

Engendering the Modern-De/Sexual(ized) Body in Colonial Korea

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Abstract

This article analyzes the politics existing between gender, colony and empire in cultural discourses relating to Korean New Woman's sexuality. Especially, it questions the ideology of chastity buttressed by Neo-Confucianism, and its transformation in the colonial period from 1920 to 1939 as the Korean patriarchal system was being reconstituted. By looking at the kinds of nationalist politics engaged in during the formation of Korean collective identity in terms of the preservation of the purity of Korean blood, the implicit linkage between the nation-building project and sexuality will be revealed, as well as how women's body was subordinated and represented as authentic Korean culture, i.e., Other-ized, within the grid of Japanese Orientalism and Korean nationalism.

Key words

Gender politics, Korean nationalism, New Woman, womanhood, *Koreanness*

Introduction

"Gender reveals itself to be a central organizing metaphor in the construction of historical time" (Felski, 1995, p. 8)

"Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson, 1983, p. 6)

"All nationalisms are gendered; all are invented and all are dangerous" (McClintock, 1997, p. 89)

The historical emergence of the "New Woman" was a global phenomenon emerging from the collision of capitalism, modernity and patriarchy. The New Woman appeared first in post-feudal Europe, but

in the 20th century increasingly became world-historical in impact.¹ However, the historical construction of the New Woman in the Third World—especially in the colonial context—carries a different historical-social meaning from that of the West because it was the by-product of neither modernity nor coloniality, but of colonial modernity.

The social category of the Korean New Woman was composed of and by the social relations and differences from her other counterparts: (1) non-Korean women—for example, Japanese female settlers in Korean space and the Japanese New Woman (*atarashii onna*) in the Japanese metropolises; (2) traditional Korean women (*guyeo-seong*) without modern education (3) "modern(ized) girl" who shared the same western fashion styles and cultural codes with the Korean New Woman, yet were non-elite working class women in the service sector.

By setting the historical debate of the Korean New Woman as its analytical prism, this article points to the dialectical relation between the colonial and nationalist discourses of Korean women's sexuality and reproductive role.² In particular, this article contextualizes the ways in

¹ On the New Woman in the United States and Europe, see Smith, B. (1988). *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700*. Lexington, D.C.: Wadsworth publishing; Showalter, E. (1990). *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle*. New York: Penguin Books; Trimberger, E. K. (1991). The New Woman and the New Sexuality. In Heller, D. & Rudnick, L (Eds.) *1915, the Cultural Movement: the New Politics, the New Woman, The New Psychology, the New Art and the New Theatre in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; Woloch, N. (1994). *Woman and the American Experience*. New York: McGraw-Hill; Caine, B. (1997). *English Feminism 1780-1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Marks, P. (1990). *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

² Studies dealing with the issues of the Korean New Woman are as follows: Cho, E. & Yoon, T. R. (1995). Iljeha 'sinyeoseonggwa gabujangje: geundaeseonggwa yeoseongseonge daehan sikmindamronui jaejomyeong [Patriarchy and the New Woman: Refocusing on Modernity and Colonial Discourse on the Korean female], *kwangbok 50junyeon giryeomnonmunjip*, vol. 8. Seoul: Hankukhaksuljinheungjaedan; Hwang, S. J. (1999). *Hankuk keundaeseolsokke nataman sinyeoseongsang yeongu* [A Study on the Representation of the New Woman in the Modern Korean novel] Ph.D. Dissertation, Keonguk University; Jeon, E. I. (2000). *Iljeha sinyeoseong damrone gwanban bunseoek* [An Analysis of the discourse on the New Woman in colonial Korea] M.A. Thesis, Seogang University; Lee, M. S. (2003). *Sikminji geundaeni 'sinyeoseong' juchebyeongseonge gwanban yeongu* [A Study on the Emergence of the New Woman in Modern Korea] Ph.D. Dissertation, Ewha Womans University; Kim, M. Y. (2003). *1920myeondae yeoseongdamron byeongseonge gwanban yeongu* [A study on the Formation of Female Discourse in the 1920s], Ph. D. Dissertation, Seoul National University; Moon, Okpyo et.al. (eds.) (2003)

which Korean women were subordinated as Other via those dialectical relations by looking at the gender politics surrounding the chastity of the Korean New Woman in terms of the dis/continuation of patriarchal control over women's body and sexuality.

This article deals with the time-span ranging from 1920 to 1937, or the so-called *Inter-war* years. The newly established colonial cultural policy (*bunka seiji*), after the first nine years of the colonial government (1910-1919), facilitated and characterized Korean colonial modernity by stimulating a renaissance of nationalist activity and discourses. The creation of inter-war journalism encouraged intellectual debate among Korean intellectuals and helped to diffuse a modern style of life and cultural cosmopolitanism in the colony. This study, attempting to look into the gendered aspects of the discursive representation of the Korean New Woman, is thus grounded in discourse analysis of inter-war period Korean journalism.

Femininity and the Emergence of the Modern Female Consumerist Subject

The social mobility and livelihood of Korean yangban class women during the Chosun period were limited to the private sphere. However, capitalism brought into the Korean colonial space not only newly circulating modern commodities, but also created a new order of market and competition. It created a new public realm in which commodity and money were exchanged, a realm that conditioned the reconstitution of social relations.

Isabella Bishop, a famous traveler and a geographer of the British Empire, left a travel book after she visited Korea and Manchuria in the late 19th Century. Regarding Korean women at Kyeongseong (the capital city, present-day Seoul) she states that:

Sinyeoseong [The New Woman]. Seoul: Cheongnyeonsa; Kim, K. I. (2004), *Yeoseongui Geundae, Geundaeui Yeoseong* [Female modernity and the modern Female]. Seoul: Pureun yeoksa; Kim, S. J. (2005). *1920-30 nyeondae sinyeoseong damrongwa sangjingui guseong* [Excess of the Modern: Three archetypes of the New Woman and Colonial Identity in Korea, 1920s to 1930s], Ph. D. Dissertation, Seoul National University.

Korean women are very rigidly secluded, perhaps more absolutely so than the women of any other nation. In this capital a very curious arrangement prevailed. About eight o'clock the great bell tolled a signal for men to retire into their houses, and for women to come out..... At twelve the bell again boomed, women retired, and men were at liberty to go abroad (Bishop, 1897, pp. 47-48).

From her observation of life in Kyeongseong at the turn of the 20th Century, we are able to understand the fact that the Confucian principle of hiding women's faces and bodies (*pyemyeon*) and the spatial separation of the genders in public space still strongly affected the structure of everyday life of Koreans until the late 19th century. Thirty years from the moment above, the scenery of Kyeongseong, renamed Keij in Japanese, was depicted in the following sketch of the city center:

After having his dinner, S stepped onto the main road, wearing western-style clothes. There was a spectacle of people heading for Jongro in a night market located on the opposite side, there were many small Arabian-style tents a group of haggard-faced college boys pass by. In front of them, a modern girl, who had a black skirt and white blouse, is walking A Christian evangelized, passing out bible pamphlets In front of the department store, a group of women enjoy window shopping the jewelry arranged inside the show-case (*Byeolgeongon*, 1930, p. 162, recited from Kim, Y. K., 1999, p. 152).

Given that the above was written in 1930, and comparing it with the first account written by Isabella Bishop, we are able to know that explicit social-cultural changes occurred during the first thirty years of the 20th century in (the) city space in terms of spatial-temporality. A group of people called "modern girls" and "modern boys" historically appeared in the public space of Keij beginning in the 1920s. They were frequently introduced and topicalized in both positive and negative terms in the diverse newspapers and intellectual magazines. The following article written by Younghee Park gives us some significant clue to the initial question of who was, by that time, regarded as the modern girl:

Without having western-styled clothes, a woman seems not to be categorized as a modern girl these days. Even in the Western style, enchanting colored clothes and long silk stocking frilled with lace is required they [the modern girls] have short hair like the old artists. With a pair of the sharp nosed shoes and feet, everything they have seems so luxurious and expensive (Park, 1927, p. 154).

The appearance of the modern girl, caught in the eyes of the observer, is depicted clearly in the above description, in western-style clothes and short hair-style. From the first line, it is apparent that these two objects played a crucial role in iconizing them as the modern girl by simultaneously differentiating and compartmentalizing them from "the rest" of the Korean women.

In fact, the "luxurious" consumption goods used in decorating the modern girl's body such as sharp-nosed shoes, Western style clothes, short skirt, long silk-stockings, and lace parasols were no longer objects of wonder. Such were already being taken for granted as the typical style for the modern subject in capitalist society (Maeng, 2003, p. 10); however, this newly-emerged style represented in the body of the modern girl in urban space was an astonishing existence to the gaze of the masses because of its strangeness, contrasting starkly as it did with the fashion of former times. Difference is always recognized and represented with an object used as a principle of comparison. The *new*, represented through 20th century styles distinct from those of Chosun, distinguished the modern girl from the large crowds in the streets.

The idealized style that the modern girl adopted and ultimately pursued was the "westernized body" symbolized as "streamlined" and "white" (Shin, 2003, pp. 164-173). For the desired project of being western, make-up and fashion were utilized actively. What should be noted here is that the modern girl's project of decorating her appearance was not only the representation of her deep desire to be western, but was also linked to her endeavor to become a Korean New Woman emancipated from the uncomfortable and inefficient style of traditional Korean clothes.

These collective activities attempting to liberate the body from the old style of fashion had already started even during the period of the turn

of the 20th century called the "opening period" (gachwa). The idea of "enlightenment and civilization" permeated the realm of daily-life and also created discourses on the renovation of Korean clothing to make them more efficient, as well as a short hair style (Chun *et al.*, 2004, p. 356). The claim that "short hair" was preferable in terms of economy and hygiene was raised for the first time around the late 19th century by Korean Enlightenment activists, but the active creation of public discourses on "cutting hair" and its practice in reality by females began after 1925 (Kim, J. S., 1999, p. 179).

Jeongsook Huh (1925)³ and Hwalran Kim (1926)⁴ asserted that "my body is mine" so "I can wear short hair." This can be interpreted as the representation of a new female subjectivity and an expression of the self in terms of sexual autonomy. This modern idea fostered the rejection of what they had always been taught, and women began, under the patriarchal system, to insist that their body was no longer the property of the male members of their family, a notion that was universally accepted in the Chosun period. Within the long-sustained Neo-Confucian tradition in Chosun society, Korean women's body had been understood and treated as a vulnerable object easily contaminated by other men, resulting in the logic that women's body should be covered. In this respect, concealing women's femininity was critical for Yangban class women in their pursuit of Confucian moralistic virtue. This way of disciplining women's body was accompanied with an articulation of inner beauty in their nature and spirit, not their outward feminine appearance.

Instead, the necessary role given to women was that of "good wife and

³ Jeongsook Huh, a socialist activist, argues that the past traditional standard of beauty not only manipulated women's rights but also made women an object of slavery to men's pleasure by insisting that women's *danbal* (short hair-cut) is women's modern resistance against the social institutions and customs given by the patriarchal power as well as feudalism. See, Jeongsook Huh (August, 1925). *nau danbal jeonhu*[before and after of having my hair cut short] *Sinyeoseong*, p. 16.

⁴ Hwalran Kim (June, 1926), a liberalist activist as well as an educator in Ewha College, also articulated her own experience, writing that a short-hair cut makes women feel free and easy so there is no reason to object to it. See her article, *namnyeotoron: yeojadanbali gahanga buhanga* [males and females: whether women's hair-cut should be allowed or not] *Byeolgeongon*. In this article, Kim spells out the reasons why she advocates short hair for women: first, hygiene; second, time-saving; third, beauty; fourth, global trend; fifth, equality between male and female, pp. 128-132.

wise mother," that is, an idealized women's status. While feminine attractiveness revealed in the female body enabled men to articulate their desire, expressions of female sexual desire were outlawed in public, the world of men; thus, the concealing of women's body was the norm, virtue and law in the Chosun period. In dealing with the issue of historical evaluation of the emergence of the modern girl and its impact on colonial society, an approach through the gaze of everyday people living at the time seems a useful way to grasp the social impact they cast. In this respect, the compelling question is how Korean people, especially intellectuals who lived in the colonial space, defined and evaluated the modern girl and boy. It also makes us look at the implicit social power relation between the modern colonial intellectuals and modern consumerist subject. In a special issue of *Byeolgeongon* called "Modern Girl, Modern Boy," Gwangyeol Yu argues that:

Can we see the modern girl, modern boy as only material? Or see them as only spirit? Carrying things further, do we seek the modern in the last 19th century that we have just passed? Or, in the present 20th century? Or do we call the newest people of all those who live in the present day but, being ahead of their time, pave the way for their contemporaries? I say that if somebody has a high modern consciousness, they should be called "children of modernity" (*keumdaea*) even if they wear old-fashioned clothes (Yu, 1927, pp. 112-113).

The strong emphasis put on the "modern spirit" capable of leading the contemporary vis-vis western material culture clearly shows us that there was already a materialistic tendency prevalent in the colonial society of the 1920s. The spiritual aspect of modernity held sway over capitalistic modernity in the minds of colonial male intellectuals. The new capitalistic mode of production—mass production and mass consumption—was propelled by diverse marketing techniques in the city that also offered the material conditions for the birth of the modern consumerist subject. The modern girl, an active consumer, expressed her sexual and materialistic desire by revealing her corporal body through the radical act of wearing her hair cut short and by decorating her body with new, western commodities.

Modern subjectivity was constructed in the process of endeavoring to disconnect from feudalistic bondage with the aim of expressing the self and individuality. In this context, the modern girl who appeared in colonial society and claimed the autonomy of her body, can be evaluated as the modern Korean female subject in terms of her challenge to Confucian control and the traditional concealment of her body. In terms of the Woman question—female emancipation from the oppression imposed on her—western fashion and style which highlighted body shape and articulated sexual attractiveness as its main strategy was also instrumental and strategic for the Korean New Woman in representing their sexual identity and femininity by breaking the social taboo placed on women's body.

Not only the expression of wonder toward the revealed corporal body of the modern girl, but also harsh moralistic criticisms of their modern body and taste for capitalistic consumption, were actively discussed in diverse intellectual magazines in the colonial period.

Ambiguous Dualism: Male Gaze at the Female Body

When the modern girl and the modern boy appeared in the public sphere, the style and fashion of those new social subjects called the modern girl and the modern boy became a central issue in the composition of intellectual discourses on what Korean women and men should be like: that is, modern-sexual identity of the colonial Korean in the mid-1920s and 1930s.

Regarding sexuality and its relation with nationalism, which imagined a collective masculine identity and community (Mosse, 1985), the following magazine article excerpt succinctly shows the way in which the Korean intellectual thought about male effeminacy (of the modern boy) and what it deemed necessary for manliness, to recover the true self again under colonial conditions:

The beauty of modern men and women can be exerted only by the power of commodities. What happens if these are taken away from their body? within our feeble society, dare we let masculinity, now rarely seen, disappear for good? No.

Contemporary men have to come back from the hedonism of their fragile individuality to the temperament and corporal body of the armed warrior for the aim of collective life. To do this, we have to be trained in labor and discipline in order to make our body and mind stronger. The beauty of man is to be founded in man-like determination, intrepidity, and aggressive vigor (Kim, 1927, pp. 104-107).

Endeavors to reconstruct Korean male identity now fragmented by the gaze and power of the Japanese colonizer, represented a critique to those who emphasized individuality. In the mind of Korean colonial intellectuals who tried to imagine a collective strong Korean community vis-vis Japan and (vis-vis) the West, the modern boy's way of thinking and acting, copying western fashion and style imported and propelled by Japanese capital and marketing techniques, was not acceptable.

The interesting point in the above article is that the writer suggests "labor and discipline" as an effective tool for making a strong (Korean) male body and mind, imagining and projecting the image of a warrior struggling in primitive nature. Within his way of thinking, the colonial circumstance is encoded as a battle between the otherized Korean vis-vis a strong colonizer, in which every Korean man is supposed to be a "brave" warrior against the Japanese. In this context, strength of both body and mind is represented and articulated as the nature and core of male beauty—masculinity, that is, what a Korean man should be like. Meanwhile, the act of revealing and decorating the body in Western style (e.g. short skirt and short hair style), the modern girl's strategy for (attaining) a modern identity, became a central axis in the creation of discourses dealing with the issues of capitalistic consumerism, modernity and femininity. Seongsang Yun's article published in the women's magazine *Yeoseong*, shows the typical register and language of intellectual criticism of the modern girl:

What is the fundamental significance of fashion? I think it is more about seeking out beautiful things rather than precious things. In this sense, fashion can be good in a broad sense and also in a positive sense..... in terms of aesthetic form and for sanitary reasons; to make things more beautiful could be one of

the good things about it. However, today, we witness a lot of negative kinds of fashion. In other words, we have been led by fashion, instead of leading fashion. It has been the ordinary women who have been most vulnerable to the ideas of fashion the capitalistic marketing by merchants utilize women's vanity and weakness to cast a net of fashion to entrap them..... with luxury clothes and sensual makeup and clumsy attempts at coy facial expressions make them look like a prostitute or a rebel..... Women should buy socks for their brothers rather than spend money on her own luxury shoes those women could use their energies to make home sweet and society cheerful.....before attempting to draw attention to themselves, it is necessary for women to be sure about their own ability to lead others with their own newness, beauty of mind and behavior (Yun, 1937, pp. 43-44).

In the above article, the writer reveals his understanding of the relationship between the role and value of fashion in constructing the "modern self"; however, he gives too much emphasis on the negative aspect of fashion as a tool for subsuming women as active consumers, especially articulating the vanity of women. In the process of deploying his logic, women's heavy make-up and seductive attire are linked with the image of the "prostitute" (*maesobu*); meanwhile, hygiene and culture (*gyoyang*) are highly evaluated in terms of their refinement and as part of the enjoyment of a modern livelihood. As a new way of organizing cultural life, he suggests Korean women become a "good sister" and "good wife" by managing the household and their family members.

Regarding the consumerism of the Korean women, intellectuals of the socialist branch, those ideologically grounded in Marxism, identifying themselves as the colonized lower class, raised the harshest criticism over the modern girl by viewing the modern girl as representative icons of corrupted culture and sexual desire of the bourgeoisie. Within their polarized logic of collective class interest between bourgeoisie and the proletariat, it was inevitable that they fixed a hostile gaze on those subjects—the modern girl pursuing individual pleasure and worth.

Words such as "demoralization", "vanity", and "parasitism" became key components in the discursive representation of the modern girl, and such

iconic imagery became the basis of male intellectuals' moralistic criticism. However, it has to be pointed out that there was also libidinal desire toward the modern girl's sensational beauty that went hand-in-hand with moralistic critiques based on the grand narratives of the nation and class as constituted within the colonial intellectual society.

The act of sexualizing the body by the modern girl was interpreted as an aggressive attitude enabling her to draw other men's sexual interest, and, as such, was understood as a serious threat to the previous right of Korean men over women's body and sexuality that had been taken for granted by the patriarchs of the Chosun society. The articulation of inner beauty of mind also reveals that male intellectuals also stood at the crossroad of traditional patriarchal thought and the modern value system articulating individuality; to colonial intellectuals, how to overcome pre-modern feudality and become modern was a significant problem.

Modern sensibility and cultural taste played a crucial role in cultivating the new domain of capitalist consumerism, and vice versa. The historical emergence of the modern girl reflected social changes in which, on one hand, colonial Korea was becoming a consumer society and a new social class (consumerist bourgeoisie) was being constructed; and on the other hand, the discovery of the modern self aspiring to the West and modernity by differentiating themselves from the "old customs."

The complex albeit inconsistent gaze and conflicting discourses on the modern-sexual body represented in the Korean intellectuals' ambiguous feelings, explicitly reveal to us how modernity, capitalism, colonialism and nationalism were contested, defended, renewed, and recreated in the formation of the Korean people's modern-capitalist mentality and colonial cultural hegemony in the 1930s. The association of the modern girl, working in the pleasure industries, with the iconic image of decadent materialism was posited in both nationalist and socialist critiques as the "other," "parasite" and "prostitute," by their inner logic and political interest in either nation or class. In the patriarchal society, hierarchal difference among women was necessary in order to discipline and control all women. Chastity was a critical criterion in patriarchy's judgment of whether a woman was qualified for marriage.

"Woman Question" and the Un/Making of the Modern Female Sexual Subject

The 1910s in the metropolis of Tokyo was a highly liberal period -Taishō democracy- in which diverse Western liberal and radical thoughts fully bloomed (Moon, 2003; Choi, 2000).⁵ The Korean students returned from study in Japan in the 1910s, having experienced metropolitan culture and exposure to diverse modes of Western thought, played a crucial role in not only introducing these new ideas via print, but also adopting them as their modern lifestyle in colonial Korean space (Kweon, 2003, pp. 97-115).

It was Ellen Key, a Swedish thinker, who made the strongest impact on how the Korean intellectuals' view of modern love and free marriage was constructed, by offering theoretical as well as moralistic legitimacy vis-vis the traditional way of marriage grounded in Neo-Confucianism and class interest.⁶ Her ideas were highly influential among Japanese intellectuals in the 1910s, at which time most of her publications were translated into the Japanese language (Moon, 2003, p. 271). Especially, her perspective on "free divorce," linked with the fundamental question of whether love exists in a marriage, accepted as appropriate logic, served

⁵ Taishō democracy conditioned the historical emergence of the Japanese New Woman. In fact, "atarashii onna" (the new woman) first appeared as the title of a magazine, *Nihon Atarashii onna*, in 1886 in Japan. Atarashii onna the translation of the English, New Woman, first appeared in the 19th century in Britain. Until the 1910s, this word, atarashii onna was used to indicate women who had modern knowledge, acknowledging the value of "civilization" in Japan. Relative to this historical emergence of atarashii onna as modern social subject, the role of the *Seitō* [Bluestockings] journal and the women who participated in this Seit circle were evaluated as crucial players. *Seit* was the first female cultural magazine published by Hiratsuka Raich during the period from 1911 to 1916. The main readership for this magazine was Japanese female teachers and female journalists. Choi and Moon view that Korean New Women, studying in Tokyo in the 1910s, were highly affected by this New Woman Movement and *Seit* magazine.

⁶ In the 1920s and 30s, there were lots of columns published dealing with Ellen Key in Korean intellectual magazines. On those, see the following: Jayoung Roh (1921, January-February). "yeoseongundongui jeilinja ellen key" [the first ranking person in the women's movement] *Gaelyeok*; Lee, K. S. (1925, January). "yeojahaebanggwa uriui pilyeonjeok yogu" [female emancipation and our inevitable request] *Sinyeoseong*; Kim, A. S. (1932, January). "sarangeun hayeora gyeolhoneun mareoraui gabu" [right and wrong of whether to marry and love] *Samcheonri*; Key, E. (1932, February). "jeonjaenggwa buin" [war and women], *Donggwang*.

to legitimize the desire of those Korean intellectuals who wanted to escape from the role of traditional wife (*guyeoseong*) who lacked a modern education. Diverse Western philosophers from Ellen Key to Marx to Kolontai, to Tolstoy, and to Ibsen's thoughts on marriage and love affairs made a strong impact on the way Korean intellectuals rethought the patriarchal power embedded in the forced marriage system by family-heads, and the modern, romantic ideal of partnership in love-affairs and marriage.

Western-style "free love," in which love is the basic core of all happiness, was accepted as the new mode of modernity by colonial Korean intellectuals who wanted to reform the traditional way of life-Chosun's old customs. The idea that divorce was preferable to a loveless marriage also enabled them to legitimate their desire for divorce from the old-style wife (*guyeoseong*) and fulfill their desire for modern love affairs with the Korean female students studying in Tokyo in Japan and Keij in Korea.

The Korean Woman Question included the issues of female modern education, allowance of female re-marriage, and the abolishment of the forced early marriage system. These issues raised by the early Enlightenment activists (*gaebwapa*) were also reflected in the contents of the *Kabo* reform policy. The ways in which the Korean nationalist activists dealt with the Woman Question were clearly shown in the early 20th century Enlightenment magazines.⁷

Relative to the nation-building project and cultural reform in the 1920s, the Korean male intellectual's acknowledgement of the woman question was limited to the scope of the reform of marriage and family institutions, while still assuming that women's proper place was in the home. To their minds, the ideal type of Korean female had Western

⁷ *Gajeongjapji* [home magazine] published by Chaeho Shin from 1907 to 1908 explicitly shows Korean nationalist male activists' perspective on the Woman Question during the Enlightenment period. Reform of the home (*gajeong*) was their initial and primary agenda in the process of nation-state building at the time of national peril. The acceptance of new civilization and self-strengthening (*jagang*) was pointed out by Chaeho Shin as the best way to stabilize national security and Korean independence. In this kind of thinking, home was the basic unit for the issue of self-strengthening of the nation. Relative to the issue of the Woman Question at the turn of the 20th century, *Dokripsinmun*, *Maeilsinbo*, *Hangseongsinmun* and *Jeguksinmun* also dealt with female education and gender equality based on Enlightenment ideas and women's social status.

knowledge through modern education as well as the new spirit, were fitted for the new role as modern-partner and good wife for the Korean male intellectuals themselves, and were equipped with rational, scientific mothering for raising children for the future of the nation.⁸

However, the Korean female intellectual just returning to colonial Korea in the 1920s had a more radical perspective, having been affected by progressive thought on love and sex. The issue of the sexual autonomy of women's body and their work in the public sphere, i.e. the issues of love affairs, (re)marriage and chastity, were crucial to the process of their own awakening to the patriarchal social structure and distorted gender relations. Their radical views are reflected in the novels and magazine columns written by the Korean radical New Woman group in the 1920s and early 1930s.⁹

In dealing with the Korean Woman Question, why did female chastity become a point of focus in their writings? The reason lay in the fact that the dualistic sexual norm that had prevailed in the Chosun period, based in Neo-Confucian ideology, was still dominant in colonial Korean society. Although female and male partners were counterparts within the context of the free love affair, the existence or absence of love was an important criterion only for males in keeping their relations (of partnership or of marriage). In the face of moralistic judgment and public criticism, women had to deal with another matter, that of female chastity or, more specifically, the moralistic defense of her choice of love over chastity. Ilyeop Kim's statement gives a clue in looking at their modern

⁸ Lee, D. H. (1923, October). *sesange naon mokjeok* [the reason for being born], *Sinyeoseong*; Sochun (1924, March). *dangsindeuleul sinyeojajungui sinyeoja* [you are the new women among the new women] *Sinyeoseong*; Kim, P. (September, 1926). *Chosunyeoseongui hanghalgil* [The way Chosun women have to follow] *Sinyeoseong*; Palbongsanin (1924, August). *sowi sinyeoseong naeumsae* [the smell of sinyeoseong] *Sinyeoseong*.

⁹ Concurrent with the cultural stirrings of nationalist activities and the development of male discourse on the Korean Woman Question was the emergence of the Korean women's press. In fact, a steady flow of women's magazines began to be published (by both women and men) in the 1920s and 30s. The first Korean women's magazine was *Yeojagye* [the world of women] in 1907; however, *Sinyeoja* [the new woman], published in 1925 by Haeseok Na, Indeok Park, and Hwalran Kim, was evaluated as the first magazine in which the modern spirit of the new woman was contained. *Sinyeoseong* [the new female] was published in 1923 by *Gaebyeok* publishers and writers so that it covered a broad range of ideological spectra relative to the debate of the Korean Woman Question.

consciousness on their body and sexuality:

Chastity is not a passive, moralistic conception, but a passion in which one's feelings and imaginative power in respect to the lover achieve maximum harmony. It is thus an instinctive feeling that, if love is lacking, cannot be found in the chastity of either of the involved parties. Therefore, if love cools, the conception of chastity also immediately disappears. In this sense, chastity is not a fixed notion like "love," but rather (it) is always new and constantly shifting. The perspective of the old moral view is that women with a "past," are no longer new or pure. However, we have to entirely abandon this mistaken way of thinking (Kim, 1927, p. 7).

It is notable that Ellen Key's idea of sexual morality impacted Kim Il-yeop's way of conceptualizing chastity. Ilyeop Kim views female chastity as constantly renewed as a woman follows new loves, insisting that women's past sexual history with previous partners is not important in starting another love with a new partner. In her perspective, the concept of (female) chastity is contested, but has not yet been abandoned. Kim's radical insight shows us that she already understood that chastity was a main controlling technology of patriarchy over the female and she created her own notion of a new chastity (*sinjeongjo*) by denying the given myth of female virginity.¹⁰ In a similar vein, Hyesek Na shared the same view with Ilyeop Kim. She shows a more radical approach on the female chastity issue by fragmenting the notion of chastity itself. Female chastity was regarded as the most precious female value in the Chosun dynasty and it was a matter of life and death for yangban class women.¹¹

¹⁰ Ilyeop Kim also criticized the Confucian principle of *samjongjido* (three subordination of women) in the following articles: Kim, I. Y. (1920, March). "bujinjamji sinyeoja changansa" [initial editorial of the new woman] *Sinyeoja*; _____ (1920, April). "uri sinyeojau yoguwa jujang" [What We New Women Demand and Claim] *Sinyeoja*.

¹¹ Chastity is not morality, a law, or anything else, but only a hobby. I follow my own will, and do as I please, just as when I choose to eat rice or rice cake. The choice should not be subjected to any mental restrictions it is often the case that in order to keep our chastity, we must suppress our laughter, our burning blood, and words we want to say. What a contradiction! Therefore, our emancipation should begin with (freedom from) Chastity written by Na, H. S. (1924, April). *Bunyeojigwang*.

Yet, Hyeseok Na attempted to reinterpret the meaning of chastity from female sexual experience, using the term, hobby. In her article above written in 1924, hobby is selected and used as a symbolic word articulating women's autonomous choice as to whether she will keep her chastity or not.

What Hyeseok Na pointed out was that the chastity ideology was unequally imposed on the female and regulated only her sexual desire. The chastity issue was dealt with as the most crucial concern in the writing of the Korean New Woman. It affected and was, thus, reflected on the formation of her sexual identity and her modern female subjectivity, inviting contemplation on what "true" Korean womanhood is, and critiquing the patriarchal social structure perpetuating female subordination to men. What is important, relative to the issue of creating modernity and a modern mentality in colonial space, is that love as such did not exist as a notion in the Chosun dynasty. It was a new Western concept introduced into the public realm of colonial Korea. The practice of having "love affairs" played a crucial role in the formation of Koreans' modern identity and modern mentality. However, the Korean New Woman's numerous writings, reflecting their agonized mental status and dealing with the matters of female chastity and free love, clearly shows us their weak, defensive position as females in the face of public critiques of their choices on the issues of love, body and chastity. In addition, in the process of practicing the Western ideal of love in the reality of colonial Korea, the notion of free love/marriage/divorce existed as a different form of gendered experience and meaning. As viewed from the discursive formation on the New Woman's chastity, it is clear that the Korean New Woman's body and sexuality was a site of contention in which Neo-Confucian tradition and Western modernity simultaneously jostled for legitimacy.

The Reform of the "Nation" and the Korean New Woman's Sexuality

The reform of colonial Korean society was the central issue of Korean intellectual discourse emerging most explicitly in the intellectual magazine, *Gaebyeok* in the early 1920s. Within intellectual discourse

dealing with the reform of Korea, the new nation was a central concept vis-vis the old Chosun, rhetorically articulating the importance of spiritual and cultural aspects of life, with particular emphasis on the modern lifestyle (*sinsaenghwal*):

Can we say that the real purpose of reform is finally completed by destroying old life habits and customs derived from the *old-mode* and simultaneously building up *new* institutions and *new* habits? The real meaning of reform is not an explicit social phenomenon, but its real meaning is within the thorough transformation of ourselves (Lee, 1930, p. 90).

Issues particularly relevant to women, such as permitting widows to remarry and the abolishment of the arranged early marriage system, were crucial elements in the formation of reform discourse for the Korean nation. The historical genealogy of the polemics on women and reform of the nation may be traced back to the arguments of the early Enlightenment thinkers and activists in the late 19th century. Their way of understanding the old customs underlining the Neo-Confucian order and norms dictating women's social status was explicitly reflected in the articles of the Kabo reform policies of 1896. This enlightenment idea continued into the early 20th century with an emphasis on the urgent necessity of female education and reform of the traditional marriage/family system. Relative to the issues of women's social status within the Neo-Confucian constraints, the issue of widow's remarriage was dealt with as most critical, representing the old customs of Neo-Confucian Chosun by modern Korean intellectuals oriented toward the "new" modern way of life:

The activity of the wife, whether adultery or remarriage as a widow became a crucial target for blame; however, it is unequal. In fact, the suicide of a widow following her dead husband was not such a bad act; yet, it is really problematic of why such a cruel act was enforced on only the wife, and not applied to the husband, thereby allowing endless freedom to him. I think that the name, *yoelnyeo*, is the total denial of a human existence to women (Lee, 1926, pp. 12-13).

Although *yoelnyeo* (women who kept their chastity by committing suicide) was regarded as an ideal female virtue in the Chosun period, awakened Korean male intellectuals called into question the existence of the *yoelnyeo*, pointing out its irrational, discriminatory, and gendered aspects. The question here raised is, if *yoelnyeo* were no longer to be judged as the ideal female type by the Korean male intellectuals, then what was to be the ideal virtue for new women in the new, modern Korean nation?

Kwangsu Yi's idea on love and marriage is clearly revealed in his statement emphasizing the importance of love as an expression of human nature and the need to construct a more advanced modern marriage system. In his idea of love, the ideal state of love is finally completed upon the combining of body and spirit through the discovery of human sensibilities and personalities. By contrast, the relationship of man and woman without spiritual union was regarded as similar to prostitution, an illicit connection. Yi's idea explicitly shows us what was the ontological limit of the Korean nationalist intellectual in approaching the issue of Korean women's boundedness within the family and marriage system. Relative to the Woman Question, what they criticized was only the "feudalistic" system of forced early marriage also connected with their own male interest.

The ideal partner-wife for the modern Korean intellectual was the New Woman possessed of the scientific, rational, and modern knowledge necessary to rear the next generation of Koreans for the nation. The Korean male nationalistic way of dealing with the Woman Question was closely linked with nation-building, implanting the new, modern mode of life, and expunging the out-dated mentality of Chosun, but not as an undermining of their patriarchal power within the social and family system. In this sense, the challenge made by the radical Korean New Woman against patriarchal power and the marriage institution itself was not accepted as a serious threat capable of subverting the interests of the Korean male intellectual. How did the male intellectuals deal with the New Woman's radical voice? How did they interpret female sexual desire and women's rights as human beings? Relative to chastity and the Korean Woman's Question, Kwangsu Yi (1936) states that:

Chastity is not the be-all and end-all of a woman's mission

in life. It is one of the many womanly virtues. The idea that a woman who has lost her chastity has lost everything is both wrong-headed and harmful. On the contrary, a woman who jealously guards her chastity is not that taken to be a good or respectable woman. Apart from chastity, there is mercy, honesty, forgiveness, kindness, fair-mindedness, industriousness, civic-mindedness, truth, love of justice, so many other virtues and duties (missions). To take chastity for the woman herself is truly a misguided and evil habit that ignores the vocation and personality of the woman. However, chastity is not such a trivial thing to a woman, either. It may be her chief virtue. It is not the entirety, but it may be the most important (Yi, 1936, pp. 244-245).

His advice for women who have lost chastity is "the problem of chastity loss occurs from lack of self-reflection and insufficient moral training enabling to her to control her sexual behavior." In a similar vein, Ahn Jaehong explains why a woman is more vulnerable than a man in matters of chastity and body.

Physiologically, in other words, following the promise of nature, a woman is fated with the biological destiny of being more sensitive to sexual morality [than a man]. Given that women's first sexual contact with a man leaves long-lasting traces and changes over her corporal body, woman's chastity is more important than that of a man. There is no reason that a woman's body should become defiled while her mind is resolute. Is not a woman's hymen the sign of her natural promise? And is not that promise fulfilled in her acceptance of the responsibility to nurse and rear her children? In this respect a woman must be more chaste than a man (Ahn, 1936, pp. 234-240).

Viewing such examples as Yi and Ahn's logical deployments above, it was found that traditional Neo-Confucian language was simply replaced with modern scientific language in articulating the essential aspect of women's sex and sexuality. In other words, the modern Western knowledge system was merely borrowed and applied to control women's sexuality by re-enforcing the ideology of chastity, by strongly articulating it as a female virtue crucial to the aim of maintaining the patriarchal power over the female.

In fact, it has been pointed out that the scientific knowledge system played a crucial role in explaining gender difference and legitimizing gender inequality in modern times. Biological essentialism based in notions of sex constructed by scientific knowledge, equated to a reconstruction of gender and gender difference that also became the ground for a "logical" legitimating hierarchical structure subjugating woman to man in society (Fausto-Stelig, 2000). As shown in Yi's argument, the Korean female ideal within the mind of the Korean male intellectual was a woman maintaining a chaste, desexualized body proper for delivering wifely work and mothering.¹² From evidence such as Yi's claims above, we are able to know that the radical resistance of the Korean New Woman to the oppressive chastity ideology and patriarchal marriage system was understood as moral decay by the Korean male intellectual who attempted to build a homogeneous imagined community (Anderson, 1983)—the Korean nation—with a strong articulation of the pure blood of the Koreans.

The Politics of Scandal and New Korean Womanhood

Hyesoek Na, during the period ranging from her divorce in 1930 until her death in 1948, never got any economically stable jobs in the public sphere, and her art exhibitions failed due to the complete ignorance of their worth by male critiques and the public. She finally ended up living on the street as a homeless person, and to this day nobody knows where she is buried.¹³ Although there was a limited number of female jobs

¹² For the purpose of understanding women's chastity from a male-centric perspective and its legitimization with Western scientific language, see the following magazine articles: LS saeng (1929 February). "namseongi yeoseongege jeongjoreul gangyohaneuniyu" [the reason men force women to keep chastity], *Byeolgeongon*; Jeong, S. T. (1929, February). "seongyokui saengriwa simri" [physiology and psychology of sexual desire], *Byeolgeongon*; Park, C. H. (1929, February). "teukhi juihal yeoseonggwa geumyoksaenghwal" [Especially circumspect women and Ascetic life], *Byeolgeongon*.

¹³ For Hyesoek Na's biography and compilations of her work, see the following: Jonguk Kim (1981). *Rabyeseok-nalagan cheongjo* [Na Hye-seok: a blue bird left] Seoul: Sinheung publishing; Seo, J. J. (2001). *Jeongwol Nabyeseok Jeonjip* [the complete work of Na Hye-seok] Seoul: Gukhakjaryowon; Lee, S. K. (2000). *Nabyeseok Jeonjip* [Complete works of Na Hye-seok].

available to highly educated Korean women in the 1920s and 30s, considering the capitalistic development of colonial Korean society, existing outside the family institution (i.e. being divorced and single) was a critical problem for the Korean female. Here, the compelling question is why the Korean New Woman's radical feminist awakening could not develop into a more collective empowering of Korean female intellectuals.

Regarding this, it has been pointed out that the limited numbers of modern educated women were not strong or influential enough to adequately provide support and resources for the first generation of fully deployed Korean feminist groups, a different case from that of Japan (Moon, 2003, pp. 276-277).

In 1920s colonial Korean society, in which modernity and tradition were in contention, the endeavor to stand as an independent subject from the power of patriarchy- father and husband- was of crucial importance to the Korean New Woman with her strong self-consciousness as a modern self. However, their proposed reforms crossed the boundary when they began challenging the marriage system itself via extra-marital affairs, as these were viewed as an attack on the Korean male intellectual's patriarchal power. What the latter wanted to focus on in respect to the Woman Question were issues falling within the boundary of (not breaking) their guaranteed patriarchal privilege. From the tragic life trajectory of Na Hye-seok and other first- generationers of the Korean New Woman's movement, the implications of the gendered structure of colonial modernity and its patriarchal nature can be drawn in terms of *new* emancipation and *new* oppression from a contemporary feminist perspective.

Colonial modernity provided a new (discursive) space for women to be modern subjects participating in the public realm; however, they ended up suffering restraint again, re-cast into the bondage of a newly-created ideal image for Korean women—the wise mother and good wife. The new image was propelled by the Korean male nationalist scheme in dealing with the Woman Question, to assure that the imagined nation would be national as well as modern. In this sense, it can be interpreted that the double-edged nature of colonial modernity not only provided Korean New Women with simultaneous emancipation and oppression, but also led to a continual process of *de(con)structive constructiveness* of patriarchal power.

Roja Park (2003, pp. 78-79) argues that the cultural and ideological creation of both the "internal other" and "external other" was a crucial mechanics in the method of nation-state building and the making of "national subject." He points out that the method the modern Korean nationalists adopted was the exclusion of the internal other.

The fact that the radical Korean New Woman was Other within the male discourse of sexuality and chastity is exposed in the social punishment imposed on the handful of New Women who pursued a modern self by challenging patriarchal national subjects in colonial Korea. Such punishments clearly reveal how the principle of "inclusion and exclusion" was activated in the creation of a homogeneous, imagined "national" community and its collective ethnic identity, that is, *Koreanness* in colonial Korea and how disciplinary power penetrated into every member's life.

The technology of controlling and disciplining women's body and sexual mobility was exercised through the publication of articles on the personal reputations of New Women in magazines, that is, the newly invented modern way of rendering the "private" into the "public." There were lots of gossip articles in popular and women's magazines depicting detailed private information about the New Women's lives: i.e. birthplace, education, height, body shape, personality, reputation among her colleagues, fashion sense, the process of her getting married, and even detailed information about her husband. One such example in *Yeoseong* is:

Son Jeung-soon, teacher. Her birthplace is Hamkyeongbukdo and she graduated from Sukmyeong Girl's High School where she majored in science and now teaches the same major. It has been said that she is tall and slim. In teaching students, she is so nice that she has gained a good reputation. As a long-time single, she was once called a "spinster," but she recently got married. (Anonymous, 1937, p. 25).

A feature story entitled "The after-story of scandalous women" in *Yeosong* dealt with 17 women's stories and included their pictures, with an explanation about why the magazine printed the article. What the male editor wanted to know was if the women who had caused a scandal were living happily or not; if they divorced or not; if they were still

single; and about the women who disappeared from public space.¹⁴

From the kinds of surveillance techniques mentioned above, Korean intellectual women's sexual mobility was captured by the public gaze and remained as a written record. Not only this, but also the disappearance of the first generation of Korean New Women from the public sphere, i.e. Hyeseok Na, Myeongsoon Kim, and Ilyeop Kim, affected the way in which other highly educated Korean women behaved in colonial Korean society. Another patriarchal way of controlling women's sexuality was to negatively fictionalize stories about New Women, falsely modeled after real New Women.¹⁵ Regarding this, Jiyoung Suh (2003, p.117) points out that it seems that there was a large discord between the realization of sexual subjectivity presented in women's positions and sexual license seen in men's position.

The (married) New Women's body and sexuality remained contained as a desexualized body for the regeneration of the Korean nation. The New Woman's body thus became the symbolic site of contentious gender politics in which nationalism, tradition, socialism, and feminism were in contestation. What should be noted here is that the rhetorical language adopted for the aim of legitimizing the control of women's sexuality was explicitly differentiated from that of Chosun, through modern scientific language explaining women's body that brought women's chastity and sexual desire anew into public discourse. Rational, scientific Western language used by male intellectuals in explaining women's body/ sexuality thus gained authority and was accepted as "truth."

The Korean women's proper role and place as the "wise mother and good wife" at home was articulated by the words of another Korean New Woman. In the mid-1930s, Jeonghee Choi, one of the famous modern female novelists, claimed that:

A husband need not keep his chastity, and he may lead a corrupted life, but if a wife adopts the same attitude, it results in the destruction of her body with no gains to her person. What is of concern is that our women have too much jealousy.

¹⁴ Anonymous (1937, July). "Hantae hwaje yeoseongdeului huildam" [after-story of scandalous women], *Yeoseong*.

¹⁵ Dong In Kim's novel, *Kim Yeonsil* [The Tale of Yeonsil Kim] is representative of this type.

Lots of misfortunes occur from jealousy. It has been said that jealousy proceeds as a natural instinct of humankind, however, sometimes this natural instinct should be repressed. (Choi, 1935, pp. 163-164).

From the above, we are able to know that the formation of the *new* patriarchy, as Chatterjee (1993) has pointed out, was thus completed by having other New Women articulate what Korean nationalist male intellectual wanted to say and hear.

Conclusion

The article investigated how the hidden nationalist-patriarchal power rendered women's body as an authentic and pure object representing the Korean nation's traditional culture and cultural pride vis-vis Japanese material domination in the capitalist colonial city space by deconstructing the male-centered discourses and masculine gaze on the body of the modern girl. The historical rise and demise of radical discourses of women's body and sexuality, that is, the process of the subsumption of the Korean Woman Question was analyzed for the aim of illustrating the temporal-spatiality of Korean patriarchal colonial modernity through the collisions between the Korean intellectuals' double standard of sexual consciousness, and radical acknowledgement and autonomy of the Korean New Woman's body and sexuality.

This article posits the following conclusions: First, the hidden political and economic politics embedded in the restriction of women's mobility in the outside world came out of the ruling-craft pursued by Confucian scholars in Chosun and Confucianism, which articulated difference of sex by borrowing its internal logic from discourses of "unchangeable nature" (biological essentialism) fitted to the aims of patriarchy in the private sphere. State policy of punishment and compensation for the woman who kept her chastity by committing suicide and who was praised as an ideal woman, can be interpreted as patriarchal characteristics derived from the cooperation between patriarchal state and individual unit of family/clan. The articulation of women's chastity is linked with the idea of viewing women's body as an important carrier producing a legitimized son as an

heir, thus keeping the pure-blood vessel for patrilineal lineage. Accordingly, women's sexuality was controlled and became male property.

Second, modern subjectivity was constructed in the process and endeavor of disengaging from feudalistic bondage with the aim of expressing the self and individuality. In this context, the modern girl appearing in the colonial society can be evaluated as the modern Korean female subject in terms of her challenge to Neo-Confucian control and concealment of the female body, claiming the autonomy of the body. Modern sensibility and cultural taste played a crucial role in cultivating the new domain of capitalist consumerism and vice versa. The historical emergence of the modern girl exactly reflected such social changes as, colonial Korea's entry into consumerist society and the construction of the new social class-consumerist bourgeoisie class.

Third, the Korean Woman Question included the issues of female modern education, allowance for widows' re-marriage, and the abolishment of forced early marriage system, such issues as were raised by the early Enlightenment activists. In the 1920s and 30s, relative to the issues of nation-building project and cultural reform, the Korean male intellectual's acknowledgement of the Woman Question was limited only to the scope of reform of marriage and family, assuming that women's proper position was in the home.

Finally, the Korean female intellectual returning to colonial Korea in the 1920s conceived a more radical perspective, having been affected by Western radical thought on the issues of love and sex. The radical Korean New Woman's resistance to the oppressive chastity ideology and patriarchal marriage system was viewed as "moral decay" by Korean male intellectuals who attempted to build a homogeneous community—a Korean nation—with the articulation of the pure blood of the Koreans. To them, the expression of the New Woman's sexual desire and their experimentation with free love outside of the marital system, stemming from the acknowledgement of the modern self, were understood as a threat to both gender and to class interest.

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