. Because our society is still under umbrella of influence of those harsh surroundings. I searched definition of the word 'misogyny' in the dictionary.

Misogyny is hatred of or strong prejudice against women. Compared with anti-woman sexism or misandry (hatred of or strong prejudice against men), misogyny is usually regarded as directed against women by some men, though women can also hold misogynistic views. In feminist theory, misogyny is recognized as a political ideology - similar to racism or anti-Semitism - that justifies and maintains the subordination of women by men. The word comes from the Greek misos 'hatred' + gyne 'woman'. (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

Many religions and philosophies contain what could be called misogyny. Paul, one of the Apostle of Jesus insisted that "women should not talk in church. women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says." (1 Cor 14:34 NIV). In Hinduism, the Code of Manu makes women incapable of ever being independent. At times in Indian history, it was customary for a woman to be pushed onto the funeral pyre of her husband. In Islam, some interpretations of law forbid women to show any part of their body in public except their face, hands or the top of their feet. There is, however, wide disagreement from followers of these religions that these various teachings are
misogynistic. The 16th century Protestant reformer John Knox wrote a book called *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* in which he argued against the ability of women to govern. Usually the Church Fathers have made Eve responsible for the fall, and identified with sexuality and sin. They thought that God was speaking to Adam alone, therefore man was to determine his own nature according to his own free will and live in his preferred form. “And out of the ground the Lord God formed beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them and whatsoever Adam called every living creature that was the name thereof.” (Genesis 2:19) God only endowed Adam with the power to wield. Therefore men think that “I am the unified self-controlled center of the universe. The rest of the world which I define as the Other has meaning only in relation to me as man/father, possession of the phallus.”

( Jones, Ann Rosalind. *Writing the body: Toward an understanding of l'écriture féminine*, Feminist Studies 7. no. 1,summer 1981) To Tertullian, women were ‘the devil’s gateway’, and Augustine regarded both extramarital and marital sexuality as sinful. Tertullian and Chrysostomos had answered their question what is a woman with a long long series of vices “enemy of friendship, necessary evil, temptation by nature, threats to the house, delightful misfortune, nature of evil” (Bock, Gisela. *Women in European history*. Blackwell Publishers.2002 p.2)

Some of the most famous philosophers exhibited misogyny at times. Nietzsche is known for arguing that every higher form of civilisation implied stricter controls on women [*Beyond Good and Evil, 7:238*]; he frequently insulted women, but is best known for the phrases, "Women are less than shallow", "Woman was God's second blunder," and "Are you going to women? Do not forget the whip!" [*Beyond Good and Evil, 7:238*]; As a mentioned in the first chapter, Napoleon, Machiavelli, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Tolstoy and even the progressive Rousseau were also
known for making such comments about women. Christine de Pisan lamented herself as followes;

Why did you not let me be born in the world as a male, so that I would be perfect as a male is said to be?. I despaired that God caused me to be born in a female body as if Nature had given birth to monsters. ( Christian de Pisan. The Cities of Ladies. Trans, Eric Hicks and Therese Moreau, Paris;Stock-Moyen Age. 1986. pp 37-38)

It should also be noted, however, that philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, Friedrich Engels, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Henry George supported feminism. Mary Daly criticises Thomas Aqinas’s thought against women

"It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Thomas Aquinas thought woman has a major or even an equal role. He wrote:

'Father and mother are loved as principles of our natural origin. Now the father is principle in a more excellent way than the mother, because he is the active principle, while the mother is a passive and material principle. Consequently, strictly speaking, the father is to be loved more.'

'In the begetting of man, the mother supplies the formless matter of the body; and the latter receives its form through the formative power that is in the semen of the father. And though this power cannot create the rational soul, yet it disposes the matter of the body to receive that form.' (Daly, Mary. The Church and the Second Sex Harper&Row. New York.1968. pp.91-92 )

Thus these misogynic claustrophobic surroundings have been passed down to the contemporary society where women are still ailing from repression and
neurosis as in case of protagonists in Sylvia Plath and Wanseo Park’s work. I wouldn’t go to the next step without mentioning and indicting the negative aspect of theology affecting the women’s life in both countries: Korea and America. All religions are same in projecting the negative image of women. They are instruments of moral reprimand and male domination. But here, in my study I will examine the two religions and one thought: Christianity, Buddhism and Confucianism, which have been influential to lives of protagonists of Sylvia Plath and Wanseo Park.

Discrimination against women is a feature common in all societies. Whether in America, Asia or Europe, the prejudice and obstacles that women have to encounter and surmount seemed almost identical. “A horse, whether good or bad, needs a spur: a woman, whether good or bad, needs a lord and master” (Christine de Pisan, La cite des dames, trans. Eric Hicks and Therese Moreau. Paris: Stock-Moyenne, 1986. pp.37-38) The peculiar disability attached to women all over the world is based on religious bias. Women’s basic disability originates in religion. Women are depicted as temptress and are warned against in almost all religions of the world.

Woman is the most monstrous animal in the whole of Nature, bad-tempered and worse spoken. To have this animal in the house is asking for trouble in the way of tattling, tale-bearing, malicious gossip, and controversies: for wherever a women, it would seem to be impossible to have peace and quiet. However, even this might be tolerated if it were not for the danger of unchastity... - (Casimoro,Dias, O.E.S.A., Parrocho de Indios Instruido, Manila.1745

According to certain religious mythological concept, man was introduced as the son of patriarchal God, but woman never found a similar standing as the daughter of God even though there is a apparent mentioning about image of woman in Genesis: “Both man and woman had been created in God’s image.” (Genesis 1;27) Amongst the soul-believers, some held the notion that a soul exists only in man and not in woman. Those who claimed that woman too had a soul would not give credence that her soul could find a place in heaven after her death. Such were the
strange beliefs amongst certain religious societies. Women have also been regarded as the source of all the sins of the world and that they are blamed for the misfortunes on men in this world and the next.

There was also the belief that as women, no salvation could be gained—they had to be reincarnated as men before they are able to gain their salvation. Certain fanatical religious cults have also prohibited women from reading the religious scriptures. The punishment for doing so was to have their tongues cut out. They were also discouraged from entering places of worship. If they were at all allowed to participate in religious practices, such participation was only confined within their own homes, attending to household religious ceremonies. Such hindrances and obstructions in the matter of moral and spiritual upliftment of women still exist in varying degrees in certain parts of the world, even though many barriers have been removed.

3 Christianity and Suppression of Women

In the minds of most of our contemporaries, Christianity primarily means morality. The spiritual aspect of their faith, except among a few, is forgotten. Many of them Christians are equally confused. They have forgotten that God's revelation has nothing whatever to do with morality.

There is simply no moral system in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. There are no moral precepts that can exist independently in some way, that can have universal validity, and that can serve the elaboration of a moral system. Not only that, the whole revelation of God in Jesus Christ is against morality. The proclamation of grace, the declaration of pardon, the opening up of life to freedom—these are the direct opposite of morality.

As Genesis shows, the origin of sin in the world is not knowledge. The origin
of sin in the world is the knowledge of good and evil. What is not acceptable to God is that we should decide on our own what is good and what is evil.

Biblically, the good is the will of God. That is all. What God decides, whatever it may be, that is the good. When we construct a morality, when we say what is right and good, that is when we are radically sinners. To elaborate a moral system is to show oneself a sinner before God. Frequently, we are convinced that Christian morality is superior to all others. Yet, even if there was such a thing as Christian morality, such a claim could hardly be true. We find honest and virtuous people, good husbands, wives, and children, scrupulous and truthful people outside of Christianity — and more, perhaps, than there are Christians.

One of the basic things in the history of Christianity is that it has imposed morality on human being, especially on women. “Chastity was a major component in the construction of the ideal woman, particularly in view of widespread concerns with purity of lineage. The fundamental reason for the pre-reformation church’s exaltation of virgin martyrs and chaste females should be seen for what it was — a manifestation of long-standing contempt for, and fear of, women’s sexuality.” (The Church and the Second Sex p.100) Chaste women have been praised throughout the history. Chastity means the renunciation of earthly pleasures, which is an implicit of male control of women’s sexuality. Mary Daly said in her book:

"Jerome wrote that it is contrary to the order of nature, or of law, that woman should speak in the assembly of men. He maintained that the man should be commanded to love his wife, whereas the woman should fear her husband: 'For love befits the man; fear befits the woman. As for the slave, not only fear is befitting him, but also trembling.' (The Church and the Second Sex p. 87)
This was the most decisive setback to the Christian mutation. Here again, it is very hard to see why it should have happened. But seemingly the Christian masses found it difficult to live in this spirit of freedom and love. Norms had to be imposed. Duties had to be indicated especially to women.

But an equally decisive factor was the prodigious immorality of the societies in which the church found itself. As this immorality was especially flagrant in the sexual sphere, the moralizing reaction came principally in this area. Women's sexuality is one of the most intimidating factors that should be suppressed to the Catholic fathers and church pastors. Feminine goddess must be repressed in the name of liberation of moral freedom of human being. In Sylvia's poetry, the White Goddess written by Robert Graves returns with enormous impact. "The white goddess - the source of all poetry and all life, the sublime muse- stands in direct contrast to the male, fatherly God of Christianity and rationalism." (Bassnett, Susan. The Sylvia Plath: An Introduction to the poetry, Palgrave, 2005.p.58) Sylvia Plath has "incorporated patterning of the White Goddess into her own writing, seeing in its intricacies a solution to the perennial problem felt by repressed women."(Ibid.p.59)

Through history, Women were the chief victims of their sexuality. So many women had been labeled as witches and died in the Middle Ages. Because they were the destructioner of the moral system in those days. "Both natural and super natural categories promise to reveal the hidden truth of femininity, its latent potential for disorder and deception. To be sure, the demonic woman deviates from patriarchal feminine ideals insofar as neither category met the ongoing demands of chastity, silence and obedience."(ELH.2002.21-55, The Johns Hopkins University Press.p.29) But "Many feminist historians and literary critics celebrate the witch as the nonconforming figure who threatened hegemonic sex/gender systems. Some even reveal a certain nostalgia for the witch, maintaining that her disappearance accrued
to the greater triumph of male hegemony.” (ELH.2002.21-55, The Johns Hopkins University Press. P.23) Marianne Hester elaborates this theory, arguing that:

A new gender ideology expedited the end of the witch hunts by providing new, and more effective, means of controlling women by men, and this new ideology as the changed perception of women from that of powerful and threatening witch to that of hysterical women, sexually passive and domesticated. She is patronized rather than feared, consigned to an involuted private sphere of sentiment, morality, and nurture, they consent to their own subjection through the insidious workings of ideological belief. (Ibid. p.25)

Up to now, theological legacy has been lingering on women’s lives requiring the morality to women. Antifeminism remains one of the important points at which Christianity’s betrayal of God’s revelation is most apparent.

Dapne Hampson tells “Christianity is incompatible with feminism. And Christianity cannot be reformed to become compatible with feminism because its root authority most always go back to scriptures that validate a patriarchal view of God.” (“Feminism in world Christianity” in Feminism and world religion Sharma, Arvind and Young, Katherine K. eds. State University of New York Press P.225) Hampson articulates her reason for this comments in her book, Theology and Feminism. In this book she argues “the fundamental Christian view of God, Christ, and divine-human relations are built on patriarchal domination men over women.” (Ibid. p.225) Thus, it has become commonplace to affirm that Christianity has been antifeminist, that it has kept women in bondage, that it has treated women as minors.

In The Glooming of Women, Tertullian berates his women and remind them of the third chapter of Genesis “You gave birth, women in suffering and anguish.” and continues:

You are under your husband’ spell and he is your master. And do you not know that you are Eve? She still lives in this world as God’s judgment on your sex. Live then, for you must as an accused. The devil is in you.
You broke the seal of the Tree. You were the first to abandon God's law. You were the one who deceived man, whom the devil knew not how to vanquish. It was you who so easily overcame him who was made in the image of God. For your wages you have death, which brought death even to the Son of God. And yet you think of covering your tunics with ornaments. (1-2, sources chretiennes 173 Marie Turcan (Paris, 197), Carthage, c.202)

Some have even tried to portray Paul as the founder of antifeminism. Mary Daly mentioned this in her book *The Church and the Second Sex*

The contemporary social inferiority of women was, indeed, reflected in the New Testament. Although the seeds of emancipation were present in the Christian message, their full implications were not evident to the first century authors. The most strikingly antifeminist passages are, of course, in the Pauline texts, which are all too familiar to Catholic, who have heard them cited ad nauseam. We now know it is important to understand that Paul was greatly preoccupied with order in society and in Christian assemblies in particular. In modern parlance, it seemed necessary to sustain a good 'image' of the Church. Thus it appeared to him an important consideration that women should not have too predominant a place in Christian assemblies, that they should not 'speak' too much or unveil their heads. This would have caused a scandal and ridicule of the new sect, which already had to face accusations of immorality and effeminacy. In ancient Corinth, as one scholar has pointed out, for a woman to go unveiled would be to behave like a prostitute (Daly, Mary. *The Church and the Second Sex*. Beacon Press. P.88)

Others have tried to justify the Bible and Christians by saying that they were simply following the patriarchal customs of the period. This excuse is in fact a terrible condemnation, for it testifies to the lack of Christian freedom relative to the customs and ideologies of the age.
It is true that there have been periods when a patriarchal form of society has been dominant, such as in Judaism during the third and second centuries before Christ and in Rome during the same period. But it is absurd to describe all traditional societies as patriarchal. Rome in the first century A.D. was no longer patriarchal in the strict sense. Except for voting in elections, women had equal rights with men. They were not kept at home to raise the children.

It is true that with the collapse of the Roman Empire, the status of women suffered a sudden decline. But from the twelfth century there were new movements toward legal and economic equality between men and women, movements which continued largely unabated until the eighteenth century. Throughout this period, Western society cannot be described as uniformly patriarchal. Rather, the nature of society varied according to time and place. But the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see astonishing regression in the status of women in every field.

Nevertheless, a problem remains. The biblical texts are very favorable to women—or are at least neutral, according to local circumstances. Contemporary scriptural exegetes of all faiths are enabled to look critically at the first chapter of Genesis. The two creation accounts, which differ greatly from each other, have been carefully scrutinized. The plural is used, indicating their common authority to rule: "And God said, Let us make mankind in our image and likeness, and let them have dominion ..." (Gen 1:26). The following verse says: "God created man in his image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). This is understood by exegetes to mean that the image of God is in the human person, whether man or woman. Moreover, the plural is used in the following: Yet in later Judaism and in certain strands of Christianity, these texts have been taken in such a way as to become completely hostile to women. In Judaism, " Rabbinic exegesis connects the Hebrew name for Eve with the Aramaic word for Serpent (Hewya), suggesting that the serpent was Eve's undoing as Eve was
More theologically, if we return to the Genesis text, we are astonished at the usual misunderstandings: Eve is inferior, because she is created after Adam. But I think that this superb logic makes Adam inferior. Creation is in fact an ascending act, and Eve, who is created, last, comes at the climax as its crown and completion. Again, it is said that Eve is inferior because she is not made out of primal clay but out of a part of Adam. This is equally absurd reasoning, for Adam, who carries the name Earth, is made out of inanimate matter, but Eve, who carries the name Life, is made out of animate and hence superior matter.

There remains, of course, an argument that is repeated again and again in later Judaism and in some branches of Christianity. Early church fathers held that “humankind’s fall from grave was specifically due to Eve’s sinful actions. Eve was cast not only as the one who caused Adam’s downfall but also as the first sinner who is responsible for the loss of paradise.” (Smith, Bonnie G. *Women's History in Global Perspective.* University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago. 2004. p.100)

To them, Eve was the first to sin. She was more open to the satanic influence than Adam. She gave sin an entry into the world. She is thus guilty and must be subject to her husband. Again, this is absurd reasoning, for it is hard to see how Adam can have any claim to superiority when in this test he shows himself unable to rule his wife, falls into the simplest of traps, and is in no way worthy to be the head. But was not woman tempted first? Indeed she was. And this leads to the invoking of absurd arguments according to which she is less intelligent, easier to seduce, weaker, and the like. Mary Daly asserts this phenomenon like this:

The presumed defectiveness of woman extended also, and perhaps especially, into the moral sphere. The primary grievance against her was her supposed guilt in the Fall.
The violence of some of the tirades on this subject has psychoanalytic implications. Tertullian, for example, wrote for the edification of his contemporaries:

'Do you not know that you are Eve? ... You are the devil's gateway. ... How easily you destroyed man, the image of God. Because of the death which you brought upon us, even the Son of God had to die. (The church and the Second Sex pp.87-88)

Alexandria taught that it is shameful for woman to think of what nature she has. Augustine cynically complained that man, who was of superior intelligence, couldn't have been seduced, and so the woman, who was small of intellect, was given to him. The logical inconsistencies implied in this seem to have escaped him: this dull-witted creature could hardly have been too responsible. Moreover, she was clever enough to seduce man, which the ingenious devil could not do. Why did the paragon of intelligence and virtue succumb so easily? It is all to evident that logic is not operative in such invective, which neurotically projects all guilt upon the woman. For the Fathers, woman is a temptress of whom men should beware. That the problem might be reciprocal is not even considered." (Ibid. p.108-109)

But a basic truth, as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 11:7, is that "woman is the glory of man." Now this passage has often been misconstrued as teaching a hierarchy from God to man and man to woman. In this passage then, Paul adds that the woman is the glory of the man; she reveals him; she shows what a human being truly is. Relating this to the temptation, we see that Eve brings to light the fundamental reality of Adam. She shows him to be weak, undiscerning, fluctuating, ambitious, and desirous of equality with God. She simply reveals this. Both are equally at fault, and the condemnation is more severe for the man, since he is given no hope. The woman, on the other hand, has a double promise that carries double hope: that she will transmit life and that her posterity will crush the serpent.
The opinion soon arose, however, that Paul is a frightful misogynist and that we should focus only on those other texts in which he speaks about the obedience of women to their husbands, their inferiority, and the need for reservations about them in certain church affairs. But “subordination of women violates God’s will and true order of creation. This is the view taken by Quaker Feminist Sarah Grimke in her 1837 *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women*” (“Feminism in world Christianity” in *Feminism and world religion* Sharma, Arvind and Young, Katherine K. eds. State University of New York Press p.218)

A pastoral epistle declared: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the women being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and chastity and holiness with sobriety.” (Pantel, Pauline Schmitt. ed. *A History of Women in the West: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saint*, Harvard University Press, 1992.)

All too often, what has been deformed remains deformed. Christianity has become primarily morality. It is imposed as such. No question of freedom or transgression arises. Especially women are not told to love God and do as they like. Faith is no longer the center from which all else derives. The main virtue that is everywhere developed in the name of the church is obedience. The church had acquired the habit of reacting on the moral and institutional level. It had ceased to be a faithful servant of the Lord of the poor, of the Savior who gives us freedom in love. We only have a stringent of the institution and a triumph of morality.

Mary Daly emphasized in *Beyond god the father* that “a woman cannot thrive so long as she subscribes to the morality of victimization.” (Daly, Mary. *Beyond god the father; Toward a philosophy of women’s liberation*, Boston; Beacon press, 1973 p.105) Also She stressed that in *Gyn/Ecology* that “a woman cannot even survive
so long as she remains patriarchy. Not only are men out to twist women's minds, they are out to destroy women's bodies through such practices as Hindu suttee, Chinese foot binding, African female circumcision, European witch burning, and western gynecology. (Daly, Mary, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston; Beacon Press, 1978 p.107)

The truth of the revelation of God in Christ is totally lost because the church has missed its way in its desire to reply to the challenge of immorality. The more Christian morality develops, the more hypocrisy develops. The result is inevitable.

But let me now return to antifeminism, for I believe that the victory of law over gospel, of morality over love, is the essential reason for the adoption of an antifeminist stance in the church. This is what led theologians to reject women against reason. We need only point to the fact that the theologians who are most supremely and passionately concerned about moral questions are also the most antifeminist like Tertullian.

I am not saying that morality leads to the exclusion of women because women are more immoral than men or constitute a trap into immorality. The reason is much deeper than that. A moralistic attitude is essentially a masculine one. It is an attitude of judgement, of stiffness, of rigidity, of the establishment of what should and should not be done. None of this is by nature feminine.

Let me explain what I mean by masculine and feminine. I do not think there is a nature that is original to man and another that is original to woman, that there are stereotypes that may be traced back to genes, and that all men are masculine and all women feminine.

Mary Daly asserted that “patriarchy had constructed Mary as well as Eve; the Madonna as well as the whore, the positive feminine qualities of nurturance, compassion, and gentleness as well as the negative feminine qualities of pettiness, jealousy, and vanity.” Thus she concluded “women should reject the seemingly good
aspects of femininity together with the obviously bad ones on the grounds that they are all man-made shaped constructs shaped for the purpose of trapping women deep in the prison of patriarchy.” (Daly Mary, Gyn/Ecology; The Metaethics of Radical Feminism. Boston; Beacon Press, 1978. p.68)

We must not ignore the genetic heritage, but this is not determinative. Gender roles and values are the product of a genetic heritage and cultural milieu in proportions that cannot be fixed in our society. Because of their vocation as mothers, for example, women incline to such values as life, an interest in small things, a concern for the weak. But because of their exclusion from socio-political functions, they have been led to develop many other values and to establish inter-human relationships on foundations different from politics, competition, and force. In primitive times, when life was dangerous due to war, wild beasts, and the hostility of nature, men striving for material existence managed to take authority and domination, reducing women to a secondary role. This helped produce two orders of values: the masculine values of force, rule, power, the seeking of big things, a spirit of conquest, courage, and order; and the feminine values of love, sensitiveness, the protection of the weak, imagination, giving and caring.

Naturally, all men and all women are not like this. Some men wonderfully embody feminine values and some women want only to act like men and embody the masculine role. Unfortunately, the latter is the tendency in some feminist movements, especially those which think the only hope of women is to be identical to men, to adopt the values of men, and to fill the same role as men in society, inadequate as that has been. It is tragic. That women should live with their own terms is not false. Morality given by the church must be stripped of for the emancipation of women and for the growth of women.

One might have expected Christians to replace false love with the true love that comes from God. Or putting the spirit of service in the place of the spirit of
domination. Or rejecting rigid legalism in favor of an open and supple human relationship. Or boosting the personal in place of the social. Or exalting personal appreciation in place of valid rules. Or looking on the heart rather than external conduct. Or maintaining everywhere a living flexibility in place of an ordered rigidity.

But instead the church chose the spirit of constraint and domination. It rejected the gospel. It set up the primacy of law and morality over faith, hope, and love. By this fact it essentially eliminated women, reduced them to a secondary role, and submitted them as well to its law and moral judgments.

The church has rejected women as living witnesses to the gospel. By subjecting women to the judgement of moralism, the church has lost its vocation and departed from its God. The church, treating women as minors, has made them an object of repulsion and distrust.

The church finds two ways to neutralize women. One, it imposes on women silence, passivity, obedience, and self-effacement, as though such things were valid for all women. Two, it makes the status of virginity superior to all others, thereby excluding women from their social role and from their true nature as those who bear and transmit life.

But when faith has become ideology, when love has been replaced by law, and when gospel has been subverted by morality, there is no longer any point to calling ourselves Christian. The gospel is lost. The hope is gone.

The antifeminism of the church is but one example of a tragic, two-thousand-year-old pattern, a pattern of perverting the will of God, a pattern of turning Christianity into the exact opposite of what we have been shown in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, antifeminism of the church is the source of subordination of women who feel always being shackled themselves in this grim patriarchal society.
4. Buddhism and Women’s Confinement

In contrast to such hindrances and bigoted religious practices by Christianity, Comparatively, Buddhism can certainly claim to have the least discriminatory attitudes against women. There is not the slightest doubt that the Buddha was the first religious teacher who had given women equal and unfettered opportunities in the field of spiritual development. Although he had pointed out on the natural tendencies and weakness of women, he had also given due credit to their abilities and capabilities. He had truly paved the way for women to lead a full religious life. “Doctrinally, it is reinforced by early Buddhism’s frequent insistence on the irrelevance of gender in spiritual matters and the equal ability of men and women to attain liberation. Women are repeatedly described as being fully capable of attaining Nirvana. The liberation of a woman is identical to the liberation of a man are the qualities that lead to it.” (Encyclopedia of Buddhism. Volume one. Robert E. Buswell,Jr.ed.) Women were able to develop and purify their minds and realize the bliss of Nirvana in as much as men could as I mentioned above.

The Buddha had opened the gates for the full participation of women in the field of religion by making them eligible for admission to spirituality dimension. Rita M. Gross mentioned as follows:

Buddhist teaching do not distinguish between men and women, if women study and practice very diligently they will progress along the path in the same manner as men. (Sharma Arvind and Young Katherine K. ed. Feminism and World religion, State University of New York, 1987) p.79

However, such a liberal attitude towards women changed with the course of time, under the influence and dominance of the priestly caste. New interpretations were given to the scriptures. Women came to be considered as greatly inferior to
men - both physically and mentally. Some texts record fairly negative views of women, even some outright misogyny, which is different from patriarchy or male dominance. "Women are viewed as more materialistic, emotional, and sexual than men, less able to renounce desire and generally less capable of making the significant progress on Buddhist path." (Arvind Sharma and Young Katherine. K) Women are construed as the symbolic other of the male. And she is conceived as the fundamental cause of male's suffering of desire, frequently comes to represent the entrapment of male's spiritual path.

Women were looked down upon as a mere possession or a thing. Her place was the home, under the complete whims and fancies of her husband. She not only had to perform all the domestic chores, but also had to bring up a large family. A myth was built up - that all women were regarded as sinful and the only way to keep them out of mischief was to keep them occupied endlessly with the task of motherhood and domestic duties. Their own domain is the inside the house where their identity are solely housewives, thus they feel the claustrophobic surroundings but there is no way out to escape. The feminist body continue to talk about these problems with along their theory, especially radical feminist talk about the unnecessary motherhood and marriage of women because these are the against emancipation of the women's freedom. Ann Oakley says "biological motherhood is a myth based on the threefold belief that all women need to be mothers, all mothers need their mothers, all children need their mothers." (Oakley, Ann. Woman's work: The House Wife; Past and Present, New York: Pantheon Books, 1974. p.186) In the Dialectics of Sex, Schulamith Firestone is harsher, she suggests that "the desire to bear and rear children is the less result of an authentic liking for children and more a displacements of ego extension needs. For a man, a child is a way to immortalize his name, property, class, and ethnic identification; for a woman, a child is way to justify her homebound existence as absolutely necessary." (Firesotnes,
Schulamith. The Dialectics of Sex, New York; Bantam Books, 1970 p.229) But Nancy Chodrow claimed that Mother's reproduction is the essential property of women, through which these motherhood, women really can transform into the real human being.

If a married woman had no children or failed to produce any male offspring, she might be superseded by a second or third wife or even turned out of the house; for there was the strong belief that there must be a male child for the continuance of family line and the performance of the rites of the ancestors. The Korean traditional belief was that only elder son could carry out such rituals which were thought to be very necessary for bringing peace and security to the father and grandfather after their death, otherwise they might return as ghosts to carry the family. This thought is quite a same as Confucian thoughts. In Wan-Seo Park's novel Dreaming Incubator, the protagonist had to go through several medical experiments to conceive a boy because she was not able to produce a male successor to the family where the son is the only hope to connect their family to next generation. In Korea we call it "Dae(succession)" As a married woman, if she doesn't bear a boy who would be a successor to the family, she must be sinned. And she had to be punished for her disconnection of family. Like this, uncertain were the lives of married women. But genetically it has proved that the conception of baby is not only the responsibility of women but also responsibility of men too.

In the field of religious practices, the position which they once enjoyed, was denied to them. A woman was believed to be unable to go to heaven through her own merits. She could not worship by herself, and it was believed that she could only reach heaven through unquestioning obedience to her husband, even if he happened to be a wicked person. It was in the midst of such extreme social discrimination and degrading attitudes towards women that the Buddha's teachings was pass on to Korea.
But his teachings on the real nature of life and death, and karma gave rise to considerable changes in the social attitudes towards women in his days. In *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, karma defined like this "Karma, Sanskrit technical term, literary translated as 'action' and referring to the Buddhist notion that any volitional activity accrues retribution appropriate to the nature of the deed."

Originally, according to what the Buddha taught about the law of karma, one is responsible for one's own action and its consequence. One is responsible for his own action. Such enlightened teachings helped to correct the views of many people and naturally reduced the anxiety of women who were unable to produce sons to perform the 'rites of the ancestors.

The teachings of the Buddha had done a great deal to wipe off many superstitious beliefs and meaningless rites and rituals. When the true nature of life and death and the natural phenomena governing the universe were revealed to them, wisdom and understanding arose. This in turn helped to arrest and correct the prevailing social injustices and prejudices that were rampant against women in the days of the Buddha thus enabling women to lead their own way of life. "In every period others stated and argued women are not inherently deficient or inferior to men in their ability to achieve the calm and insight required to attain Buddhism's highest goals. (Arvind Sharma and Young Katherine. K p.89)

Despite the fact that the Buddha had elevated the status of women, he was practical in his observations and advice given from time to time in that he realized the social and physiological differences that existed between men and women. It was clearly mentioned that a man's duty is his unending quest for knowledge, the improvement and stabilization of his skills and craftsmanship and dedication to his work and ability to find means for the maintenance and sustenance of his family. On the other hand it was stated that it was the woman's duty to look after the home, and to look after her husband. Thus, one thing that cannot be overlooked is that
Buddha's teaching has antifeminist trait in that his advice renders women to be confined in her space and to have a myopic worldview.

The Buddha had given advice to young girls prior to their marriage. Realising that there was bound to be difficulties with the new in-laws, the girls were enjoined to give every respect to their mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law, serving them lovingly as they would their own parents. They were requested to honor and respect their husband's relatives and friends, thus creating a congenial and happy atmosphere in their new homes. They were also advised to study and understand their husband's nature, ascertain their activities, character and temperament, and to be useful and co-operative at all times in their new home. “These notion of androcentrism is almost unrelieved throughout the Buddhist history, this androcentrism, more than any other facets of the Buddhist past, prevents us from finding any truly reliable models in the past.” (Arvind Sharma and Young Katherine K.p.134) By this notion of androcentrism, the emotional confinement imposed on women is so severe that women's growth was never expected. They should be polite, kind and sacrificial in their relationship with family members and should safeguard their husband's earnings and see to it that all household expenditures are properly regularized. Such advice given by the Buddha more than twenty five centuries ago stands good even today in Korea. It asks Korean women to be selfless and self-effacing in any circumstances without conditions.
The handicaps and drawbacks under which a woman had to undergo in life were also clearly indicated. The suffering and agony to be borne by a woman in leaving her family after her marriage, and the difficulties and problems she had to encounter in trying to accommodate herself in a new environment, were the trials and tribulations she had to bear. In addition to these problems, a woman is also subjected to physiological pains and sufferings during her menstrual periods, pregnancy and child-birth. These are natural phenomena depicting the differential handicaps and circumstances prevailing between a man and a woman.

Among these drawbacks, positive aspect endowed by the Buddha to women is that Buddha considered women as more discerning than men and urged women to behave wisely to attain perfection or sainthood. The Buddha, unlike any other religious teacher, paid a glowing tribute to women and mentioned certain characteristics that adorned a woman in the following words: -

"Some women are indeed better (than man) Bring her up, O Lord of man. There Are Women who are wise, virtuous, who have high regard for mother-in-law, and who are Chaste. To such a noble wife may be born a valiant Son, A lord of Realms, who rule a Kingdom." (Walpda, Rahula. What the Buddha Taught. New York: Grove House, 1974. p.89)

In reveling the nature of women, we can't deny that the Buddha had pointed out women's potentialities and abilities. But even though some of his statements may appear favorable to women, Korean women still feel uncomfortable with his creeds
that impose sacrifice and egolessness on women. That's why she still has bear unpleasant experience and discrimination because of impact of the Buddha's teachings from old generation despite there exist in Korea more enlightened and fairer attitudes, educational and independent career opportunities are open to women.

In advising women about their roles in married life, the Buddha appreciated that the peace and harmony of a home rested largely on a woman's shoulder. His advice was so realistic and practical when he quoted a good number of day-to-day characteristics which a woman should and should not emulate. But it's too much burden to Korean women who want to fly high and far. On diverse occasions, the Buddha counseled that a wife:

a) should not harbor evil thoughts against her husband;
b) should not be cruel, harsh or domineering;
c) should not be a spendthrift but should be economical and live within her means;
d) should zealously guard and save her husband's property and hard-earned earnings;
e) should always be virtuous and chaste in mind and action;
f) should be faithful and harbor no thought of any adulterous acts;
g) should be refined in speech and polite in action;
h) should be kind, industrious and hard-working;
i) should be thoughtful and compassionate towards her husband and her attitude should equate a mother loving and protecting her only son;
j) should be modest and respectful;
k) should be cool, calm and understanding - serving not only as a wife but also a
friend and adviser to her husband when need arises.

Within these lessons, women cannot claim their identity and express themselves. Self effacing, egolessness is the basic rules given to the women for the peace of family. Buddha thoughts that:

The idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality and it produces harmful thoughts of me and mine, selfish desires, craving attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, egoism, and other defilement and impurities and problems.


Therefore Buddhists concepts of egolessness connives male dominance. In feminist perspectives, it can be used to force women to become or remain spineless doormat dependent on and subservient to males.

It have also spoken on the duties and obligations of a wife towards her husband - stressing particularly on the duty of a wife bearing an offspring for her husband, rendering faithful service and providing conjugal happiness and heavenly bliss. However, although the duties of a wife towards the husband were laid down in the code of discipline, it did not stress the duties and obligations of the husband towards the wife. As I said, androcentrism is the most crucial negative aspect Korean women must be affected by Buddhism.

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5. Korean Confucianism and Repression of Women

Confucius envisioned a society where good people behaved in a civilized manner through education, proper government and family life, all guided by a system of rites and rituals. He was born in China, but China never made consistent use of his teachings. China, although incorporating many Confucian ideals, for example patrilineage, used Confucian doctrines along with others, as suited their purpose. They never chose to be a distinct Confucian country. Korea, on the other hand, at the change of dynasties in 1392, made a conscious decision to become a thoroughly Confucian country.

This legacy has been lingering in the lives of so many Korean women. I want to acknowledge this to the world how one legal system managed, over 300 years, to gradually erode some of the rights of Korean women. First, I must look into some basic Confucian teaching.

i) Confucian Teachings

Confucius, born in China around 500 BC, quickly mastered the teachings of the Chinese sages and decided his mission in life was to restore the practices of the ancient emperors and sages. For over fifty years he taught that good government lay in choosing honest and educated officials, yet he was usually misunderstood and ignored in his life, and died relatively unknown. Organized his teachings into a
virtual library of Confucian thought, emphasizing the practice of ethics, education, statecraft, and the goal of the 'superior man'.

The key concern of Confucian teaching is ethical living on this earth. Man is born good, and can be perfected, and thus the focus is on correct actions to build harmony across society. Life is guided by five moral imperatives: between ruler and subject, righteousness between father and son, affinity between husband and wife, separation of functions between elder and younger, proper respect between friends. Fidelity, ritual and etiquette supply the glue that maintains these proper relationships. The perfect woman must obey her parents when a child, her husband when a wife, and her son when a widow.

The Confucian transformation of Korea began in earnest in 1392 when the new Yi dynasty had started, Yi dynasty made a conscious break with the old and decided to build a new government based clearly and completely on Neo-Confucian teachings. To appreciate the magnitude of this shift, one must look back into the previous dynasty, Koryu. Women experienced what we might consider normal freedom of movement before this Yi-Dynasty. Now let us look at the laws that held this lifestyle in place.

Inheritance in pre-Confucian times, mainly land and slaves went to daughters as well as sons, for they enjoyed equal rights and duties. Privately owned land listed both brothers and sisters as co-heirs. In the early 1200s, a case went before a judge when a father's will gave the major portion of the inheritance to the daughter, and the son received almost nothing. The judge ruled that a parent's devotion is impartial to...
all their children and therefore it could not have been the father’s intention to be
generous to one and stingy to the other.

Also in pre-Confucian years, plural marriages were common, and these wives
were not ranked; a man could simply marry more than one woman, each of equal
rank. Having more than one wife was possible because the man did not have to
support each one and often a wife continued to live with her birth family in her own
separate home. Census registers of 1333 and 1372 list many women as heads of their
own households.

ii) The Erosion of Women’s Right in Choson Dynasty (1392-1910)

In 1392 Koryu Dynasty gave way to another, Yi Dynasty and the new rulers
sincerely wanted to revitalize the country, government and populace by adhering to
the new Confucian ideology put forth by Chinese scholars of the 11th and 12th
centuries. For them, Confucianism was more than a personal choice; it was the best
and most civilized way to run not only the government, but the entire country. The
new government immediately began the task of transforming Korea into the society
that is still familiar and exists today. Confucian scholars and politicians assumed
command and Confucian ideals gradually gained control over the official mode of
government. Changes in private family life, however, faced a wall of passive
resistance and the struggle continued throughout the next 250 years.

Did Confucius speak out against women? Can one refer to a specific statute
against women in the Confucian doctrine? In Confucian law, “women must be a
helpmate to husband in a way that would not be expected of men in relationships to their wives. So Confucius should not be condemned as a misogynist and primary oppressor of women. But in his uncritical adherence to the traditional norms of sexual segregation and male authority, Confucius may be judged an accomplice to the continued cultural minimalization of women.” (Sharma Arvinda and Young, Katherine K. eds. *Feminism and World Religions*, State University of New York Press, p. 117)

In Korea officials enacted laws to bring society gradually into line with Confucian doctrine, and one of the standard criteria of Confucianism was patrilineage, the overwhelming importance of the father and the father’s line of ancestors. Women are obliged to be yielding and obedient unconditionally. The following poem shows the bitterness of women’s situation.

My heart is in turmoil, I cannot sleep.
But secret is my grief
My heart is not a mirror. To reflect what others will
My heart is not a stone: it cannot be rolled.
My heart is not a mat: It cannot be folded away.
I have borne myself correctly
In rites more than be numbered.

My sad heart is consumed, I am harassed.
By a host of small-minded people.
I have borne vexation very many. Received insults not few.
In the still of the night I brood upon it:
In the waking hours I rend my breast.
O sun, ah moon. Why have you changed and dimmed?
Sorrow clings to me.
Like an unwashed dress.
In the night I brood upon it,
Long to take wing and fly away. (Sharma Arvind and Young, Katherine K. Eds. State University New York) p.114

Wanseo Park’s protagonists are also not able to escape from these circumstances where they feel claustrophobia. Korean Patrilineage has been one of the severest patriarchal system in Asia. The erosion of women’s rights became the flip side of the growing societal importance of the men. It is perhaps an example, over several hundred years, of a good idea taken to unconscionable extremes. The laws below are listed in chronological order, so that one can notice the gradual tightening of restrictions. However, notice the areas where losses for women are most severe: freedom of movement, inheritance, marriage, and ancestor rituals. From the Confucius point of view, freedom cannot bring the peaceful society. Instead, freedom, with its complementary idea of rights, forms the antithesis of the Confucian sense of duty. He thought that harmony in society depends on the web of interdependent obligations. He also emphasized that freedom and rights cause chaos since they may too easily degenerate into license and self-centeredness. That’s why he strictly assigned duties to the women; obedience and virtues in terms of harmony of family assuming a natural hierarchy. In Korea, his idea has been rooted so deeply in society that strict “sex segregation rules, the so called ‘Rules of Naeoe’ for men and women, husband and wife are prevalent. In line with the differences in roles and temperaments, the status and position for both sexes are divided and established, and values are placed upon these.” (The Compilation Committee of the History of Korean
confine of women who always should be correct, firm, chaste and virtuous for
the peace and prosperity of family. Under the family bonding, especially voices of
women must be subdued and unheard. In Korean proverb, there is one addressing that
humorously. “If hen crows, the household would be ruined.” In this proverb, hen is
metaphor of a woman. Therefore women all the time ruminate and repress their
sufferings and ordeal that stuck in their heart as “lump of spirits”

In these dismal surroundings, Korean women lost freedom of movement. Upper-class girls were not allowed to associate with boys after age seven. Women
must not go out in open palanquins. Women banned from the streets during the day,
for they did not have to look after public affairs. Women forbidden to go to Buddhist
temples. If a woman did go outside, her face and body must be fully covered. Wives
were ranked, with a clear distinction between primary and secondary wives. Secondary wives were excluded from the list of kin. The Board of Rites tried to force
compliance to a sons-only performance of ancestor rites. Women forbidden to go to a
shaman’s house. The law tightened ancestor rites. Now they must be done, not by any
son, but by the eldest son. Only if the eldest son was unable, could younger sons,
even male cousins, take over. Never women. Women were confined to the inner
rooms. To add it absurdity, Women were forbidden to ride horseback.

In Korea, there was a once a year sporting contest reserved completely for
women: swinging, in a standing position, on a swing suspended from a spectacularly
tall frame. The winner, of course, is the one who propels her swing to the highest,
even perpendicular, position. There is more to that swing than a simple contest. Legend has it that as Confucian laws confined Korean girls behind the walls of their family houses, they began to build their swings higher and higher as one way to peek at the world beyond the walls. It was a desperate girl's wish to fly away to another world where there was no mental prison.

For remembrance of ancestors, eldest son was officially ranked as preferred heir to officiate ancestral rituals. Participating of ancestor rituals was clearly forbidden to wives and daughters. They were responsible only for the food. Royal edicts finally orders the arrest of those who failed to conform to Confucian rules. Women lost control of their own property. A woman's inheritance no longer went to her directly, because she was not responsible for all those rituals. Inheritance from her own family now bypassed her and went to her husband, for he, as the man, was responsible for the multitude of ancestor rites. All power officially went to eldest son--ritual, economic, rights and duties.

Finally, the ruling power of the father's line, patriarchy, held Korean society in its grip. The family name carried from father to son to grandson and girls were more and more ignored.

This was a voice of opposition by a famous statesman, Kim Yuk:

A human being, upon being born, is initially only one single being, but it proliferates and its descendants reach thousands of people. Seen from their beginnings, they all came forth from the same origin. Therefore, the sons of sons are grandsons and have the same family name as their ancestors, and the sons of daughters are also grandsons, even though they have a different family name.
Is someone’s love for a daughter’s sons different from the love for a son’s sons? The natural affection is exactly the same for both. How could I love exclusively my sons and grandsons and not those equally loved by their ancestors?


His plea was ignored. Women became unimportant in their own right, and were considered mere links between the father’s and mother’s line. Nothing Left to lose except their names. Women gradually lost all property rights. Genealogies listed sons and then daughters. Genealogies and family registers’ left daughters out altogether. They were listed without a name, only as daughter: married to Mr. X of such-and-such clan. Women were expected to be content with this constrictive life. A few women began to leave written records. From them we find that not all women went docilely to their doom! Here are the words written by a 14 year old girl.

“Man has his place between heaven and earth as one of the three divisions of creation, and woman shares it with him. Yet she is hidden away in the inner quarters, buried out of sight. When she goes out she covers her head and wears a coat by which her limbs are always bundled. She is not at liberty to go out by herself; she is like a prisoner, unconvicted of any wrong, yet locked up for life.

Yet she has a heart and soul that yearns to break free from every bond and become something more in the world than a mere kitchen drudge. Why should these meaningless restrictions be put upon her?

Must I be imprisoned and be satisfied behind the bars? Must I follow the usual path and be buried from sight forever. Hence my plan was made, and I spoke many times to my parents about it. After a long delay, they agreed. That very day I had a boy’s suit made.”
During Yi dynasty, Korean women were very rigidly secluded, perhaps more absolutely than the women of any other era. They had few opportunities to see the streets of Seoul by daylight.

Absolute seclusion is the inflexible rule among the upper classes. The ladies have their own courtyards and apartments, towards which no windows from the men’s apartments must look. No allusion must be made by a visitor to the females of the household. Inquiries after their health would be a gross breach of etiquette and politeness requires that they should not be supposed to exist.


Here is the crying out of Na Hye-sok who was the first new Korean woman awakening ordinary women to come out of darkness

A doll as my father’s daughter
A doll as my husband’s wife
I was a toy for them.
Let Nora go
Gently let her go,
By knocking down the high walls
And throwing open the gates at deep inner quarters,
Let her loose into the air filled with freedom.
I am a human being,
Even before being a husband’s wife
And before being a mother of children
First of all, I am a human being.

I am a human being,
The shackles are already broken
The road to freedom is open

And the heaven-given power is overflowing.
Ah! Young girls,
Follow me as you awaken yourself
Rise up and exert your power!
The light of a new day is shining.

(NA Hye-sok. Han’guk yosongsa, v.2, p.378 in Kim, Yung-Hee,
Women’s Issues in 1920s Korea, Korean Culture, Los Angeles.
Korean Cultural Center, v.15, summer 1994, p.26)

Through one girl’s indicting her circumstances, we can recognize her misery.

“I was ten and never had gone to school. Where I lived with my father at the gold mines, there wasn’t any school, and Father said it was too far to go to the village. So I had never been to school at all. I don’t know if it was because I was a girl or really there was no school nearby.

When I became ten, I insisted that I wanted to go to school. I threw a tantrum! I stamped my feet and cried my eyes out. Finally they separated me from my family so I could go to school. I stayed with relatives.


The seclusion of women began as part of the plan for an orderly and civilized society, but as often happens, plans get out of control. Separation of function between husband and wife led to women being kept at home and out of sight. Proper respect between elder and younger often forced a woman to become a servant under the control of her mother-in-law. Proper adherence to one’s place in the hierarchy could
force a woman to use respectful language to a young spoiled and spiteful boy simply because he was of her husband's generation. Confining several generations of women to the women's quarters for life often produced jealousy, bickering, or worse. Among these dismal situation, there was a little relief. To some degree, a woman would receive residual respect from all those who respected her husband. In addition, her children must give respect to her as well as to their father. Honorific language must be used, of course to the father, but also to the mother and even an elder sister. And if a woman lived long enough, she eventually became a lead manager of her entire household. At this point, depending on her own inner personality, she had the power to mitigate, or to pass on, the legacy of Confucian abuse of women.

In closing, I return to the words of the young woman who opened this discussion:

All these years later, the systematic nature of that differential treatment still grieves me. This look at Korean history so clearly illustrates how women's status can change for the worse through systematic and deliberate fiat. This horrifying narrative proves just how constructed inequality can be, and forces me to question my deeply held assumptions about my own lesser worth as a woman. (Deuchler, Martina. Confucian Transformation of Korea, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992)

In Korea, Confucianistic culture has held the ideology of a hierarchical class society. This ideology has obstructed the self-consciousness of individuals but fostered the family centered system. This may have had the positive effect on human relationship on the surface. However, it must also be credited with a negative influence on Korean women's position without embracing the equal human relationship between men and women because of its intrinsic harsh patriarchal nature.