

***They Are Not Machines: Korean Women Workers and Their Fight for Democratic Trade Unionism in the 1970s*, by Soonok Chun, Cornwall: Ashgate, 2003, 226 pp.**

After the quite time of pondering, I picked up this book *They Are Not Machines: Korean Women Workers and Their Fight for Democratic Trade Unionism in the 1970s* as the material for book review. As the book title says, the main topic of this book is on the Korean women workers and their labor movement in the 1970s. In fact, English version of this book was already published 8 years ago in Britain and America and 7 years ago in the case of Korean version. However, two political issues currently emerging in Korean society make me to pick and re-read this book. Two political issues I mention below are deeply related with the collective and social memories on the situation 1970s in Korean society.

Some scholars have said that 1970s in Korea was started with one person's death and closed with another person's death. The former was the death of labor activist Chun tae-il who burnt himself to death on November 13, 1970. Chun soon-ok, the author of *They Are Not Machines* is the younger sister of Chun tae-il and the book title came from his last words shouted in flames in front of the Peace Market, central Seoul. He sacrificed himself for the workers working in sweat-shop garment factories, mainly young women. The latter death

was the assassination of President Park Chung-hee by the former Director of the Korea CIA on October 26, 1979. Eighteen years of dictatorship under Park Chung-hee had come to close from this event. Throughout this book, the author tries to recover the history of women workers' struggles in 1960-70s' Korean society. The author claims that the assassination of Park Chung-hee was actually triggered by fear of rising industrial labor movement which was developed on the deposits of women workers' strenuous efforts.

They Are Not Machines is the academic outcome on the collective memories of 1970s. Through the collective memories, we could build and confirm "what makes us think 'we' and how we share we-ness." Thus, collective memories are not same with simply records but something similar with intended representations having the significances in the present context because representations of the past are always intermingled with the current phenomenons. Then, why I'm thinking that the collective memories of 1970s about two person's death were related on contemporary Korean society? I think that two significant political issues in Korea recall us the implication of this book once again in this moment.

One issue is on the protest of a 51-year-old labor activist named Kim jin-suk. She was against 400 job cuts announced by the CEO of Hanjin Heavy Industries & Construction and has confined herself on Crane No. 85, a huge industrial apparatus since last January 6th in Young-do(Young Island), Pusan. She has spent the whole spring and summer in small and dangerous metallic box in thirty-five meters above a windy ship yard. Now Kim jin-suk's lonely protest already goes over 240 days. Nowadays, Many Koreans are stirred memories on a labor activist, Chun Tae-il from Kim's struggle. Chun tae-il's death provided a great momentum for the development of labor movement. Now Kim jin-sook's live protest, I believe, is providing a new milestone for the

history of Korean labor movement.

The other political issue I point here is the high and continuing popularity rating on Park Geun-hye as a leading candidate of the ruling party for 2012 Korea Presidential Election. She is the eldest daughter of former president Park Chung-hee. After the military coup in May 1961, general Park Chung-hee became the president by himself and had ruled under the harsh and oppressive authoritarian leadership during eighteen years. During that time South Korea got rid of its old dependency on rural agrarianism and emerged as one of the world's nascent industrial economies. Many Koreans believe that economic miracle of South Korea has been achieved by Park's administration's leadership. However, this economic success is the rose blooming inside of a myriad of labor forces' blood and sweat since late 1960s. Nowadays, worker's effort was ignored and forgotten and only President Park's leadership remained among current peoples' memories. And politician Park Geun-hye has succeeded only a bright side from her father and his age of 1970s. For the historical perspective with equilibrium, I think we need to recall the laborer's history and this book provides the good gate to enter the first page of Korea laborer's history.

South Korea in 1960s and 1970s was at the dawn of economic revival, preceded by textile and garment industry. Huge labor force mainly composing of women and young girls were compelled to endure extraordinarily oppressive and inhuman working conditions at that time. Working conditions in those times were of a universally low standard and all notions of workers' rights and dignities were ignored. The author of this book was one of those young girls who suffered in the warrant of sweatshop garment factories. After her brother, Chun tae-il's death, author's mother, Yi So-sun became one of the worker's leaders and confronted the ruling authority at all levels with other women workers. This book tries to illustrate the visible roles played by these women

workers' struggle. Despite appalling state-directed violence, betrayal by other colleagues, the chicanery and mendacity of employers' co-operatives, and countless other setbacks, these uneducated and overworked women finally had succeeded in forming the first fully democratic trade union in the history of Korea.

The author says that one of the purposes of this book is to make visible the hidden history of these women workers. Many people assume that everything related with the democratic progress in South Korea began with the democratic movement of 1987. However, the author reinstates the importance of the workers' struggles of the 1970s. In fact women workers struggles and their accomplishments in the early 1970s have gone largely unrecorded in the labor history until recently.

Today one middle-aged woman labor activist standing on the huge crane recall us to think who the ones taking all of the economic glory are in South Korea and how the oppressed people's history have been ignored. To revive the forgotten side of South Korea's economic miracle, this book deserves to be widely re-read. Inside book we could encounter the stories based on many women workers' live experiences with their voices. They were uneducated but awoken by themselves during the struggles and wrote the first page of Korean labor history book.

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