Modern Woman, Loving Marriage, and the Promises of Advancement

by

Miyabi Modry Yamamoto

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Japanese Language

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Daniel Cuong O’Neill, Chair
Professor Miryam B. Sas
Professor Alan M. Tansman
Professor John Lie
Professor Serk Bae Suh

Fall 2011
Abstract

Modern Woman, Loving Marriage, and the Promises of Advancement

by

Miyabi Modry Yamamoto

Doctor of Philosophy in Japanese Language

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Daniel Cuong O’Neill, Chair

This study analyzes the literary construct of modern womanhood in Japan and Korea in the early twentieth century. The texts examined include prose fiction, religious prose, and poetry written in both Japanese and Korean during the decade immediately after Japan’s colonization of Korea in 1910. They are taken from magazines produced for an educated female audience: Seitō (Bluestockings; 1911–1916), Yŏja gyae (Women’s world; 1917–1921), and Sin yŏja (New Women; 1920).

The discourse on womanhood was intimately tied to that of marriage, which in turn connected to family (typically represented as the microcosm of a nation). Within this scheme, the idea of love as the instigator of marriage became of paramount importance, for a nation could be “modern” only if its citizens engaged in an appropriately “modern” marriage leading to a “modern” lifestyle (including a modern way of childrearing). Many of the texts I examine show a female protagonist struggling with the idea and realities of marriage and family. The chapters trace modern woman figures who appear as the authoritative narrators of stories of the “traditional” woman, as the modern schoolgirl figure, and as the modern woman figure.

The focus on women’s literature in early imperial Japan and colonial Korea highlights the importance of the then new phenomenon of women’s education—a subject closely related to modernity, gender, and nationalism. Education was an important part of the national project for both Korea and Japan in order to foster native-born “civilized” citizens. It was through teaching women the ideology of modern womanhood and instructing them in methodologies of modernizing that women learned how to be “modern” in terms recognizable by Westerners. However, the way in which education functioned in each context differed: the Korean modern woman came to embody the hope for the postcolonial future, whereas the Japanese modern woman was depicted as disappointed in the empty promises made to her by
modern men about new interpersonal relationships. Looking at the significance of the educational site for Japanese and Korean women figures, we begin to understand the heavy stake that women had in becoming “modern” in order to join the collective and national march toward “advancement.”
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**: 1

**Chapter I: Relics of the Past: Our Sisters, Silent Traditional Women**…8  
  Recording the Vanishing Figure…10  
  The “Other” Woman’s Tragedy…13  
  One Woman’s Issue? Or, a Women’s Issue?…18  
  Whose Fault Is It Anyway?…24  
  Why Portray Traditional Women?…28

**Chapter II: The Schoolgirl’s Ideal Marriage**…30  
  Modernity Encoded…33  
  Discursive Space, Urban Space…35  
  The Self-Contained Educational Site…40  
  In the End, It’s Still All About Men…42

**Chapter III: The Female Christ and the Modern Virtuous Woman**…46  
  A Woman’s Body…47  
  The Purpose of Educating Women…51  
  Mingling Christian and Confucian Imagery…53  
  Successfully Blending the Traditional with the Modern…56  
  Vision of an Alternative Future: Creating a Female Lineage…58

**Chapter IV: Seeking Female Solidarity**…62  
  Geisha as “One of Us” or Not…64  
  Beautiful Geisha…66  
  Family Purity…68  
  Geisha as “One of Them”…71  
  Words Written and Spoken…72  
  Women, Men, Servants, and Provincials…74  
  Different “Women”…76  
  In Closing…78
Introduction

This study analyzes the literary construct of modern womanhood in Japan and Korea in the early twentieth century. The texts I examine include prose fiction, religious prose, and poetry written in Japanese and Korean. These pieces are taken from magazines written for an educated female audience that collectively span the decade immediately following Japan’s colonization of Korea in 1910: Seitō (Bluestockings; 1911–1916), Yōja gyae (Women’s world; 1917–1921), and Sin yōja (New Women; 1920).

Seitō was founded as a literary magazine of the Seitō Society by Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971) and other graduates of Japan’s first institution for women’s higher learning, the Nihon joshi daigakkō. Yōja gyae was a Korean-language women’s magazine published in Japan by female Korean students studying there. It was the female counterpart to the more famous (and better studied) Hak chi kwang (Light of learning; 1914–1930) published mainly by male Korean students also studying in Japan.1 Sin yōja, a short-lived general-interest magazine, founded, edited, and published by Kim Ilyŏp (1896–1971), is considered by Korean scholars to be the first women’s magazine, despite the fact that the editorship of Yōja gyae was taken up by female students before Sin yōja’s founding.2 In any case, Sin yōja was one of the first modern woman’s magazines, and it emphasized and encouraged women’s contributions in ways no other Korean magazine had ever used. It should be noted, however, that the designation “women’s magazine” does not exclude the possibility of the authors or the readers being male. In fact, some of the texts the magazine published strongly suggest that it was widely read by male educators and intellectuals.3

Studies of considerable quality have been published on “modern women” figures, including the New Woman, the Modern Girl, and schoolgirls (or female students).4 Historians of

---

1 The relationship between Yōja gyae and Hak chi kwang is similar to that between Jogaku zasshi (Women’s education magazine; 1885–1905), the Japanese women’s magazine founded by Iwamoto Yoshiharu (1868–1942), and Bungakukai (World of literature; 1893–1898).
2 Yōja gyae, perhaps because its first volume was published in Japan and is now missing, is a severely understudied magazine even though the contributors all became prominent women leaders in Korea. The undue neglect of Yōja gyae, however, does not diminish the prominent significance of Sin yōja.
3 Rebecca L. Copeland asserts that the audience of Jogaku zasshi was roughly divided between women and men. (Lost Leaves: Women Writers of Meiji Japan [Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000], 8).
4 There are many terms referring to various female figures that became important at different points in early twentieth-century East Asian history. However, the period of my study, 1911 to 1921, was before these fine categorizations came into play. In the texts under discussion here, all the modern female traits are portrayed as intimately tied to one another and often even coexist.
Japan and Korea, such as Miriam Silverberg, Dina Lowy, Muta Kazue (in Japanese), Hyaewoel Choi, Theodore Jun Yoo, and Kim Kyŏngil (in Korean)—to mention only a few—have addressed each society’s obsessions and interactions with modern female figures of the early twentieth century. On a larger scale, the Chinese historian Tani E. Barlow and those involved in the project “Modern Girls around the World” have explored the possibilities of demonstrating “the simultaneity of modernity aesthetics and aspirations” through using the Modern Girl figure as a “heuristic device.” That is, they register the spread of Modern Girl figures as a simultaneous global phenomenon linked to the process of globalization. Mun Ok’pyo and Muta Kazue, along with other young and emerging Korean and Japanese scholars, have begun the work of comparing Japanese and Korean modern women and their writings primarily from a historical or sociological perspective. Beyond using this body of historical scholarship to place the texts explored here into their proper cultural and social contexts, I draw on them to understand specific cultural codes and any significance the texts might be subverting, contesting, or encoding. This becomes particularly pertinent in discussing underrepresented figures—whether women or colonized people—because the discursive logic of these figures tends to be at odds with that of the majority.

Scholars of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean literatures, such as Rey Chow, Rebecca L. Copeland, Indra Levy, Ji-Eun Lee, and Pak Sŏnmı (in Japanese and Korean), to again name just a few, have elucidated the significance literature for, by, or about women played in the formation of modern culture, society, and literature. Their studies have helped in understanding the specific context of my research subjects and in articulating the importance and relevance of my study. The specifically literary approach allows me to see and consider the artistic aspects that simultaneously intertwine with and stand apart from their sociological and cultural contexts. My study adds to this emerging field of scholarship through comparing close readings of key Japanese and Korean texts.

Discourse on womanhood was intimately tied to that of marriage and family life in the period under discussion. As scholars such as Carol Gluck, Jordan Sand, Miriam Silverberg, and Muta Kazue point out, family—along with womanhood—was an important rhetorical device for modernity and acted as the connecting point between women and nation. Within this scheme, the idea of love as the instigator of marriage became of paramount importance, for without an

within one character. This indicates that the use of fine categorizations for various modern female figures would be counterproductive for the purpose of this study. Therefore, here, all images of women that arise within the context of modernity and its discourse are termed “modern women” (or “modern female”) figures.

appropriately “modern” marriage that leads to a “modern” lifestyle (including a modern way of childrearing), the nation (the macrocosm of a family) could not expect to become sufficiently modern. It is not surprising, then, that many of the texts I examine in the following pages show a female protagonist struggling with the idea and realities of marriage and family—the lives of women and families were deemed inseparable.

The modern woman began as an exciting symbol of progress and the ideal companion to the modern man. Within magazines for young women, the sense of the modernized woman’s sovereignty was strong. What modernity brings, including modern thought, was portrayed as natural and humane; this portrayal was typical in publications that congratulated modernity. One of the major concepts attributed to modernity in this period (along with many others) was that modernity furthered universal humaneness and, therefore, brought about individual happiness through liberating “natural” human emotions and behavior. In the publications I examine here, figures of the traditional woman came to represent the painful past and counterfigures to modern women. Portraits of traditional women were sympathetic, but unflattering: such women were depicted as victims—demure, passive, pathetic. Even in stories where the traditional woman was the protagonist, she was not positioned to tell her own story. Her lack of voice appears correlated to her lack of modern character. Traditional woman figures usually appeared in tandem with the decidedly antimodern form of arranged marriages, which young intellectuals at the time furiously attacked as the antithesis to the ideal of “love marriage” (Japanese: ren’ai kekkon, Korean: yŏnae kyŏlhon).6

Chapter I examines the construction of the literate and modern woman figure who appears as the authoritative narrator of a heartbreaking story that situates a silent and helpless “traditional” woman as the protagonist. The stories examined here highlight how modern women figured as messengers of moral imperatives and as instigators of important social transformations. Through narrating the story of traditional women, modern women framed themselves as a part of the dynamic and progressive history that would advance morality, technology, and all of humanity. Just as humanity (gendered as upper-class men) could be saved from the past by advancing beyond its ancestors, so could women be saved by “recording” their origins (the project resembling the writing of history), which led to delineating their purpose of existence and tracking their progress. In this scheme, then, the modernized woman becomes a symbol of

---

hope—for what the future will bring, or, rather, for what she will make the future bring.

The treatment of women became a central issue of concern among Korean and Japanese intellectuals because women’s conditions were seen as directly corresponding to each nation’s “level” of civilization. Levy explains that this discourse had an impact on various venues of print media: “Where this discourse probably had the most direct affect [sic] on social reality,” however, “was in its interpretation by advocates of educational reform.”7 This, she argues, was because “[a] major impetus behind modern women’s education was to establish a certain kind of equivalency between Japanese women and their female counterparts in the advanced nations of Europe.”

Levy does not speculate why it was education for women that became a hot topic. I argue that women’s education became a particularly salient site because both Japan and Korea were latecomers to the Western-led civilization and modernization project. The onus of proving their legitimacy as modern independent nations was on them. Japan had to prove its legitimacy to the encroaching Western powers in the mid to late nineteenth century, and Korea had to prove it to the Western powers and Japan both before and after its formal colonization by Japan in 1910.

This study’s focus on women’s literature in the early imperial Japanese and colonial Korean contexts brings to the fore the importance of the still new (at the time) phenomenon of women’s education—a subject intricately related to modernity, gender, and ethics. If the invention of the printing press (originating in eleventh-century China) is considered to be one of the last millennium’s greatest inventions,8 then the wide spread of literacy among women (and commoner men) through institutionalized education in East Asia appears almost equally significant. With the spread of literacy, women and men outside the ruling class could also participate in the forum of cultural production through written words.9

Education was an important national project for both Korea and Japan in order to foster native-born “civilized” citizens. The intended results were different for Korea, a recently colonized nation, and Japan, a nation supposedly on the rise as a new imperial power on par with Western nations. For Japan, a successful educational project would bear future citizens who

7 Indra Levy, Sirens of the Western Shore (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 52.
8 The Economist, no. 8151 (1999): 121.
9 Today, with the spread of the Internet, the ability to produce and publish one’s own writing has become even more widespread. In addition, our increasing dependence on visual forms of information—including the preference for words written down instead of spoken—has changed many art forms and communication devices that were once in wide use. Without idealizing or romanticizing a world with low literacy rates, I would like to acknowledge that increased rates of literacy and the dependence on written words comes with its own consequences, including people’s increased inability to memorize facts, figures, and stories, and the loss of oral culture, as well as obvious advantages.
would create a base for an empire founded on a new hierarchical system informed by social Darwinism, which preached the survival of the fittest in a metaphorical way within human society. For Korea, the potential success of the national education project offered hope for regaining independence.

An important feature in the formation of Korean and Japanese modern womanhood was the crucial role played by newly constructed educational institutions modeled after modern Western schools. This aspect of East Asian modern womanhood is distinct from English, Scandinavian, and U.S. models where the debate on modern womanhood germinated in political settings primarily outside of educational institutions. This difference arises from the differing order of the establishment of modern educational institutions. In the West, modern institutionalized education began as church-run Sunday schools and grew its secular counterpart during the period of industrialization. The modern values that arose from the process of modernization in the West were isolated as a complete model to be followed in the Japanese and Korean contexts and taught within the modern institution of education. As a consequence, ideas of feminism in Korea and Japan were largely transmitted in educational settings established in part to prepare students to better emulate the powerful ways of “advanced” Western nations. In other words, feminism did not often stem from discussion among women as an antiestablishment force in Korea and Japan, but instead it was taught as an orthodox subject within the establishment with already prescribed answers.

Chapter II focuses on the configuration of the clash of tradition and modernity by delving deeper into how the modern woman was coded as the symbol of modernity. This chapter examines the pattern of progress and individualism for women. The texts discussed here place schoolgirls—who are on their way to becoming “modern women”—as protagonists and narrate how they counter marriages arranged by their parents. The publication of these stories coincides with the period when heated debates on legal codes concerning women and family structures

10 “Hierarchy is a creative way of defending differences in status and power by allocating to each a proper social, cultural, and political position within the sum of all the differentiated parts” (Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam [Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monographic Series, 2002], 3).
were taking place in both Korea and Japan. Here, the schoolgirl is in a position analogous to the traditional woman figure in Chapter I. In contrast to the traditional female figure, the schoolgirl figure protests, and the narrator uses this to emphasize the crucial importance a self-determining and free-willed “love marriage” carries in a modern society.12

Having looked at symbolisms and ideological forces common to the Korean and Japanese figures of the modern woman, I turn in Chapter III to examine the significance of school specifically in the colonial Korean context as a site that embodies hope. The complexity of hope in the Korean context is implied in the Korean condition of being a nation colonized by a semicolonized nation, Japan. Hope in these texts is portrayed as salvation rather than simple optimism, connoting a deeper despair or dissatisfaction with Koreans’ present condition and explicitly drawing on religious imagery.

The fervent hope displayed in these texts draws attention to an underlying tension between Confucian and Christian symbolisms. The Christian missionary women’s schools often did not subscribe to “liberal” Western politics and ideologies, but by virtue of their Western origin and their proximity to the Korean and Japanese progressive population, ended up occupying a central place in the feminist literary imaginary. Neo-Confucianism, as a historically recent and prominent mode of social organization, also loomed large in the Korean literary imagination. This Christian and Confucian exchange and collaboration emerged in part because Korea was a colony of a non-Christian empire, turning Christian activities into a force of anticolonialism.

Chapter IV takes up a specifically Japanese configuration of modern womanhood that expresses a profound sense of disappointment and cynicism toward the supposedly new scheme of modern gender relations. The geisha figure functions as a device to expose the hypocrisy of modern men and, by extension, implies that the collective category of “women” is suspect from the modern woman’s perspective. The texts depict the discomfort, anxiety, and ambivalence the educated modern woman feels when she notices the male gaze, thereby conflating modern women and geisha as sexualized female bodies.

Focusing on women’s literature during the early modern period in Japan and Korea allows us to explore a period when women were bursting into the public sphere through their own writings. It is fascinating to explore the varying portraits of women in texts written mostly by

12 The Japanese sociologist Muta Kazue observes that the importance of “love marriages” was often used as a simile to the Japanese project of nation building during the Meiji period (1868–1912). See Muta Kazue, Senryaku toshite no kazoku: kindai Nihon no kokumin kokka keisei to josei [Family as strategy: Modern Japan’s national formation and women] (Tokyo: Shinyōsha, 1996), 51–77.
women—asking where they converge with canonical texts and general media images (particularly in relation to figures of traditional women) and where they diverge from them.

One of the central issues with which the texts deal is the disjuncture between represented ideals and perceived reality. In a sense, the representation of women is almost always tied to this question. Differing literary conventions also highlight this issue in varying ways, creating a unique effect. Comparing representations of modern womanhood in Japan and Korea during the early twentieth century in both Japanese and Korean allows me to analyze colonialism from both sides, within populations closely related to each other, but in terms of power, quite unbalanced. It is my hope that by unfolding the words of the magazines of this time I am able to release the lingering fragrance of an era.
Chapter I. Relics of the Past: Our Sisters, Silent Traditional Women

New female figures representing modernity peppered the pages of Japanese and Korean journals, magazines, and other periodicals during the early twentieth century. These modern female figures were called variations of “New Woman” or “Modern Girl,” depending on the time period. Scholars such as Miriam Silverberg, Muta Kazue, and Kim Kyŏngil have pointed out the symbolic importance of these female figures and their simultaneous absence in the real world. The modern female figures represented an imagined articulation of cultural features; these figures were created in media and then refracted in individual lives. Literature appearing in women’s magazines such as Seitō, Yŏja gye, and Sin yŏja show narrators and characters both drawing on and contesting these images. A reconfiguration of womanhood was under way.

At the same time, modes of storytelling were being affected by new forms of timekeeping. Patricia Murphy argues in Time Is of the Essence that women in late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century England were portrayed as being outside the new, “linear,” and “progressive” time. Women were representatives of the ahistorical past and “tradition” that remained static, morally depleted, and immature. These characteristics related to how “nineteenth-century thinkers constructed history as a secularized religion” in which “progress [represented] a continual movement toward a more civilized and idyllic state.”13 History provided a new purpose and philosophy of life, and in the course of doing so took on the Protestant Christian notion of progressive time that placed those people further along the historical path as more “advanced”—spiritually, morally, and materially.

Rita Felski claims in Gender of Modernity, that women writers, in contrast to how women were generally portrayed, self-identified differently. British feminist narratives at the turn of the twentieth century “encouraged many women to identify themselves as historical subjects and to present themselves as liberatory agents of the new.” In the process, however, they also inherited the rhetoric of exclusion.14 This amounted to “the primarily middle-class members of the women’s movement frequently [presenting] themselves as an intellectual and political vanguard at the forefront of history. Within this scenario, women of other races and classes were often depicted as primitive and backward, yet to be awakened to the light of feminist consciousness.”15 How fiction portraying the traditional woman functions to create a space where the modern woman becomes the autonomous historical subject is the focus of this chapter.

The texts I analyze here position the traditional woman as the protagonist, and yet they do not elucidate her life conditions or thoughts. Rather, they serve to augment the portrait of the modern woman, the authoritative narrator of the traditional woman’s story. In other words, the traditional woman in these

---

15 Ibid., 149.
texts is the shadow of the narrator—a younger modern woman—and functions as the conceptual repository of all that was rejected or excluded in the development of modern womanhood. Following the linear and progression-based model of history, the modern woman, as the “improved” woman, was better—morally, intellectually, and physically—and therefore had a justifiably privileged status vis-à-vis the traditional woman. She also distinguished herself by her heightened sense of self-awareness, which allowed her to become a historical subject and fed into her ability to transform society for the better—a major theme of modernization.

We see in the following stories the modern woman positioned to narrate how the marriage system and the “traditional” patriarchal system take away subjective agency from women. In so doing, the modern woman narrator occupies the place of the “benevolent patriarch” and acts as the authoritative mouthpiece for the silent traditional female figure. Consequently, traditional female figures take the place of the larger female population. Diffraction of the female population becomes possible through the modern woman’s development of a sense of historical consciousness and individual agency. Ultimately, the texts show the struggle of whether “women’s issues” should be treated as an issue of the collective “women” category or as an issue of individualism, that is, an issue of the individual “woman.”

“The Sacrificed Maiden” (“Hŭisaeng twen chŏnyŏ”; Sin yŏja, 1920) is a story that shares some of the same impulses as the Japanese story but differs in critical ways that mark it as a colonial Korean narrative. Whereas an educated modern woman is situated as the narrator of the fate of a woman in a traditional marriage in the previous story, this narrator is portrayed as more critical of the modern male figure and more sympathetic and protective toward the traditional woman figure. This tendency is representative of Korean texts, as we will see in subsequent chapters. The comparison of a Japanese and a Korean story in this chapter shows the general trend of Korean stories more explicitly depicting patriarchy and its link to an imperialistic existence.

16 The terms “modern” and “traditional” should not be taken as absolute qualifiers. I use them as adjectives describing historically and geographically specific trends. Although I am tempted to keep using quotation marks around them to denote this, for the sake of ease of reading I will stop doing so from this point onward.
~Recording the Vanishing Figure~

Both “Curse of the Water God” and “The Sacrificed Maiden” feature modern women narrators who see themselves as members of the linear, progressive, historical narrative. In turn, they exclude themselves from being and contrast themselves to “traditional” women—not necessarily defined by class or even race, but by the level of education received in the new system of institutional education and fashion. In other words, women—already in a position of less power than men—were employing logic that created yet another minority population inferior to themselves.

The seeming contradiction of minorities’ employing the logic that makes and keeps them a minority is well-documented in the case of Oliver Schreiner in Anne McClintock’s seminal work, *Imperial Leather*. McClintock states that Schreiner engaged in “an impassioned and lifelong denouncement of social injustice in the colonies and Britain and a fierce defense of the disempowered: Africans and Boers, prostitutes and Jews, working-class women and men.” However, McClintock argues that as an extraordinary thinker and writer, Schreiner’s life as simultaneously both “colonizer” (as a white South African) in Africa and “colonized” (as a woman) in the Victorian schema produced writings that “pushed some of the contradictions of imperialism to their limits,” exposing “the abiding conflicts of race and gender, power and resistance.”

“Curse of the Water God” was published in the controversial women’s literary magazine *Seitō*, founded as the coterie magazine of the Seitō Society. Its explicit aim was “to promote the development of women’s literature, to give scope to the innate characteristics of each individual, and to give birth to the female genius of tomorrow.” This had the effect of limiting the readership to those with a high level of literacy, making the vast majority of the magazine’s audience (which overlapped with its contributors) elite women. *Seitō* accepted opinion articles, stories, poems, and other literary and artistic submissions from members and sponsors of the Seitō Society, most of whom were women. Many of the stories

---

18 Ibid., 260.
21 The first bylaws of Seitō state that any woman who loves literature can become a “member” (shain) “without regard to race,” veteran women writers are welcome to join as “supporting members” (sanjoin), and “men who endorse our goals, as long as they are recognized as meritng the members’ respect,” are welcome as “honorary members” (kyakuin); see Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan*, 267. Any of these three categories of members could potentially publish in the magazine, but, in fact, throughout the history of the magazine, only a handful of men contributed.
depicted a scene or episode from a woman’s life, following the literary convention of what later came to be called the *shishōsetsu* (I-novel) style, a confessional or autobiographical form of writing. As many scholars of *Seitō* have noted, although the initial aim of the magazine was to be an artistic and literary forum for women, the articles often dealt with the philosophical and political questions of love, marriage, humanism, gender equality, and social transformation.

The author of “Curse of the Water God,” Okada Yuki (1895–1966), was born in Tokyo to a highly educated couple. Her father was a government official serving the royal family, and her mother was an alumna of the Women’s Teaching School, having received the highest level of education a woman could achieve then. She was a frequent contributor to *Seitō* in the latter half of its existence, primarily publishing personal essays (*kansō*) and dialogues (*taiwa*), often of a philosophical nature. “Curse of the Water God” is the only overtly fictional piece (*sōsaku*) that she published. It is seventeen pages long and sandwiched between another story, “Jinchōge” (Daphne), which is about a young single woman and her brief flirtation with a friend’s husband, and a philosophical essay, “Shinsei to ningensei to ren’ai to” (Divinity, humanity, and love), which struggles with the question of attaining mutual partnership within a heteronormative love relationship and marriage where sexism still prevails. The two works that bookend Okada’s “Curse of the Water God” highlight how many of the stories and other texts in *Seitō* were centrally concerned with how *jiyū ren’ai* (liberated romance), gender equality, marriage, and morality functioned for the modern woman.

“Curse of the Water God” is a text marked by a keen curiosity toward the “other” woman—whether older, of a different background, or of a different class. The more distanced from the presumed general readership, the more detailed the contextualization of the character or situation becomes, clarifying the supposed target audience: affluent and educated women in large cities (also the likely key characteristics

---

22 For more on the *shishōsetsu*, its history, literary conventions, and reception, refer to Tomi Suzuki’s *Narrating the Self* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).


24 I include the Japanese terms for genres in parentheses because the categorizations of texts—what they mean and how they are identified—have changed drastically over time.

25 Saeki Junko, in ‘Iro’ to ‘ai’ no hikaku bunkashi and *Ren’ai no kigen* (Tokyo: Nihon keizai shimbunsha, 2000), convincingly argues that fiction written during late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Japan included many love stories between cousins because in such a sex-segregated society, the few members of the opposite sex one was able to meet were family members, relatives, and their friends. This point might also be relevant in understanding why the protagonist of this story has a brief flirtation with a friend’s husband (with whom she had romantic moments long before marrying).

26 *Jiyū ren’ai* is more literally translated “free love.” This term was a conceptual extension of *jiyū kekkon* (literally, “free marriage”), in contrast to *kōsei kekkon* (literally, “forced marriage”), which was conceptualized as the traditional form of marriage where parents decided on a person’s mate instead of a person choosing his or her own mate.
of the narrator). The protagonist’s marked difference from the target audience also acts to enforce the prevailing attitude of intellectuals at the time that a modern marriage is possible through a lifestyle informed by a high level of modern education—thereby justifying the modern woman’s superiority over the traditional woman.

In “Curse of the Water God,” the narrator is an omniscient third person who refers to herself simply as “I” (watashi). She remains nameless in the narrative but reveals some crucial information that positions her as a modern woman. On the opening page, she explains: “What I am about to write right now is the whole story of how Osada went mad, which the master told me with tears in her eyes.” With this sentence, the narrator establishes herself as the ethnographic figure who records, recounts, and disseminates the tragedy that has befallen the female master of nagauta and her daughter, Osada. In so doing, the narrator also situates the master and her daughter as figures in a ghost story and places them in a primitive displaced past. In this sense, “Curse of the Water God” appears similar in its project and effects to Japanese ethnographer Yanagita Kunio’s Tōno monogatari (Tales of Tōno; 1910), supposedly a collection of traditional tales and mythical stories from the Japanese countryside. Marilyn Ivy argues that Yanagita “purports to be directly transmitting tales he has heard from the voice of another, and that he created a “discursive space…[that]… pointed to the marginalized obverse of Meiji civilization and enlightenment: the rural, the unwritten, the vanishing.” The narrator of “Curse of the Water God” replicates Yanagita’s ethnographic stance and appears to create a space to tell the story of disappearing Japanese women.

“Curse of the Water God,” like other literary texts of the time, does away with the premodern Japanese convention requiring the reader to understand the direction of an utterance, an action, or a narrative perspective based on grammatical context, such as level of speech or terms of address. Instead, it supplies punctuation marks, frequent paragraph changes, consistent use of proper nouns, and the frequent use of pronouns to mark character relations within the text. The speech level is consistent throughout, using the forms -ta, -da, -de-aru, etc.

The text contains many direct quotes throughout that are marked off by quotation marks—a Meiji invention. Punctuation marks, used widely in all of the texts in Seito, were one of the innovations in the Japanese language in the Meiji period (1868–1912). The format of the story is very close to

---

27 It is important to note, however, that the target audience described here is not necessarily reflective of the actual audience or even the writers and contributors themselves. The self-image of the modern woman as urban, educated, and from an affluent class is related to the widely circulated image of the New Woman—an image constructed by the larger media—which sometimes collided with reality but often did not. The image of the New Woman is intimately related to the idea of modernity, revealing the important, yet largely fictitious, nature of the New Woman figure.


29 For more on the development of the modern Japanese language, especially as a concept linked to imperialism, see I Yonsuku (I Yŏnsuk), Kokugo to iu shisō: Kindai Nihon no gengo ninshiki (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), translated by Maki Hirano Hubbard as The Ideology of Kokugo: Nationalizing
contemporary Japanese texts, with short paragraphs (danraku), a new paragraph per quote, and short and simple sentence structures that use the period-equivalent maru (。) at the end of each sentence.

Like Yanagita’s Tōno monogatari, “Curse of the Water God” is written in the shasei (sketch) style, which sought to “transcribe reality directly,” pointing to the belief in the potential of creating intuitive and transparent language. The technique attempted to create “an almost photographic reproduction of external reality, including speech itself, within prose narratives.”30 The careful and methodological writing style coupled with frequent uses of pronouns reflects an objective realist stance. Metaphors are extremely limited and, where they appear, are always marked with yō ni (like), making it clear that what precedes is a comparison and thereby separating the objects of comparison.

The positionality of one person to another is marked in the text through abstracted terms such as “man” or “woman” and through the heavy use of the pronouns kare (he) and kanojo (she). The third-person objective outsider tone of the narrative almost makes the reader forget the personal master-disciple relationship the narrator has with the nagauta master, the teller of the story. In flattening out the grammar of hierarchy, the hierarchical relationship between the characters is also flattened. Thus, the narrator is able to assert her superiority and reverse the hierarchical relationship among herself, the master, and Osada. The narrator’s observations are methodical, scientific, detailed, and self-aware. In turn, those being observed are erratic, emotional, moody—and caught in “traditions” that appear to only harm humans. The narrator seems to be observing the premodern figures, the master and her daughter, as if they were museum pieces.

~The “Other” Woman’s Tragedy~

In the narrative, Osada is portrayed as having been raised in Tokyo but later moving to Hokkaidō, considered a frontier in the Meiji period, thus being displaced to a rural area.31 Befittingly, she lacks “modern” sensibilities, as highlighted in her subservient attitude. When her husband suddenly returns home with a traveling geisha after an unannounced three-day absence, the only thing she can do is quietly say, “Welcome home.”32 When he ignores her and demands that she serve him, she does so at the expense of her heartache. In the passage describing Osada’s humiliating meeting with the geisha, the narrator describes Osada as “biting her lower lip”—a gesture connoting repressed chagrin. This vexation was so

---

Language in Modern Japan (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010).

30 Ivy, Discourses of the Vanishing, 75–76.
31 Hokkaidō was known as Ezo until the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The large island was inhabited by the native population, the Ainu people, and was not a part of Japan proper, although there was a presence of the Matsumae domain beginning in the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). After the Meiji Restoration, however, the Japanese government began to place great emphasis on Hokkaidō’s economic development and encouraged settlers from other parts of Japan to immigrate there (Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan [Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1983], s.v. “Hokkaidō”).
great that, while serving them, “she felt like her arms and legs were moving mechanically, ignoring her own mind.”\textsuperscript{33} The narration depicts her vexation as so deep and the counterforce to not express it as so strong that she becomes blinded to her own senses. In not expressing her distress and not knowing how to respond to the humiliating comments made and actions taken by the geisha, she is portrayed as demure to a fault and as not knowing how to “naturally” express her thoughts or emotions. This depiction foreshadows the criticism charged by Kitazawa Shūichi, the critic central to the formation of the ideal Modern Girl figure in the 1920s, that Japanese women lacked a healthy and “natural” openness.\textsuperscript{34}

In presenting a wife who is emotionally distraught at her husband’s bringing home a geisha, the narrator reveals the assumption shared by the narrator, writer, and readers that a mutually monogamous marriage is more natural and humane. In Japan at the time, legal prostitution and concubinage, and their morality, were a topic of heated debate in the pages of major magazines and newspapers, including \textit{Seitō}. In the face of such a debate, then, texts such “Curse of the Water God” were not enforcing already condoned notions but, instead, were forcefully arguing for the “natural” desire that a marriage should be a monogamous sexual relationship. What is “natural” was also being reconfigured in light of modernity and the values it purported.

From the beginning of the narrative, Osada is repeatedly expunged from a continuous biological family line, which was seen as the new “natural” form of a family: At birth, she is put up for adoption. She is then adopted by a single working woman she is not related to by biology or acquaintance. In other words, she is not a part of the ideal modern nuclear family with its father, mother, and siblings. Such adoptions were quite common in Japan in the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), which immediately preceded the Meiji period, but here this type of adoption symbolizes Osada’s marginalization. Even when she is finally married—to a man previously unknown to her in an arranged marriage—fulfilling the minimum criterion for beginning a modern nuclear family, she is still left alone. Her often absent husband, after three years of marriage, gives her neither a sense of family nor a child. As the narrative unfolds, we see Osada’s being stripped of any family ties and becoming increasingly isolated. Osada’s lineage is constructed to portray a space for the marginalized figure that will eventually vanish.

Befitting the character construction of Osada, the story itself is told in the form of a classical ghost story. The teller of the story is a master of \textit{nagauta}, a form of song and chant originating in the Tokugawa period. It is usually used as accompanying music to kabuki and other Japanese theatrical arts popular in the Tokugawa period, which often narrate dramatic tales of love, death, or family separation. \textit{Nagauta} is also an art form that has strong associations with the pleasure quarters.

At first, it appears that the story is about a woman gone mad, but then the narrative makes a

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Kitazawa Chōgo (also known as Shūichi), “Modan gaaru no hyōgen—Nihon no imōto ni okuru tegami” [The Modern Girl’s expression—A letter to my younger sister in Japan], in \textit{Josei kaizō} [Women’s transformation] (April 1923).
surprising connection between madness and ghosts. Originally, Osada was only a scary madwoman figure to the narrator—intriguing and beautiful, but with those “intense eyes, unique to those who had gone mad.” The figure of Osada closely resembles the figure of Oiwa, the protagonist of the all too famous Tōkaidō yotsuya kwaidan (Yotsuya ghost stories; 1825), written by the playwright Tsuruya Nanboku IV. Oiwa was killed by her husband because she was in the way of his extramarital love affair. The lineage of tales about female ghosts who appear in front of their husbands or lovers reaches as far back as multiple episodes in The Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari; early eleventh century), but these stories were especially popular in the late Tokugawa period when many news stories were dramatized as scripts for such popular theatrical forms as jōruri puppet plays, kabuki, and rakugo comic tales, all theatric forms that used nagauta as accompanying music. As a ghost, Oiwa possesses supernatural powers. Osada as a madwoman, however, does not. By becoming a figure in a modern narrative, Osada has lost the possibility of possessing supernatural powers because everything must be explainable in “scientific” terms. The sense of shame and fear evoked in her husband is explained away as an ordinary psychological response:

Looking at Osada who was ceaselessly talking nonsense, neither her husband nor father-in-law could do anything. One moment she would let her hair go loose and glare at people. In the next, she would laugh as if she were being charmed. In yet another moment, she would start sobbing. Watching this, her husband sat there mute, like a prisoner who would forever tremble in front of the crime he had committed.

Osada’s story takes supernatural elements of a ghost story and turns them into psychologically explainable phenomena. As if trying to replace her lack of supernatural powers, Osada herself is identified with nature. In a unique moment in the text, Osada’s feelings are projected onto her natural surroundings. As she walks toward the house of Bunzō, a trusted and loyal neighbor, the narrator describes the surrounding scenery:

36 Although I use the term “extramarital” here, we must keep in mind that the idea, concept, and practice of marriage at the time was completely different from today and has evolved much in Japan as well. Depending on the class of people and the time period we are discussing, this affair could have been taken in myriad ways, including as shocking, as modern readers are likely to be shocked. The story has been retold many times over the years, making it difficult to tell what significance the affair would have had on various audiences.
38 Okada, “Suijin no tatari,” 177.
In the clear evening autumn sky, above the thick pine tree grove was a cool-looking moon. Osada felt as though the iridescent light was flowing into the depths of her heart. Walking through the completely silent grove all alone, her mind was strangely full of a serenity that made her feel like at this point she could think through any difficult situation. But, lukewarm tears from somewhere—from where she did not know—flowed onto her cold cheeks.39

This passage marks a turning point in the narrative and the beginning of Osada’s transformation. Earlier in the text, Osada “passed lonely days…surrounded by ceaselessly rolling mountain ranges and always silent forests, thinking always about her mother in Tokyo.”40 She was not comfortable with the vast nature that surrounded her; her identity was still tied to Tokyo and the urban landscape. But in this passage, we see that the narrator depicts Osada as letting the moonlight shine into her and inspire her. The moon provides clarity, and the moonlight touches her. Simultaneously, the repeated reference to coolness or coldness seems to signal that her body temperature is dropping, foreshadowing the nearing of her metaphorical death.

After the short excursion, the narration describes Osada’s return home in detail. She is described as unified with the foreign nature surrounding her: “She went into the grove as if she were being sucked into the muteness that enveloped all corners.”41 The extent of her proximity to nature here is in contrast to the earlier portrait where the vast nature made her feel lonely. Her becoming one with that scenery, then, suggests that she is being overcome by her loneliness, losing control of herself, and quickly becoming self-alienated. At this very moment, Osada falls into an old well “as if some invisible force firmly guided her body.”42

The modern perspective infusing “Curse of the Water God” is obvious, particularly in comparison to Tōkaidō yotsuya kaidan, the story of Oiwa. The narrative’s effort to explain the traditional tale from a scientific and psychological perspective yields a narrator sympathetic to Osada, the tragically wronged wife. Criticism of her husband’s behavior is included in the narrative through honest and hard-working laborer Bunzō’s denouncement: “You know, Missus, in the evening, I thought that it wasn’t good for you to be alone in case anything should happen, so I went by your house and I was just disgusted. Mister was back with some woman no one knows about. I wonder how he can do something like that to you, Missus. You have come all this way into these lonely mountains [to marry him].”43 Bunzō is portrayed as the romantically pure, simple, and hard-working laborer figure. His idealistically straightforward

39 Ibid., 171.
40 Ibid., 165.
41 Ibid., 171.
42 Ibid., 174.
43 Ibid., 172–173.
nature—reminding us of the idealized proletarian worker figure—is depicted in the following: “Osada was moved listening to Bunzō complain about her husband with his unpretentious voice and attitude.”44 His hard-working but benign nature, which colors their safely romantic relationship, is best expressed in the scene when Osada first arrives at his house. He is fast asleep “sprawled out exhausted from a full-day’s labor.”45 The sight of a man comfortably asleep in his own home is startlingly intimate. Yet, its intimate significance is elided in favor of emphasizing his status as a laborer. The class difference between Bunzō and Osada here mingle with the notion of romantic love and provides an opportunity to portray star-crossed potential lovers who will remain safely “pure.”

This text, true to its literary style of portraying everything “as is,” represents things logically, except in one scene: Osada’s fall into the well.

Osada held her sake vessel as though she were hugging it. She appeared from the groves like a character out of a legend covered in a sheer blue light. Her mind had become strangely numb and was completely lacking in consciousness, as though it was not functioning at all. She looked like she was simply moving her legs. Eventually, when she came to the old well, even though it was a path she knew well and had passed countless times, she got pulled down into the still water, as though some invisible force firmly guided her body.46

This is the one “irrational” scene in the otherwise logical and scientific narrative. Osada is then described as emerging from the water as a madwoman. In other words, she is like Oiwa: Oiwa, too, appears as a ghost when she emerges from the well where her body was thrown. But, the narration seems to imply that Osada is not a ghost. Even though her face is completely pale and hair disheveled, as in one of the most famous portraits of Oiwa, she simply appears ghostly. From a “modern” perspective, she has only gone mad. The cause of her madness is clearly explained in terms of modern medicine by the doctor who arrives to examine her. The language the text uses also includes the same medical terminology. When Osada is first pulled out of the water, she is “unconscious” (kizetsu shita). The doctor is indirectly quoted as having diagnosed Osada as having “gone mad” (hakkyō shita) because “she encountered a sudden surprise when she was already sleep-deprived (fumin) and anxiety-ridden (shinrō).”47 The doctor is never directly quoted, making him disappear into the narrative background. However, an alternative diagnosis by a fortune-teller appears as a direct quote as a part of the dialogue with the master:

---

44 Ibid., 173.
46 Ibid., 174.
47 Ibid., 176.
“This patient looks like she is cursed by the Water God. She must have fallen into a pond or the like and almost drowned at some point?”
“Come to think of it, I heard that she fell into an old well.”
“So that must be it. If she had given her life over to the Water God then and died, nothing would have happened, but because she lived, she has been cursed.”

This conversation is recorded in the ethnographic style of direct quotations and set apart as the narrative of the “other,” as opposed to the diagnosis of the doctor of modern medicine. Intriguingly, the fortune-teller is the one who brings up the figure used in the story’s title: the Water God. The narrator is the modern ethnographer figure and, by extension, the figure of authority who constructs the parameters of the master’s and Osada’s existence. She positions herself as the authoritative modern figure who stands at the endpoint of this progressive history of Japanese womanhood. In telling the tragic story of Osada, the narrator shows how Osada, like other “native” Japanese figures and objects—such as its countryside and traditions—is bound to vanish.

~One Woman’s Issue? Or, a Women’s Issue?~

{Seems like a transitional sentence would be good here, but I can’t come up with anything. Something about a similarity or difference between the story just discussed and the one about to be?} The Korean story “The Sacrificed Maiden” by Wŏlgye was published in the inaugural issue of Sin yŏja (March 1920). A short-lived magazine for women, Sin yŏja was inspired by Seitŏ and stood to counter traditionalism, which was attacked by intellectuals as the cause of women’s oppression. Its period of publication coincided with the “Golden Era” of Korean literature and coterie magazines, which was shortly after Japan’s colonial government changed from the so-called Militaristic Policy to the Cultural Policy. The magazine lasted for only four issues due to financial constraints. Sin yŏja included a broad variety of texts such as fictional stories, poetry, and articles and opinion pieces that either prescribed how to be a modern woman or the historically significant role she had. The theme of improvement (kaejo), the keyword of the

---

48 Ibid., 178.
49 Although Sin yŏja explicitly modeled itself after Seitŏ, there were many differences between them. One of the most significance differences was the inclusion of male contributors in Sin yŏja. In an effort to distinguish between male and female contributors, male contributors’ sex was identified by placing the character for “male” (nam) after their name while female contributors’ names remained unmarked.
50 The Militaristic Policy (mudan chŏnji; 1910–1919) period was marked by harsh and explicit military oppression that included suppression of any political activity, tight control and suppression of Korean as a language of expression, and the forced use of the Japanese language. During the Cultural Policy (munhwa chŏnji; 1919–1937) period, which followed shortly after the March First Movement (also referred to as the Korean Independence Movement; 1919), explicit military suppression was replaced with vigilance and control through prepublication censorship and diligent policing and spying activities.
time that signaled individualism, was central to its opinion pieces and articles.51

The importance of improvement, particularly self-improvement, was derived from a well-articulated self-awareness that allowed for the mastery of the self and, consequently, of one’s own environment. This emphasis on self-mastery is perhaps ironic in the context of Korea’s official colonization by Japan in 1910 following multiple threats of being colonized during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. The theme of self-improvement was conjoined with the aim of building a better, stronger nation. This paradigm was articulated in terms of making a clear break from the past and the “traditional” mode of thinking and being.

The March 1920 inaugural issue of *Sin yŏja* bears a strong sense of mission. Women, “the masters of the household,” who had been oppressed, treated inhumanely, and locked into dark rooms, were to be liberated through “awakening” (*kaksŏng*), imagined as seeing the light.52 Central to Korea and all modernizing nations then was the message of women’s improvement through self-awakening because women’s happiness was treated as an indicator of the health of the general society. In Korea, the so-called Enlighteners (*Kyemong juija*) spread their ideology through literature and periodicals. Most of these Enlighteners, however, were men of a high social standing. *Sin yŏja* was exceptional because it was one of the few women Enlighteners’ magazines. The ratio of informative articles introducing the lives of female students, opinion articles, and fictional prose and poetry is about equal. The contents center around the themes of marriage (*kyŏlhon*), the home (*kajŏng*), the meaning of being a modern woman (the term used here for “modern woman” is *sin yŏja*, as opposed to the later and more famous term *sin yŏsŏng*), and women’s education. In contrast to *Seitŏ*, which most school officials considered controversial and problematic, *Sin yŏja* was commended by women’s school administrators.

On a superficial level, “The Sacrificed Maiden” is about a traditional wife’s physical weakening and eventual death. Like “Curse of the Water God,” it situates a modern woman as the authoritative narrator for a tragic traditional woman figure. The narrator is sympathetic to the traditional woman figure and is often depicted as identifying with her. The narrator of “The Sacrificed Maiden” does not attempt to disappear into the background as the objective third-person narrator. Instead, she occupies a position closer to the master figure in “Curse of the Water God” who orally narrates the story in which she is emotionally invested.

On another level, this text reveals the significant space Japan as the symbol of masculinized modernity occupied in colonial Korea, as well as the narrative of the Korean woman, which comes to

---

51 Perhaps the small number of issues is part of the reason little scholarship exists around *Sin yŏja*, whether in Korean, English, or Japanese. The first book-length study on the magazine is Yu Jin-wŏl’s *Kim Ilyŏp üi Sinyŏja yŏngu* (Seoul: Purŭn sasang, 2006), which includes a transcription and translation (into modern Korean) of all the journal’s issues. However, the transcription does not preserve the original layout or illustrations and contains many egregious errors.

52 *Sin yŏja* (March 1920): 2–3. The image of “awakening” portrayed as seeing the light is discussed in Chapter III herein.
stand in for the narrative of colonized Korea and its people. Comparing these two texts yields insights into some crucial differences between texts written from a “marginal” position and those from a more “central” position—in this case, the woman’s versus the man’s and the colonial versus the imperial perspectives.

“The Sacrificed Maiden” bears a section heading reading “The Great Tragedy of the Clash of Old and New” (“Singu ch’ungdol ūi dae-pigŭk”) and the subtitle “A Tragic Tale of Marriage” (“Honin yaehwa”). The story is ten pages long, double-tiered, and signed by Wŏlgye (Laurel),53 a pen name of someone whose identity is still unknown, but who is presumed to be a young woman on par with such writers as Kim Wŏnju (pen name Ilyŏp; 1896–1971), Kim Myŏng-sun (T’ansil; 1896–1951), and Na Hye-sŏk (Jŏngwŏl; 1896–1948), who were highly educated and had studied in Japan.54

The text that frames the main narrative opens up by emotively calling on the imagined target audience: “The sacrificed girl! This piece describes a sad history, a tip of the woeful lives of tens of thousands of people hidden on the other side of our modern Korean society. Mothers and Fathers who educate and raise children! All those who blindly deny any wrongdoing by saying that it is not written in the Book of Morals and Mores (SoHakch’ak)!” The exclamation marks and the noun endings (instead of the usual verb endings) emphasize the exclamatory and emotive nature of the text. This style of writing continues throughout the text with the more common exclamations being “Oh!” and “Oh! Poor sister!” The narrator dramatically tells the story of her sister through employing a first-person limited narrative structure instead of as an objective third-person narrator. This perspective provides little evidence of what the sister feels, but the narrator strongly asserts what her sister must be feeling, appearing to be taking over the protagonist’s voice or, perhaps, superimposing her ideals onto the sister.

The emotive writing style is reminiscent of p’ansori, a traditional form of dramatic storytelling set to percussion music. Perhaps as a part of this convention, the narrator appears to be filled with a great sense of urgency, a feeling that she herself could have easily followed the same fate as the traditional woman protagonist. This manifests in part through setting the narrative as her biological sister’s. The protagonist’s proximity in age to the narrator, which is a mere two years, as opposed to the eight years between the narrator and the protagonist, Osada, in “Curse of the Water God,” strengthens the urgency and solidarity the narrator feels toward the protagonist.

53 The title page, which takes up the top section of the first page, contains the section heading, subtitle, and title proper in varying fonts along with the author’s name, Wŏlgye. The frame around the words is ornate and flowery, with a yin-yang symbol placed on either side at the bottom, the symbol at the center of South Korea’s flag today. The intermediate text is free of decoration, with only the magazine name appearing in the outer upper margin and the pagination on the outer bottom margin. In the space after the narrative, there is a simple picture of a single rose in a vase.

54 Yu Jinwŏl, in her discussion of Sin yŏja and the New Woman of early twentieth-century Korea, points out that more than 90 percent of the female population at the time was illiterate. The modern woman, then, in this context, represented only the handful of women who received an elite education. See Yu Jinwŏl, Kim Ilyŏp ŭi ‘Sin yŏja’ yŏngu [A study of Kim Ilyŏp’s “New Woman”] (Seoul: P’ulŭn sasang, 2006), 29.
The narrator, in her eagerness to portray her sister as a “natural” candidate for modern womanhood, projects an idealized portrait of her sister despite the lack of textual evidence such as quotes from the sister showing a modern sensibility. The narrator never describes her sister as complaining or lamenting, but, citing physical deterioration, she infers that her sister’s unhappiness is due to a lack of marital love. Perhaps the narrator deliberately conflates the traditional wifely devotion with the modern notion of marital love. The problem is her sister’s lack of marital intimacy in the form of her continued virginity.

Among the educated Enlighteners, the motif of the virgin wife was used as an evocative example of what was wrong with traditional marriage, referring to the custom of ch’ohon (literally, “early marriage”). According to documented Korean tradition, marriage was often arranged between children who could not yet engage in conjugal relations. The young bride—often older than the groom—was expected to acclimate to her marital household while she waited for her husband to mature enough to have conjugal relations. In the modern period, when it became more common for young men to cross the ocean to study in Japan, the virgin bride—who could be left behind waiting for many years—came to be seen as a social problem that represented one of the ills of “traditional” Korean practice.

The virginal bride is the protagonist who is the narrator’s sister. True to the opening statement, “The sacrificed girl, the pitiful girl…is one of us,” throughout the text the narrator painstakingly depicts any trace of modern womanhood in her sister. The narrator insists that the seed of modernity was solidly sown in her sister, although it, along with her angelic, sweet demeanor, was destroyed along with her traditionally arranged marriage: “My sister who was envied for her beauty and talent would have not led such a cruel life if she had only received an education…!” Education separates the fates of the narrator and her sister and is shown to be the key to a better life.

The explicitly stated dividing line between the narrator and the protagonist—her elder sister—is whether they were educated or not. But education here is less about the content that is taught, and more about the access it provides to the outside world. Through the act of being educated, that is, going to school, the narrator describes gaining access to the world outside her home, to modern civilization, and to the tangible and intangible beyond one’s immediate surroundings: “I felt privileged and proud to have a special right to go in and out [of our home] as I liked seeing all the things that my sister could not see…. I

---

55 Child marriage dates back to the thirteenth century, although its practice in reality was far from the monolithic way presented here or that one might assume. Child marriage was practiced widely across classes in varying forms, but at the beginning of the twentieth century it was particularly popular among the upper class, from which many of the elites who studied abroad came. For an intriguing discussion and overview of marriage practices in Korea spanning class differences, refer to Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 17–33. Ch’ohon came under severe scrutiny and was attacked as a way to criticize the premodern practice of “forced marriage” (K: gangjŏ kyŏl hon, J: kyōsei kekkon), which was also attacked in Japan, but for different reasons.

56 The motif of the young virginal bride as a social problem appears in later texts, such as *Ch’ŏnbyŏn p’ungsŏng* (Scenes by the river; 1938) by Pak T’ae-won (1909–1986).

did not know how much she looked forward to my tales of the interesting things I would see on the way to school.” The sister is described as having been raised “shut in a small room” or “confined” (kat’chida)—a keyword that describes how women are mistreated—and “not knowing the changing seasons outside.” The changing seasons symbolize the changing world, in its physical and intangible states, outside the home grounds. However, even in this regard, her sister instinctively knows the importance of education. For on her deathbed, her last words are “study hard…!”

The division between the narrator and the protagonist is also evident in the framed narrative, which begins by impressing upon the reader the autonomous status of the intellectual narrator. The narrator describes herself sitting at the desk in a room of her own and writing. There, she ponders the life of her sister, which comes to stand in for the lives of the larger population of Korean women: the narrator’s own shadow symbolizes her sister and, by extension, the “other side” of Korean society. The shadow first acts as a reminder of her sister, creating the sense that the narrator is her sister’s double. Then, it becomes the embodiment of the “other” side of Korean society that she refers to in the initial frame and that her sister’s story represents. In this transformation from the narrator’s shadow becoming a reminder of her sister and then the representation of the other side of Korean society, the narrator’s body itself becomes the symbol of the Korean nation:

I absentmindedly stare at the shadow on the paper window and suddenly am reminded of my sister…. I think of the fact that there were—or rather, there are still—people like my sister who are experiencing lives…they should not have to. On the other side of our society, there are still women sobbing for their cruel misfortune.

This quotation also reveals the narrator’s strong identification with her sister and establishes the close parallel she draws between herself and her sister. In contrast to the narrator of “Curse of the Water God,” this narrator, through her sister, shows strong empathy with women as a whole. In this portrait, the narrator simultaneously becomes a double of her sister, the embodiment of the Korean nation, and an intellectual leader resembling the benevolent Confucian scholar-leader. That the narrator figure is portrayed as a socially engaged intellectual writer, connoting that she received an education that taught her how to read, write, and express her opinions through the written word, clearly marks her as a modern woman; this is especially true given that “for the vast majority of Korean women during the Chosŏn dynasty, kyoyuk (education) meant informal training in the basics of domesticity,” as the narrator’s sister was educated.

58 Ibid., 31.
59 Ibid., 38.
60 Ibid., 28.
61 Yoo, The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea, 38.
No one in the text bears a proper name, perhaps suggesting that every woman reading this text is the literate younger sister who must frustratingly stand by as her elder sister is murdered “under the dividing line between the new and the old.”\textsuperscript{62} It is as if the text is saying that all women suffering from inhumane traditional marriages are the elder sisters of those reading this text. The lack of proper nouns and the sole use of pronouns indicate familial relations and promote a sense of kinship.

The deliberate obscuring of proper nouns such as the name of the sister’s groom, his new wife, and the hospital in which the sister was admitted gives the entire story a sense of reality. We feel that if we were contemporaries, we would be able to fill in the blank circles that stand for the proper names. These deliberate blanks draw attention to themselves, making us presume that there is a “real” name associated with them.

The narrator expresses the idea that there is not a categorical traditional woman, but, rather, a category of women and subsets within that who suffer because of external circumstances that they are unable to change on their own. She asserts that society must be improved (\textit{kaejo})—hailing back to the opening words of the magazine in which this story appears—for the happiness of all, including the collective category of “women.” The narrator’s concern with the individual happiness of her sister ultimately ties into justifying her narrated stance that reform is necessary for the collective happiness of Korean women. This lends a collective tone to the story and uncovers the underlying tension in the narrative of whether to treat women’s issues as individual or collective.

Scholars such as Hyaeweol Choi in the United States and Inoue Kazue in Japan have argued that modern Korean women faced severe isolation and difficulties in their feminist activities because of Korea’s colonial condition that forced them to prioritize the collective aim of achieving national sovereignty.\textsuperscript{63} Inoue states that “the salient feature of women’s liberation in early modern Korea was its need to liberate itself from a double bind of a patriarchy rooted in Confucianism and Japan’s colonial rule.”\textsuperscript{64} In summarizing both Confucianism and Japanese colonial rule as different forms of patriarchy, Inoue draws attention to the fact that Korean women were transferring from one form of patriarchy to another and at times being stuck in both simultaneously.

Choi further analyzes the details of this “double bind” and argues that because the larger issue for Korean intellectuals became “nation building,” or how to regain national sovereignty, the women’s rights issue came to be subsumed under the Self-Strengthening Movement, perpetually relegating women’s issues to a secondary status. That is to say that the issue of women’s rights came to be perceived as a

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{63} Similar phenomena, and therefore reasoning, seem to apply to the Japanese case as well. In Japan, however, the nation was not under direct and official colonialism, but it had what some call a semicolonial status, which created less of an “either/or” situation for Japanese women.
\textsuperscript{64} Inoue Kazue, “Chōsen shinjosei no kōdō to shakaiteki kattō” [Korean “New Women”’s activities and social dilemma], in Chūgoku josei-shi kenkyū-kai, ed., \textit{Ronshū Chūgoku josei-shi} [Collected works on Chinese women’s history] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbun-kan, 1999), 170.
collective one parallel to the achievement of national independence instead of as an issue of individualism. Choi concludes that, “ultimately, the failure to incorporate the idea of individual rights into the new role envisioned for women in society resulted in the condemnation of New Women, whose advocacy of individual freedom was dismissed as selfish, bourgeois, and unpatriotic.” In other words, it was the pressure put on the nation as a collective to “gain strength,” a mission that appeared more important than individual rights, that relegated women’s issues to the margins, ending in the condemnation of the modern woman figure who (in the public eye) flagrantly (and inappropriately) pursued individualism.

Upon close examination, “The Sacrificed Maiden” shows dissatisfaction with women and their conditions used simply as a barometer for the degree of general social civility. The text reveals frustration with the use of the happiness of women as only a measure of societal health instead of as an end in and of itself.

~Whose Fault Is It Anyway?~

“The Sacrificed Maiden” also has a stance on the modern Korean man. The narrator’s anger and ambivalence toward modern male intellectuals appear in her efforts to insist that her sister is just as good as a modern woman. There is no difference between the sister and the narrator except in their age and education; they share parents, a family, and an upbringing. The narrator says that while both the family her sister married into and her own family boasted about all the gold, treasures, and beautiful clothes that accompanied the sister as her dowry, the bride’s “inner life was extremely sad and lonely.” The concern for her sister’s “inner life” reveals the narrator’s perspective that her sister is a modern person who has feelings and thoughts of her own.

The narrator’s difficult position is projected as ambivalence toward charging anyone in the “modern” and “enlightened” camp with any wrongdoing. She is reluctant to accuse a fellow “modern person” of causing severe damage to a fellow “woman.” Yet, in setting up the close affinity between the traditional woman figure—her sister—and a modern woman figure—the narrator herself—she highlights the cruelty of modern men, who deem the traditional woman irrelevant. Her sister’s story cannot be simply cast away as an unfortunate “sacrifice” along the way to social advancement.

The source of the tragedy in this text—and what often happened in 1910s and 1920s Korea—was that a boy who was already married to a woman according to Korean traditional practice would meet and fall in love with an unmarried modern Korean woman during his study abroad. The result was that the young boy, now a proud modern man, abandoned his traditional wife. The increased number of already married male students of the intellectual and upper classes who went to Japan caused great distress both for the unmarried modern women meeting them abroad and for traditional wives who would end up

66 Ibid., 32.
abandoned. After waiting for five long and painful years for her “husband” to come back, the sister is abandoned. He has married a “modern” woman—such as the narrator—he met in Japan. As a result of his cruel treatment, the narrator asserts, the sister becomes so weakened, she is hospitalized.

In the hospital where the sister is dying, the narrator and brother visit her daily, but neither their parents nor the sister’s in-laws are mentioned. This strengthens the sense that she no longer has an appropriate place in this world. The only ones who will care for are her siblings in the modern, scientific facility of a hospital: “Brother would visit the hospital room many times a day. While he would hold...[our sister’s] wrists and silently let tears roll down, I would hang my head on our sister’s blanket and sob.” Here, the narrator repeats the following refrain: “This is the loss and damage done to the ‘Old’ side that has lost in the clash between Old and New.” She says that she blames her parents for having caused this result, but if we are to read between the lines of what she says, the claim is not so simple.

Although the narrator avoids directly attacking the group of study-abroad students, she also seems to partially implicate them: they seem to come and go between Korea and Japan and diligently pursue the modern ideal without enough regard to the casualties they cause in their native lands. The narrator also expresses her sister’s misfortune as her fate. But, we must remember it was her brother, another study-abroad student, who first suggested that what was happening to their sister was unavoidable and unredeemable, perhaps even unavoidable “collateral damage” caused by the clash of the Old and New Worlds. He was also the first to express that there was nothing else that he and the narrator can do to help (or save) their sister and they only had to accept what had happened to her as “her fate.” The narrator, on a superficial level, seems to eagerly accept his view as the “modern” and “correct” one. However, her persistent indignation, expressed through many interruptions to the narrative flow with the phrases “My poor sister!” and “Oh, unfortunate sister!!,” seems to betray her own eagerness to fully embrace such a view. Whereas she explicitly faults only her parents for her sister’s misfortune, she also implies that she is angry at the men who left for Japan and did not fulfill their obligations toward those who were left behind.

Modern men, who are represented by the sister’s husband and the narrator’s brother, appear in the story as forces that intend to advance Korean society, but they are portrayed unflatteringly. In the heat of passionate narration appears the narrator’s ambivalence toward the modernizing men—at once allies and enemies to her sister. The groom is portrayed as immature, gullible, and self-centered. When he is an immature thirteen-year-old boy, he does not know what marriage is and so allows her sister to spend lonely nights in the inner chamber, where they should be sleeping together as husband and wife. As a grown young man studying in Japan, he writes an article about the new form of marriage, titled “First and Foremost, Transform the Marriage System!” and spells out his rejection of his “traditional wife” to whom

---

67 Ibid., 37.
68 Ibid.
he was married according to tradition. The narrator is shown neither agreeing nor opposing the content of
the article that strongly asserts that marriages must be left to the individuals involved and must be
“completely free.” The narration elaborates on what this means in terms of the sister’s fate rather than
describing the narrator’s opinion of the article: “This article that powerfully argues that ‘marriage should
be left to the individuals involved,’ ‘is an absolutely free thing,’ and that that{correct translation?} will
enable us to live happily, cuts away at my sister’s fate word for word, phrase by phrase.”69 The
disappointment and sadness in this passage is clear in her hyperbolic metaphor of the husband’s words
cutting away at her sister’s fate—the image of his words being used as a weapon such as a knife and
physically harming her.

The circumstances under which he left for Japan is narrated as almost criminal: “The groom, being
tempted by fellow students, took the large sum of 700 wŏn from his home and escaped to Japan.”70 Japan
symbolizes the privileged space where aspiring Korean men study and become modern. It is the place of
maturity and transformation. In this passage, however, Japan is described as the alluring land that young
Korean men can flock to by robbing their own people—a portrait disturbingly close to that of the
Japanese colonizers robbing Korean resources and transporting Koreans to Japan. All the while, illiterate
traditional Korean women—perhaps representing Korea as a whole—are left behind to fend for
themselves. Here again, Korean women seem to stand in for the simultaneously exploited and neglected
Korean nation, while Korean men turn into modern imperial Japanese men. What is the modernity that
stands on such robbery if not exploitative and cruel?

The brother, while portrayed as well-intentioned, is not depicted as a strong or forceful character.
Rather, he represents a social type and is depicted in representative terms: he is a diligent student of
modernity motivated by idealism; an advocate for women; a study-abroad student in Japan; and a part of
institutions representing Western modernity and advancement in Japan and Korea. When the sister is
dying of physical illnesses brought on by emotional distress, he takes her to a hospital—another modern
scientific institution—to treat her. Yet, long before her physical deterioration is complete, he brands the
sister as lost to them. The narrator reports that she received a letter from her brother reading, “It’s all fate.
We can only leave it up to fate. Oh, my sister—cry for our poor elder sister.”71 The narrator depicts her
brother as agreeing with her on what marriage is and should be but as giving up, perhaps too soon. Their
elder sister’s demise is grieved and brushed aside as “fate,” maybe even as an unavoidable casualty for
the advancement of society and humanity as a whole. Not having been able to marry in the progressive
modern way, her sister is doomed—she is “sacrificed.”

The narrator inadvertently exposes how even the “modern” (and “good”) side has abandoned her
sister. In fact, her sister was ejected alive, and eventually physically killed, by the “modern” men who

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 32.
viewed her as merely a remnant of Old World values instead of as a live woman like the narrator herself. This appears to point out the hypocritical claim that modern practices are always morally superior to traditional ones.

In the blaming, however, the narrator gives the groom one avenue of escape from guilt that also turns the blame on the parents and the traditional marital system. Upon reading the article he wrote, the narrator knows that the thirteen-year-old boy has grown up and come to espouse ideas vastly different from both those of their parents and her sister’s. Now that “he knows what marriage is, the wife that he demands now is not an ignorant and quiet woman like my sister.”

“Demand” (yogu) was a word frequently used in tandem with “modern” (kündae), such as in the title of the article “The New Home that Modernity Demands.” Its insistent and urgent tone is similar to the tones of “warning” (kyŏngjong) and “awaken” (kaksŏng), words also frequently used in opinion articles (but not in fiction). What makes her sister unfit for the newly grown-up man is that she is “ignorant” and “quiet.” In this passage, we hear the blame turning again to the parents who not only neglected to educate her sister so that she could have protested the marriage herself but also did not know what “true” marriage is. In this wavering as she looks for a place to lay blame, the narrator’s difficult position becomes apparent.

The sister’s marriage is described as rooted in the parents’ greed. After all, the narrator writes, “Mother also seemed happy sending her [the elder sister] off as a bride to a rich and noble family,” implying that both the mother and father are mired in greed. She characterizes her sister’s marriage as that between gold and a person instead of between two people. In presenting this dichotomy, the narrator implies that marriage is about an individual’s personhood and is cultivated through “learning and knowledge.” The narrator here explicitly links education with a “better” form of marriage. She laments her sister for not knowing better than to accept her parents’ order to marry some unknown boy, but she also blames her parents for having neglected to educate her sister so that she could have protested the marriage. As we can see, education is not simply about literacy, or about a richer experience as discussed earlier, but also about a radical change in lifestyle and in the perception of reality—even about transforming personal character.

Education, represented by literacy, quietly functions as a vital motif in “The Sacrificed Maiden.” Not only is the story told as a “written” text—a memorial for the sister—but the narrator’s exchanges of letters and gathering of information are done through her ability to read, write, and communicate with her brother in Japan. Without her education, the narrator would have been unable to correspond with her brother or to read the article he had sent. Literacy gave her an entrée into the world of male intellectuals.

---

72 Ibid., 35.
73 Ibid., 26–27. This is but one example. There are many more articles with similar titles with the focus on women, men, education, etc.
74 Ibid., 31.
from which her sister was completely excluded. The narrator’s literacy is also depicted as having
provided her with the tool for resistance (or rebellion) against her parents and their ways. It is at her
request that her elder brother sends a letter to their father, protesting their sister’s marriage arrangement.

Curiously, though, the emphasis is not on the content of the education and what it allows people to
do, such as to read, write, and calculate. What is emphasized, instead, is how the mere act of attending
school allowed the narrator to leave the confines of the house and to see the outside world. For men,
receiving a modern education was a ticket to reading different kinds of books and developing into a new
kind of intellectual. However, the narrator of “The Sacrificed Maiden” effectively illustrates that for
women, for the most part, it was the mere act of leaving the house to receive an education and to be
exposed to new ideas that transformed a woman’s life, as it did in her case. While women’s education
held many symbolic meanings, its gender-specific significance is eloquently expressed in this piece.

~Why Portray Traditional Women?~

Both “Curse of the Water God” and “The Sacrificed Maiden” portray traditional woman figures as pitiful
characters who are silent in the face of mistreatment. The narrator, in turn, is outspoken, not only for
herself, but also for her sisters. Through the retelling, the narrators “give voice” to the silent
protagonists. These traditional women figures, then, function as the vehicle of truth telling of the
violence done to women within a traditional scheme of life. In the process, the modern woman who acts
as the narrator maps herself onto the linear progressive history of women as the authority. She describes
the critical break between “tradition” and “modernity” in marriages and posits herself on the other side of
the dividing line. She also creates a feminized version of the traditional woman who is emotionally
delicate, physically feeble, and requires protection. The narrators’ sympathy for the protagonists may
express their ambivalence at simply severing themselves from the traditional woman figures.

Supposedly, the modern enlightenment agenda was to pursue individualism as expressed in the idea
that “true” marriage is a monogamous marriage based on an ideology of heterosexual romantic love that
is supposed to promote self-actualization—an individual project. The system of “traditional” marriage, by
contrast, is characterized as honoring family lineage and wealth over concerns for individual happiness. In
other words, the wrongs of the traditional system are couched in terms of prioritizing the collective good
(of the family) over individualism. At the same time, however, the supposedly individualistic project

75 Today we assume that letter writing and all other written communication is private. However, this
stands on the assumption that the letter writer is herself able to write and that the receiver himself is able
to read and respond to the letter—things that require basic literacy, which cannot be assumed for people in
many parts of the world even today.

76 The notion of “giving” voice to the unspeakable and oppressed subject is one that raises questions of
authenticity of voice and active subjectivity. This is dealt with most famously in Gayatri Chakravorti
Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds., Marxism and the
becomes one for the collective good, for the advancement of the nation as a whole. Where the goals of the
individual and collective appear to be similar, as in Japanese texts such as “Curse of the Water God,” this
contradiction is harder to see. However, in Korean texts, as represented by “The Sacrificed Maiden,”
where the individual is wronged because the collective agenda contradicts individual happiness, suddenly
the flaw in this logic becomes apparent.

One of the areas in which this logical flaw becomes apparent and problematic is in the field of
education, particularly higher education. The perpetual question surrounding education ever since its
institutionalization has been: What is the aim of education? Specifically, are educators trying to cultivate
pupils to be better citizens or better individuals (even if they might turn against their nation or community
as a result)? The question points to the inevitable conundrum that what is good for an individual might not
be what is desirable for the nation or the collective to which that individual belongs. The contradictions
and dire consequences of this conundrum for the imperial and colonized women are further explored in
Chapter II, which looks at stories about modern schoolgirls facing traditional marriages.
Chapter II. The Schoolgirl’s Ideal Marriage

Marital practices are a pregnant site for cultural and systematic conflict. As literary scholar Michiko Suzuki points out, Japanese women “often used…love…to talk about woman as [a] modern process…. [L]ove was a crucial concept within the cultural imaginary and vital for the construction of both woman and nation.”\(^\text{77}\) It was through this symbolic parallelism constructed between a changing nation and its women that women came to believe that “the experience of love led to the attainment of an identity resonant with a changing Japan.”\(^\text{78}\) She argues that the discourse of love became a part of how women could transform, as the nation was transforming. Love was not simply a personal issue; it was a matter of national import.

Love became a significant modality of attaining true personhood from late nineteenth-century onward. One of the reasons behind this was the essay by Kitamura Tōkoku (1868–1894) titled “Ensei shika to josei” (Disillusioned poets and women; Jogaku zasshi, 1892), which was also influential among Korean intellectuals. It reads: “Love as a ‘clear mirror’ establishes a man’s ‘true self’ and reveals to him his place within the world; because love embodies an idealized relationship, its pursuit leads to the advancement of individual and society.”\(^\text{79}\) Tōkoku was a part of the Meiji intelligentsia and was best known for this essay in which he defines love as a way of attaining self-actualization and thereby clearing a pathway to creating an ideal individual and society. His vision of society and the individual seems to presume a direct and parallel relationship. That is to say, a healthy society is one composed of healthy individuals—it has little consideration for the possibly differing aims of an individual and the collective. In this context, the significance of modern love and marriage based in this “liberated romance” and its centrality in the discourse of modernity, particularly that pertaining to “social advancement,” begins to reveal itself.

For the modern woman, “marrying out of love” was important because that provided one of the few socially sanctioned avenues for self-actualization, turning the issue of marriage into a matter of metaphorical life or death. The place where girls and women are infused with the ideal of the love marriage is portrayed as the incubated site of an educational institution. Once a woman leaves that space, however, this concept creates conflict with her family. The schoolgirl figure has nowhere to turn, exposing the confined nature of the ideals despite the message that promises change in the larger society outside the school.\(^\text{80}\) The texts explored in this chapter, “A


\(^{78}\) Ibid.

\(^{79}\) Translated by Suzuki in *Becoming Modern Women*, 10.

\(^{80}\) I am indebted to Indra Levy for the translation of the Japanese term *jogakusei* as “schoolgirls”; it is usually translated as “female students,” “girl students,” or “woman students.” The Korean term *yōhaksaeng* is analogous to *jogakusei* and has also been translated as “female students,” but I choose to
Certain Girl’s Death” (“Ŏnu sonyŏ ŭi sa,” Sin yŏja, 1920) and “Night Train” (“Yogisha,” Seitō, 1915), show how the “older” generations’ insistence on a parentally arranged marriage, in effect, disallowing the younger generation to consider a “love marriage” threatens the schoolgirl’s sense of self, culminating in pessimistic narratives.

“A Certain Girl’s Death” was published in Sin yŏja’s second issue, in April 1920, which was focused on the question of love. Another work by the same author, Ilyŏp, is considered to be one of the earlier works criticizing the existing marriage system. Ilyŏp was born in a Christian pastor’s home outside of P’yŏngyang, an area that was known for its progressiveness. She was afforded the opportunity to attend school from childhood and concluded her formal studies by attending and graduating from Tōyō eiwa (K: Tongyang yŏnghwa), a missionary school of higher education for women in Tokyo. Shortly after returning to Korea, she began publishing Sin yŏja. In her early career, she became a public figure in Korean modernization, advocating the reformation of both women’s education and the marriage system. In 1923, she grew interested in Buddhism and eventually entered a nunnery, where she spent the rest of her life.

“Night Train” was published in the April 1915 issue of Seitō, which was a special issue of fiction (shōsetsu-gō) focused on providing a forum for “the expression of the real lives” of “today’s young women—leaving aside for a moment whether they are new or old.” The author, Saiga Koto (1892–1973), was born in Chiba Prefecture (immediately north of Tokyo) and attended Seijo Women’s Higher School headed by Miyata Shū (given name alternative, Osamu; 1874–1937). The names of the school and its principal have clear correspondences to those in the text: “S Women’s School,” as in Seijo Women’s Higher School, and “Mr. M,” as in Mr. Miyata. Saiga wrote fiction that spoke against the ie (literally, “house”) system, but this story bears

translate this also as “schoolgirls” to draw out their commonalities and proximity to the jogakusei.

82 Pak Sŏnm points out that in accordance with the reputation that northern Korea was an area more interested than the south in modern education, the number of Korean students studying in Japan from the two northern provinces (Hamkyŏng Nam-do and P’yŏngan Nam-do, where P’yŏngyang is located) was significantly higher than from anywhere else in Korea. See Chōsen josei no chi no kaiyū: Shokuminchi bunka shihai to Nihon ryūgaku [Korean women’s knowledge cruising: Cultural colonization and studying abroad in Japan] (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 2005), 31.
83 Ilyŏp is one of the most celebrated and fondly remembered Korean woman authors, having been active as a public intellectual, writer, and poet from the 1920s until her death. She took a rather long break from publishing from the early 1930s until the 1960s—the time between when the Japanese colonial government tightened control and when the dusts from the Korean War started to settle. This was interpreted as her protest against the Japanese colonization of Korea, a fact that enhances her popularity today.
84 “Henshūshitsu yori” [From the editor’s desk], Seitō (April 1914): 204.
85 “Women’s school” (jogakkō) was often used as an abbreviation for “women’s higher school (kōtō jogakkō).
particular, strong markings of her experience of falling in love with and wanting to marry a scholar and translator, Harada Minoru. Her parents instead tried to force her to marry her deceased elder sister’s husband in order to carry on that family name. “Night Train” chronicles the battle of the protagonist, Toshiko, with her family over whether she—as rightful heir to her own family’s name and assets—will marry her widowed brother-in-law.

Both “A Certain Girl’s Death” and “Night Train” portray the seemingly inevitable clash of the “old” (or traditional), represented by the parents, and the “new,” represented by the modern schoolgirl, and show that the traditional way is not simply antiquated but is aggressively antimodern in the present. This accords with how the rhetoric of modernity was coded in terms of social progress and improvement—if one does not actively progress toward the future and strive for improvement, one is being contrary. There was no such thing as being “neutral” or static because that in itself is regressive. It seemed unavoidable that seeking “modernity” would mean perceiving the old ways as not only inferior, but also as causing considerable damage and often leading to tragic results when the “old” did not enthusiastically embrace the way of the “new.”

In both stories, the schoolgirl protagonists, each living in a modern urban setting, hear the news about their marriage arrangements and resolve to fight their parents’ injustice and backwardness. In “A Certain Girl’s Death,” as the title suggests, the protagonist, Myŏngsuk, commits suicide. In the closing lines of “Night Train,” the protagonist, Toshiko, sits in the train that runs toward her hometown through the night, strongly suggesting that she will end up marrying her late sister’s husband despite her strong resistance. The night train, like her life, seems to be swallowed by darkness.

This chapter examines the schoolgirl figure and the representation of her relationship with the idea of marriage through the literary significances of women’s education, the urban landscape, and sites of education. I argue that the site of education was portrayed as the grounds nurturing the schoolgirl’s conviction that “liberated romance” (K: chayu yŏnae, J: jiyū ren’ai) and marriage were important. The stories, however, expose how this nurturing site also functioned as a confining space containing these ideals within its grounds.

86 Raichō kenkyūkai [Raichō research group], ‘Setō jinbutsu jiten—110nin no gunzō [Who’s who in Setō: 110 portraits] (Tokyo: Taishūkan shoten, 2001), 96–97. Saiga was able to successfully marry Harada after many years of negotiating with her family. The story, despite having many obvious similarities to her experience and clearly being modeled on it, is also clearly not a direct transcription of it.

87 I have chosen to translate this term, often translated as “free love,” as “liberated romance” in order to avoid confusion with the American notion of “free love” from the 1960s onward that connotes having many sexual involvements.
Schoolgirls were a potent representation of modernity in ways modern women already out of school (whether married or not) were not. Yi Yunmi, a scholar of education, writes that modern Korean women were “women of the changing new era,” subjects who “had received institutional education.” The schoolgirl is intricately tied to the incubated ideal space that is the educational institution. For both Korean and Japanese women, receiving a modern education was central to defining themselves as “new,” although, in fact, that newness may have been confined to that time and space delineated by the school—the girl’s school.

An educational institution, as a site of discipline in a Foucauldian sense of the word, is one of the most efficient places to communicate and indoctrinate students with specific messages. Yi argues that “in the early process of modernization the school as a space for mass education acted as the site to ‘correct’ ‘tradition’ and to transmit modern efficiency as educational knowledge.” In the process of transmitting new and better “modern” knowledge to replace the “traditional” ways—she argues using Foucault’s notion of discipline and punishment—not only was the mind trained, but so was the body. Yi argues that “women entered the public space through modern education.” It was through the process of receiving modern institutionalized education that Korean and Japanese women gained entry into the field of public discourse.

Toshiko, the female protagonist of “Night Train,” is portrayed as well-versed in Western languages, literature, and the latest Japanese intellectual discourse. She lives in the school dormitory, has discussions about society and the ideal world, and believes that her personal life has social significance. She privately studies English, plans to begin studying French, has a portrait of Tōkoku on the wall in her room, and fondly thinks about the lectures she received on the “stories of Aspasia, Sappho, Cordelia, and Monica.”

The protagonist of “A Certain Girl’s Death,” Myŏngsuk, first appears in the narrative as “a girl who looks like a schoolgirl.” Mostly a quick sketch of a longer story—the narrative time is punctuated by where Myŏngsuk is in her school career. There is very little description of what happens in school, or any description of the school at all, such as who she knows at school or what kinds of conversations she has in school. School in this text acts as a powerful symbol

88 Yi Yunmi, “Kundaechok in kyoyuk kongkan kwa sahwechok in kōri tuki” [The modern educational space and the social distance placed in between], in T’ae Hyaesuk, ed., Hankuk ū sikminchi kūndae wa yōsōng kongkan [Korea’s colonial modernity and women’s space] (Seoul: Tosŏ ch’ulp’an Yŏiyŏn—The Alterity Press, 2004), 305.
89 Yi, “Kundaechok in kyoyuk kongkan kwa sahwechok in kōri tuki,” 296.
90 Ibid., 300.
91 “Yogisha,” Seito, April 1914, 135.
92 “Ŏnu sonyŏ ū sa,” 41.
93 There is a note at the end of the story that asks the readers for forgiveness because the text is insufficiently developed (Sin yŏja, March 1920, 50).
merely by the mention of it, suggesting the heavy significance it bore for the readers. The death of this schoolgirl figure, then, is a highly symbolic act.

Myŏngsuk enters the narrative as an anonymous schoolgirl figure in a streetcar; she is described as though she is a symbol of modernity. The narration begins by depicting her from the outside, perhaps from the perspective of one of the other passengers, and then moves into her thoughts and feelings, while the emotions and intentions of other passengers are only alluded to through their outwardly visible actions. This places Myŏngsuk as the narrative focal point, invested with a rich interiority not easily apparent: “Whatever emotional scar she was carrying, she looked seriously melancholic. Her brows arched nicely like spring mountains and were bright, but under her pretty eyes one could see the marks of fallen tears.”94 The narrator alludes to a painful story behind this anonymous schoolgirl, foregrounding the narrative that is follow. Describing her as being pensive also foregrounds the later structure of the narrative, when the letters she wrote to her parents and a journalist are shown.

“A Certain Girl’s Death” shows how education for women as a concept seemed to be sought after, but what it yielded was often at odds with society—a point also made in “Night Train.” Myŏngsuk, the protagonist of “A Certain Girl’s Death,” angrily charges at her parents in a suicide note:

If, I, your daughter had not gone to school and learned how to write, I think that today’s action [of committing suicide] might not have happened. My honorable parents, when you sent your daughter to school, wasn’t it because you believed that I too should become a person?… [B]ut, last year, around the time when school was about to end, you said in a concerned way, “why have you become such an unreasonable person?”95

Myŏngsuk’s letter to her parents is accusatory in tone though in diction it employs the appropriate level of politeness. The form and rhetoric used are traditional, peppered with many Sino-Korean words, loaned Sino-Japanese words, and phrases written in Chinese characters such “in a blink of the eye” (pyŏlangan), “schoolgirl” (yŏhaksaeng), “breaking off a marriage engagement” (p’ahon), and “coutesan” (kisaeng).96 This establishes the protagonist as a woman.

---

94 “Ŏnu sonyŏ ŭi sa,” 42.
95 Ibid., 43.
96 Ibid., 41. The distinction between Sino-Korean and Sino-Japanese is a difficult one to draw at this period because many modern terms were initially loaned from Japanese or Chinese but then became incorporated into modern Korean, whereas others did not survive that process. The matter was further complicated as time progressed because Korea and its intellectuals became increasingly (at least) bilingual, causing more Japanese terms to appear in the Korean language.
well educated in both the East Asian classics (originating in China) and modern theories and vocabulary (originating in the West and often arriving in Korea via Japan). Her modern attire, including her “student-style” hairdo, suggests that she is schooled in the Western knowledge system as well. This constructs a portrait of a modern woman who is well educated in both the Eastern and Western knowledge systems and is articulate—for a woman to be outspoken was a controversial matter, as suggested by “The Sacrificed Maiden.”

In Myongsuk’s letter, she implies that although her parents gave her the opportunity to become autonomous through sending her to school so she could learn how to read and write, they did not understand its significance. This near mockery of the older generation that values symbols of modernity, such as sending their daughters to school, without truly understanding their implications is a recurring theme in Korean literature of this time. Education might not (yet) give women the happy lives they want, but it gives them the tool to reframe their experience, to express their thoughts in words, to communicate their experiences, and to become a part of the larger society through social involvement. Myongsuk’s act of suicide and suicide note act as reminders of this power granted women.

~Discursive Space, Urban Space~
The openings of the two stories under discussion here present to the reader a striking portrait of a


97 “Ônu sonyô üi sa,” 50. We are not told her specific hairstyle, but from the passage, which reads that “she swept her hair aside,” we know that her hair was worn loose and uncovered. The traditional hairstyle for women when in public was up (as in an elaborate bun) and covered, so if her hair was plainly visible and loose enough to be swept, this means that she had a nontraditional hairstyle.
98 In “The Sacrificed Maiden,” discussed in Chapter I, the protagonist writes to her modernly educated brother to interfere with their sister’s arranged marriage. She does not talk directly to her father about it even though she is the one living in the same house as him and her brother is far off in Japan. In another scene, when the narrator-protagonist talks to her mother about her concerns, she is reproved by being told, “How can you say such a thing against what Father is doing?… It’s bad luck for an unmarried girl to interfere in matters of marriage” (“Hûisaeng twen chûmyôn,” 31). Whatever reason is given, it is clear that the problem lies in her actually speaking up and is not a matter of good or bad luck.
99 For instance, in Yi Kwangsu’s Mujông, see the ironic narration where the wealthy Elder Kim is introduced for the first time: “The Elder was a disciple of Christ, who had taught his followers not to own so much as two sets of clothing. Nevertheless, once Kim had been enlightened in the ways of modern civilization, he too purchased land, and kept dozens of servants” (Ann Sung-hi Lee, Yi Kwang-su and Modern Korean Literature: Mujông [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2005], 80).
modern figure by suggesting her rich interiority—a portrait of a woman deeply involved in her thoughts. This rich inner life takes place against the backdrop of travel on modern transportation systems—one girl sits on a train, and the other on a streetcar. Urban modernity is also suggested in the setting of the narratives—one takes place in Tokyo, and the other in Seoul.

Key to reading “A Certain Girl’s Death” is the central place modern technologies occupy—constructing a view of the modern urban landscape, of the physical setting intertwined with the inner dialogue and psychology of the characters. Modernity here is described through technology, manifested in the changes in urban landscape and human relations. The schoolgirl’s education and ideologies in this context are another form of “modernity” to be included in this landscape.

Like a camera going from a wide scope to a narrow focus, the narrative of “A Certain Girl’s Death” begins by introducing the general landscape of urban Seoul and then closes in on the protagonist, Myŏngsuk. First the narration surveys the urban landscape; then centers on a specific object, the streetcar; then focuses on the inside of the streetcar; and, after a brief survey of the interior of the streetcar, takes us to the disruptive incident that finally brings Myŏngsuk within the frame, but not as the main focal point. Once the incident brings the focus to her, the narrative voice lingers and stays with her.

In the setting of the urban landscape, looks, gazes, and stares occupy a significant part of the narrative, creating a constant sense of surveillance. This is reflective of the sense that one of the most painful things for the modern schoolgirl was the intense scrutiny that caused feelings of shame. This sense of being scrutinized probably refers not only to the critical gaze women in particular felt but also to the general mood of surveillance in colonial Korea. Falling under the scrutinious gaze is the suicide note, which appears in its physical form at the beginning of the narrative. The narrator’s awareness of her ability to write eloquent letters, her desire to keep her thoughts private yet simultaneously wanting to express them, as evidenced by her writing them down and sending them to a journalist, renders her a particularly modern figure. In her writing about her thoughts and inner turmoil, she shows her sense of self-worth and belief in her interiority and uniqueness.

The letter form used as a central narrative device in “A Certain Girl’s Death” is common in Ilyŏp’s earlier writings and was also a salient form of public address and instruction in Korea during the Chosŏn period and into the modern era. The historian Se-Mi Oh discusses letters to the editors of daily newspapers called nonsŏl and points out that some female writers “identified themselves in the titles reserved for yangban [aristocratic] men, as learned women equivalent to Confucian gentlemen and as female scholars likened to scholar-officials.”100 Women who wrote

---

100 Se-Mi Oh, “Letters to the Editor: Women, Newspapers, and the Public Sphere in Turn-of-the-Century...
public letters to the editor, in their learnedness and aspirations, appear to have identified themselves as learned men, appropriating the term *yangban* beyond its specific gender implications. Myŏng suk of “A Certain Girl’s Death,” like the narrator figure of “The Sacrificed Maiden” discussed in Chapter I, also appears to be situated as a self-aware modern person who nevertheless carries on the tradition of mapping herself onto the well-known figure of the scholar-official. At the same time, the function of the schoolgirl as a public figure, who was greeted by the “public…with mixed reactions of respect, sympathy, curiosity, suspicion, and hostility,” appears to represent rapid modernization, as the following letter embodies.101

The letters that we gain access to through the story initially function as crucial objects in the text. These letters are, in fact, suicide notes addressed to her parents and a newspaper company to encourage investigation into the cause of her suicide and eventual publication of the findings. The narrator frames the reading of the letters as a way to understand the protagonist’s erratic behavior. Myŏng suk had accidently dropped both letters (in Western envelopes) and had acted so flustered that, the narrator reports, others (including, presumably, the readers) wondered what was written in them. In the first pages of text, the letters are tightly guarded against her bosom during a rowdy scene in the trolley car. The image of the letters tightly held against her body falling over and over again seems representational of her not being able to contain her deeply held beliefs and feelings. The scene seems merely descriptive until the following fraught moments:

“Hey, sir. It looks like something fell,” a passenger said out of the blue. The conductor blinked in surprise and looked under his feet to find that he was stepping on two fallen letters in Western envelopes. Just as the conductor tried to pick them up, the face of the girl—she looked like a schoolgirl—turned pale. She quickly picked them up, but in her clumsiness she dropped one of them again. On the outside, it was written, “Attention: ○○Daily.” The girl then picked up the fallen letter again in great hurry while holding onto the other one. On the other letter was written “Dear Father and Mother” over two lines. At once, all the passengers’ curious gaze turned to her. She looked about seventeen or eighteen and had a slender face that struck everyone as extraordinary. Whatever emotional scar she was carrying, she looked seriously melancholic. Her brows arched nicely like

---

spring mountains and were bright, but under her pretty eyes one could see the marks of fallen tears. The conductor looked blankly at her and stood up. The girl gathered and put the letters in her back pocket and went back to the seat she had been sitting in. She then once again ignored everything as before and just sat there elegantly. All the passengers saw this and both marveled at her and wondered about her.102

Everything happens in a hurry here, reflecting the general sense of the text as rushed, including even the note from the editor at the end: “This piece of fiction (sosŏl) was a short story (tamp’yŏn) written as material to be turned into a novella (changp’yŏn), so it does not have any elements including those such as description (myosa). In addition, because of time constraints, it has turned into a completely trivial thing. For these reasons, I ask for your forgiveness.”103 Additional evidence for the rushed tone of the story is that one of its most frequently appearing terms is “in a blink of the eye” (pyŏlangan), translated more commonly as “all of a sudden” or “suddenly.”

The urban landscape adds to this rushed feeling with its running streetcar, conductor rushing to stay on schedule, and clock tower lording over the city keeping watch. Within these dark images of the city, the tragic-looking and beautiful protagonist—“a girl who appeared to be a schoolgirl”—turns pale at the site of the conductor opening the envelopes to inspect them. She quickly grabs the two letters in “Western envelopes” out of the conductors’ hand. The rushed feeling is registered as unpleasant throughout. Ultimately, her death is also portrayed as caused by being rushed—rushed into modernity, rushed into decisions, rushed into actions she did not have time to carefully consider.

The content and style of the letters that Myŏngsuk carries defy later-developed portraits of the Korean and Japanese modern woman as selfish and thoroughly Westernized. However, in presenting both of the letters as wrapped in “Western” envelopes, the narrative appears to affirm the notion that there is something “Western,” that is, foreign, about the schoolgirl. In the modern Japanese literary context, Indra Levy discusses schoolgirl figures in relation to literary style. Using her neologism “westernesque,” she describes schoolgirls as women who “emerge in Japanese literature as the alluring embodiment of Japan’s cultural assimilation of the modern West” and who are “neither ethnically nor culturally ‘Western’ per se, yet [are] distinguished by physical appearances, personal mannerisms, lifestyles, behaviors, and ways of thinking that were perceived…as particularly evocative of the West.”104 The schoolgirl figure was imagined to have

---

102 “Ŏnu sonyŏ ūi sa,” 42.
103 Ibid., 50.
104 Levy, Sirens of the Western Shore, 5.
a “flare” of the West. Levy further argues that the “westernesque” schoolgirl was imagined as a “bridge between Japan and the West.” The schoolgirl, as a westernesque woman, is not only representative of the exotic, but is also a symbolic intermediary between Japan, or perhaps “the East” in general, and the West. While the picture of what is westernesque in modern colonial Korea needs more refinement, this symbolic merging of the East and the West also occurs in the figure of Myŏngsuk.

Myŏngsuk’s appearance and behavior appear Westernized, in keeping with what the description “student-like” connotes. But, a careful reading captures the ways in which she embodies the ideal Korean figure as well. Her physicality is depicted in classical terms: She has a “long and slender face” (kyalûmhan oglol) and eyebrows perfectly shaped like “mountains in springtime”—both descriptions of extraordinarily good looks. In addition, her desire to remain chaste and true to her values (even if only the newly earned modern values) culminates in her committing suicide. This ultimate form of self-sacrifice is valued in the classical tales of “virtuous women” in the Yŏllryŏn (Tales of virtuous women). Linguistically, her letters contain many Chinese characters (as does the main narrative), and in them she keeps intact the traditional nominations and forms of address to her parents.

The letter to her parents ends with her signature preceded by “your unfilial daughter.” The date is written in hangûl (the Korean phonetic writing system) instead of in Chinese characters like in the letter to the journalist. This signals the difference in perspective presented in the two letters. The letter to her parents is worded personally. Her indignation is presented as based in concrete experiences of her family: the example of a woman’s education is about her education; the example of how distastefully men can grow up is drawn from her two brothers; and the wrongdoings of society and, specifically, the older generation toward women is exemplified by her parents’ behaviors. On the contrary, the letter to the journalist, which immediately follows in the narrative, presents her case in a larger social context.

The letter to the anonymous journalist is a request to investigate and report on the cause of her suicide. This letter opens by again damning herself as an unfilial daughter, but it deviates in how she situates herself. She writes, “On the darker side of this world, there are many truths like this…. I think that there might be many women who follow the same fate as me.” The word she uses that I have translated as “the darker side” is imyôn (literally, “backside”), a term that also appeared in “The Sacrificed Maiden.” This, along with words such as “society” (sahwa) and others discussed in Chapter I, are keywords used throughout both Sin yôja and Yôja gye to signal the arrival of the modern world. The purpose of modernity and its utilities is to identify this “darker side” and bring the “light of civilization” to it.

---

105 Ibid., 20, 54.
106 Ibid., 45.
For both Toshiko and Myŏngsuk, the school is the symbolic site where they develop ideas about modernization and how to bring it about. Educational institutions, however, function simultaneously as sites of the incubation and the confinement of these very ideas. The confining aspect is clearly reflected in the physical setting of the school Toshiko attends—the dormitory in which she lives, located in Tokyo, is within school grounds and far away from her hometown. The dorm is where she makes invaluable friends with whom she goes out into the city, and where younger students affectionately call her otōsan, the word for “older sister” originally used among geisha.107

The dorm constructs a faux nunner structure where young single women learn and live together, develop explicitly asexual but nevertheless close relationships with one another, and are unified under a surrogate father figure, Mr. M, who is almost revered.108 This is where Toshiko’s ethics and worldview, which severely conflict with her family’s, are cultivated. The dorm also acts as a secluded safe zone within Tokyo, the dangerous and seductive urban center where schoolgirls were prone to delinquent behavior.

“Night Train” is narrated in the first person from Toshiko’s perspective, but it also, at times, describes Toshiko’s outer appearance from a third-person perspective. This narrative style is similar to that of “A Certain Girl’s Death.” Descriptions of Toshiko’s extended and ideologically impassioned dialogues with Mr. M paint a portrait of a serious woman ready to change the world. The narration is full of dialogues, mostly exchanged between Mr. M and Toshiko, some between Toshiko and her school- and roommates, and none between Toshiko and her family. What the family says is always summarized through the narrator or indirectly quoted by Toshiko in the course of her conversation with Mr. M. In the one scene where a family member, the patriarch, Toshiko’s grandfather, finally appears, his voice and body are conspicuously absent. Toshiko is informed by her friend, Ikuko, of her grandfather’s arrival with the words: “Oh, where were you? We were looking for you because your grandfather has.


108 This sterile environment stands in contrast to the Japanese imperial system that was constructed with a faux-heterosexual family structure, relying on the heterosexual reproductive system.
come.” Toshiko walks into the room where her grandfather and the principal, Mr. M, await her. Her grandfather’s words are reported through their effect on Toshiko:

Toshiko was mortified listening to her grandfather’s long lecture full of complaints, selfishness, and completely lacking reason…. Her grandfather repeated the words, for the parents, for the family, over and over again and concluded that at this point, it was the ultimate humanitarian path for Toshiko to become a part of the family to maintain the family’s peace…. His habit of having to persuade the person right in front of him made him repeat his words over and over again despite Toshiko’s repeated refusal.

In contrast to the care taken to replicate the smallest details of conversations between Toshiko and Mr. M, Ikuko, and others in the school setting, the grandfather’s utterances are dismissed as “completely lacking reason” and being repetitive. Even when there are quotes—the words “for the parents, for the family” do in fact come from the grandfather—those words are not set off with quotation marks or any other formatting, causing the reader to register even that small bit of speech as a part of the narrator’s description. The few words that Toshiko is reported as saying are quoted in their entirety, but the response of the grandfather is not recorded:

At first, Toshiko was being very cautious and trying her best just to listen and not say anything unnecessary, but when the sun of the short winter days set and the lights started turning on, she just couldn’t stand it anymore. She started to feel anxious to solve the problem as soon as she could. Finally, some strong words came out of her as well:

“The household that you keep talking about, grandfather, is also composed of individuals, isn’t it? If we were to improve the household, that must mean that we first must improve each individual, doesn’t it?

“No matter how much you praise my brother-in-law and insist that he has no shortcomings, I am different from you, grandfather.”

When she spoke so defiantly, Mr. M let out a laugh and said,

“You can’t say things so bluntly. Your grandfather can’t understand such things—”

From this passage we can see that the grandfather’s words are smothered out of existence.

---

109 “Yogisha,” 125.
and considered irrelevant to Toshiko’s life. There is an effort to turn him into a prototypical character who cannot understand the “new” way of thinking and is stuck in the “old” ways. In effect, Toshiko’s family members are dehumanized. They are set aside as a part of the past the way the narrator of “Curse of the Water God” was so eager to set aside Osada and her mother, the master of nagauta.

The dialogues between Mr. M and Toshiko are depicted in fine detail and are infused with emotion. There is always a contextualization of speech within the character’s mood and thoughts, as in the previous quotation in which Toshiko’s thoughts are built up before she blurts out her words to her grandfather. Within the quotes, the use of dashes to express the trailing off of a sentence and emphatic rhetorical endings using the question marker *ka*, which I have translated as “isn’t it?,” express Toshiko’s defiant way of speaking.

Toshiko’s dedication and passion toward honoring her individual self and the sadness that overcomes her for not being able to do so is symbolized in a brief moment: “After busily rushing around the room [to prepare for her return home,] she stopped for a moment to look around the room. It was sad that the first thing that caught her eye on the wall facing her was the lonely portrait of Tōkoku.” While she is preparing to return to her family, to become a “woman” again, Tōkoku’s portrait reminds Toshiko of the aspiration to be an individual in the Western model. This scene, however, also points to the fact that the only viable model of individuality was a masculine one.

Young women were encouraged to develop themselves in the new modern way only in the limited confines of the school and among the intelligentsia who espoused their values; they were discouraged to do so beyond that—into maturity, and outside in the “real” world. Myŏngsuk’s letter to her parents describes them as worrying and wondering about her having become an “unreasonable person.” Toshiko’s Mr. M, although initially depicted as encouraging her to consider her predicament seriously as an educational tool, at one point shows signs of giving in and asks Toshiko, “Can you leave everything behind and sacrifice yourself?” The schoolgirl’s newness was only a commodity that was to be nurtured during a self-contained space and time—during her glorious and ideal years at school.

~In the End, It’s Still All About Men~

In both stories discussed here there is an influential male authority figure who acts as the

110 Ibid., 132.
112 “Yogisha,” 123.
schoolgirl’s source of courage to counter her parents’ opinion of whom she should marry. The men are as follows: in a position of authority in relation to the protagonist; not relatives of the protagonist; and identified with their professions. In a sense, they are portrayed as outsiders to the protagonist’s narrative, perhaps signaling the “foreignness” of the idea of liberated love and romantic marriage. For example, in “The Sacrificed Maiden,” where the authority figure is the brother of the protagonist and the narrator, the brother is physically in a “foreign” country and culture.

The significance the male authority figure has as the supporter of the rebellious modern schoolgirl is important. In both “Night Train” and “A Certain Girl’s Death,” the narrator posits a powerful male figure who represents the new world order that the modern female protagonist wants very badly to implement, but is unable. This male authority figure in “Night Train” is Mr. M, the principal of the school and Toshiko’s source of strength and inspiration to be modern. In the case of “A Certain Girl’s Death,” interestingly, the male authority figure who is presumed to be privy to the new world order and acts as the modern schoolgirl’s moral support is the nonspecific and anonymous journalist to whom Myŏngsuk addresses one of her two suicide notes.

Although both schoolgirls are inscribed as active agents, the “dynamic subject of history” in changing times, to quote Rita Felski, the final authority to condone their actions is still rendered to intellectual men. Myŏngsuk passes on the power to relay her story and message to the wider public to the anonymous journalist. Toshiko is shown acting only with the approval and permission of Mr. M. In fact, whereas Myŏngsuk is shown to be always acting based on her own thoughts, Toshiko is presented as always motivated or inspired by Mr. M’s words and actions. In other words, the narrator always credits the origins of her modernity to Mr. M, effectively making him the final authority figure. There is an inherent obedience built into Toshiko’s actions that is not present in Myŏngsuk’s.

Toshiko’s obedience to her admired school principal is striking. The narrative presents her decision to return to her family’s home outside of Tokyo as a result of following Mr. M’s instructions. He is depicted as the source of her inspiration and the guide to her new philosophy of life:

all of the muddied confusion dissipated when Toshiko’s heart touched Mr. M’s warm light, when she was enveloped by his correct understanding and warm compassion, with his ability to always values people’s freedom and gift and to try to help its development. At that moment, tears fell in heightened excitement and she only wished to obey him, to submit to him all of her life. She felt as though she could vividly see her newly valuable self arising from an absolute submission that
transcended life and death.113

This depiction of the sudden opening up of a vision is reminiscent of the Christian notion of a “moment of clarity.” Mr. M is portrayed not simply as an educator, but as a fatherly figure who skillfully and gently guides others. The portrait of him up until the sentence ending in “development” seems to keep open the possibility of seeing him as either a priest or a Christ figure. However, in describing the deep emotions aroused by his presence, expressed by her wishes “to submit to him all of her life,” the tone turns epiphanic, suggesting that Mr. M, in Toshiko’s mind, is closer to a Christ figure. Thus, the social mission has taken on a religious overtone. That the description of the dorm and the school grounds as curiously similar to a nunnery also enforces this reading.

Toshiko’s finding a replacement patriarch seems to suggest that while the social ideals might have been changing, the basic social structure of patriarchy remained stable. In fact, Mr. M is presented as the new patriarch and focal point of Toshiko’s life. He is shown as replacing her grandfather, the patriarch of the “old” order from her native family.

Myŏngsuk does not find a “new” patriarch to replace the old one, nor is she shown as trying to find one, but she is portrayed as relegating the power to transmit her story to an journalist absent in corporality. The journalist is never depicted in concrete terms and remains a lofty idea, an imaginary figure she assumes must exist. Myŏngsuk is depicted as having no mentor close by who will stand by her side and comfort or support her like Toshiko has. Myŏngsuk’s loneliness appears to eventually culminate in her death. The story valorizes martyrdom, displaying a strong sense of collective identity among women.

In “Night Train,” the “Western” knowledge and ethics that the schoolgirl touts are transported by a male authority figure with whom she is enamored. On her ominous train ride back home, Toshiko is portrayed as thinking about “Mr. M’s teachings she heard in the girl’s school’s classrooms” where he taught about “self-awareness as an individual, [and] an independent life worth living.”114 In the end, the story shows, the discussion about Toshiko’s fate still occurs between men: Mr. M, Toshiko’s father, and her grandfather. She is defiant, but the narrator shows that the education that makes her stand up to her family is also rooted in a man’s teaching.

Myŏngsuk’s story, on the contrary, spells out her rejection of the old order but cannot replace it with any concretely new figure. She is portrayed as espousing the new “modern” ideas, as Toshiko does, but she cannot put them into practice, and there is no authority figure—male or not—who can help her. What seems to be portrayed in this is a serious absence of reliable

113 Ibid., 121.
114 Ibid., 134–135.
authority. Instead, the text is full of images of surveillance, constriction, and imposed hurriedness. Myŏngsuk’s ideals are presented as consistent and clear in her letter. But the narrative that follows, which describes the background to her letters, gives a portrait of a society turned upside down where the poor become rich and the rich become poor within a decade or two and standards of morality go completely awry. Men, even modern men with an education, are not reliable sources of strength. The anonymity of the journalist and the newspaper to which she addresses her letter makes one wonder if there is in fact a person or a company able to receive the letter. Amid all the new, modern objects, absurdity and immorality seem to rule people’s lives. Such a portrait is of a completely fractured society.

The abundance of deaths in Korean novels and short stories, particularly those depicting women in the service of public good or larger social advancement, is startling. The motif of a self-imposed death in the middle of a city (presumably thickly populated) seems to connote Myŏngsuk’s presumed desperation at having no other options, her loneliness in having no one else with whom to share the burden of her decision, and no one with whom to share her ideal life, at least no one her parents will approve. Her ideals are too far flung and do not match the state of the city or her native family. Myŏngsuk’s loneliness is in a sense the loneliness of contemporary urban life but is contrary to the ideals of the time. While modernity and urbanity connote freedom and a better, happier life, the narration shows that belief in the modern ideal brought her to despair and self-imposed death. This seems to foreshadow the desperation eventually felt by many Korean intellectuals in colonial Korea. Any hope expressed by colonial Korean intellectuals was always combined with a sense of desperation and abjectness. Korean women, being at the bottom of the totem pole—both colonial subjects and women—were quick to capture this mood in their writings.
Colonial Korean texts written for a female audience sometimes use women’s liberation as a symbol of national independence and at other times present women’s liberation as an end in itself. The texts discussed in this chapter highlight the tension between the symbols of national independence and those of women’s liberation. A poem by Namsŏng, titled “Maiden’s Song” (“Ch’onyŏ ūi norae”; Yŏja gyaе, vol. 3, 1918), shows an effort to bridge this symbolic schism and productively conjoin the two value systems. “Noon” (“Chŏnggo”; Sin yŏja, vol. 4, 1920) by Kalhyang is a piece of devotional mystic Christian prose portraying important Korean Protestant theology that shares many commonalities with Confucian values surrounding women. “In Front of Grandmother’s Grave” (“Ch’omo ūi myojŏn ae,” Yŏja gyaе, vol. 4, 1920), a prose fiction piece written by Kim Myŏngsun (penname T’ansil; 1896–1951)115, is representative of many women’s texts that portray universalistic values, symbolized by Christianity’s coming to replace the “traditional” paradigm associated with Confucianism.

Yŏja gyaе, from which both “Maiden’s Song” and “In Front of Grandmother’s Grave” are taken, was an exclusively Korean-language magazine published in Japan by the Tokyo Female Study Abroad Students’ Fellowship (Tonggyŏng yŏja yuhakaeng ch’inmok hwe) from 1917 to 1921. From the fourth issue onward, the fellowship created a group dedicated to publishing Yŏja gyaе and at the same time made the magazine solely women-run, replacing its prominent male advisers, including Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950) and Chŏn Yŏngt’aek (1894–1968).116 The group became composed only of women, but it continued to have contributors and sponsors of both genders. Although the magazine was aimed at Korean women in both Japan and Korea, the readership in fact included many “progressive” modern Korean men.117

Looking at the extant issues of the magazine (numbers 2 through 6), we can clearly see the sense of mission and responsibility among these women to succeed. Letters of congratulation from principals and teachers of women’s schools in Korea and letters containing well meaning

---

115 For this story and other texts in Yŏja gyaе, Kim Myŏngsun writes under the penname Mangynagch’o.
116 Yŏja gyaе, vol. 4 (March 1920): 68–69. Between the publication of the third and fourth issues, there occurred the March First Movement, a significant historical event in modern Korea. Clearly, this incident affected the publication of the magazine, but exploring this aspect unfortunately goes beyond the scope of the present study.
117 Rebecca L. Copeland, in her study of Meiji Japanese women writers, Lost Leaves (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), extensively discusses the background of the prominent women’s magazine Jogaku zasshi. She points out that its “readers were evenly divided between men and women” (16). When considering the low literacy rate in both Japan and Korea, particularly among women, it is no surprise that a magazine aimed at women must have also been read by men interested in women and their education (30).
warnings from other writers and intellectuals pepper the thin sixty- or seventy-page-long issues. Editorials directly address readers to explain that the magazine has not been able to publish as many issues as originally scheduled because of the staff’s demanding schedule, reminding the readers that this is a magazine published by students temporarily residing in an alien land.118

The breadth of ideology represented in Yŏja gyae is exceptional in that it captures a rare moment when modern Korean women and men of all camps published in the same venue. The magazine is distinguished by its strong and frequent use of Christian imagery intertwined with a sense of hope for and belief in the advancement of Korea as a modern nation. The following presents examples of such imagery, starting with the image of a woman’s body.

~A Woman’s Body~
A woman’s body is famously symbolic of many things, including popular or mass culture, the nation, modernity, and tradition—everything except the woman herself. In “Maiden’s Song,” we see another example of how the female body is symbolic of the nation, although we also see how the protagonist stands as a symbol of all Korean women. “Maiden’s Song” was published in September 1918, when Yŏja gyae was still under the tutelage of prominent male Korean intellectuals. Namsŏng is a pseudonym that has not yet been identified with any specific author or poet, but it is a cognate with the word “man,” making it likely that the author is male or at the least wants to be perceived as male.119

The poem closely follows the conventions of classical Chinese poetry (han sì). Each of the nineteen stanzas is composed of mostly four (sometimes three) lines, and each line consists of four nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. Each stanza stands as an enclosed unit and is semantically independent of other stanzas. In some ways, however, “Maiden’s Song” clearly departs from the conventions. Most importantly, while it includes Chinese characters, it is written mostly in hangŭl. The poem also includes modern punctuation marks such as the natp’yo (quotation marks: 「」), the korichŏm (period: 。), and the exclamation mark. As suggested by the inclusion of the natp’yo, direct quotations appear, although they are not part of dialogues. This poem also uses colloquial language such as na (the neutral “I”) in the narrative voice outside of quotation. Notably, thirteen of the sixteen stanzas end with a korichŏm, using it to demarcate the semantic enclosure of a stanza instead of the now common usage of marking the end of a sentence.

As for content, the poem constructs a woman protagonist who hopes to build a strong

---

119 Other writings published under the same name in Yŏja gyae also point to the high likelihood that Namsŏng was a man was associated with the Korean Study Abroad Fellowship (Chosŏn yuhakaeng hakuhwe), which published the influential magazine Hak chi kwang.
nation through her modernizing mind and body; this character exemplifies claims that the New Woman became the symbol of a modernizing nation in this time period. The female narrator, Kŭmju (Golden Jewel), begins by exclaiming, “I am a maiden of Paedal / From the time I breathed in the first breath / Until the time I breathe my last.” Paedal is the most ancient name of Korea, so through this term her nationality is expressed as naturalized in her biological makeup. Her breath is mentioned as a sign of her life, as well as the life of the nation. Like the narrator figure in “The Sacrificed Maiden” discussed in Chapter I, for Kŭmju, her body is identified as entirely belonging to the Korean nation from antiquity.

Kŭmju’s body is described in terms of its function and parts and is immediately concretized in scientific terms: “Six quarts of blood in a mass of bone and muscle / Go through my body uninterrupted.” Kŭmju’s physical depiction is supported by modern scientific knowledge of anatomy, describing bones, muscles, and blood as components of the body. The anatomy of the body is the most abstracted form of a person. In this moment of describing the narrator in terms of the sum of the abstracted parts of her body, even her female gender is abstracted out to the larger category of humanity. Kŭmju’s body becomes replaceable with any other that identifies with Korea.

Kŭmju’s powerful physicality is juxtaposed to the nurturing mother figure who, despite possibly lacking physical strength and vivaciousness, is concerned with modern regimes such as school, body measurement, and physical largeness: “Once a month, she measured my height / Happy with the incremental growth / She said, ‘Come, grow tall, my Kŭmju,’ / Urging me to grow taller still.” Like a disciplining institution, the mother measures Kŭmju’s growth on a regular basis and urges her linear growth—resembling the linear advancement of society—to continue.

Kŭmju, the daughter figure, is the ideal futuristic woman who grows tall (proving her biological strength), becomes educated, and aspires to be the ideal “wise mother good wife” (hyŏnmo yangch’ŏ). Kŭmju dreams of the day she will raise her own child: “In time, my arm and tender heart will / Hold Okju, the eldest’s eldest / Raise her, send her to school / Watch over her until adulthood.” Suddenly, Kŭmju’s future daughter’s name, Okju (Round Jewel), slips in. “Eldest’s eldest” is a translation of the word changson, which in common usage means “eldest son’s eldest son”—the direct heir and eventual patriarch of a family. Clearly in this case, the historically gender-specific term is being appropriated in the spirit of the times when women

---

121 Ibid., 15.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid., 16.
124 Ibid., 16–17.
were appropriating implicitly masculine terms such as sŏsa (scholar-official) for themselves.125

In contrast to the apparent comfort Kŭmju has with scrutinizing her body, as depicted in “Maiden’s Song,” other texts show a female character extremely uncomfortable at the stranger’s gaze directed toward her. Much of the pain of being a modern woman in early twentieth-century Korea centered around the humiliation of being exposed to stares. One of the most oft-cited examples vividly describing this discomfort is Na Hyaesŏk’s illustration in Sin yŏja of a young woman standing in the street, holding a bag, with her head bowed low. Male passers-by turn their heads to stare and point at her, perhaps because she is roaming the streets alone without a chang-ot (a long hood worn over the head), which was traditionally worn by higher-class women.126 The modern Korean woman not only crossed regionally defined cultural lines, but, by doing so, simultaneously crossed class lines dictating that higher-class woman should cover more parts of their bodies than lower-class women, including their hair. The pain of being scrutinized and humiliated in public is a particularly feminine problem even today and is an overwhelmingly common image in many texts written by and about modern Korean woman.

As a representative modern woman, the author of “In Front of Grandmother’s Grave,” Kim Myŏngsun, personally suffered attack and ridicule in the media because of her actions and “improper” public appearances. Kim was the eldest daughter in one of the wealthiest and most prominent Korean families in P’yŏngyang—the center of progressive thought at the time, including accepting and practicing Christianity. She went abroad to Japan for the first time in 1913 at the age of eighteen, after graduating from Chinmyŏng Women’s Normal School in Seoul. She debuted as a writer in 1917 with “Ŭisim ŭi sonyŏ” (Doubtful girl) in the magazine Ch’ŏngch’un (Youth; 1914–1918) published by young Korean intellectuals. As she tried her hand at acting and other artistic outlets, she continued to write for various venues. Ultimately, she returned to Japan in 1939, and she was confirmed to have died in a mental clinic in Aoyama, Tokyo, in 1951.

As if to exemplify the damage a man’s gaze directed at a woman can cause, the tragic events befalling Ch’unch’ae, the protagonist of “In Front of Grandmother’s Grave,” are described as beginning with the symbolic moment of the gaze Kim Suyŏng turns toward her: “Suyŏng’s savage and despairing gaze fell on the figure of Ch’unch’ae, who was weeping in front of her grandmother’s coffin in anguish…. [This was how] Ch’unch’ae’s misfortune came about.”127 Suyŏng, Ch’unch’ae’s eventual fiancé, is portrayed as a caricature of an abusive, cruel,

---

126 Sin yŏja (Seoul: Sinyŏjsa, 1920), 2:40.
self-centered, and womanizing “traditional” man. Yet, the narrator also expresses a sense of pity by calling the gaze “despairing” (chap’o chaki), describing a self-loathing and resignation reflected in Suyŏng’s eyes. This underlying sense of pity for the clearly “evil man” continues while the narration also relentlessly describes his cruelty:

Because of not getting along with his first wife, he played around with every kind of woman as though he were possessed. He then became a plaything of a certain woman and in the end was abandoned, which made him extremely enraged, throwing the entire family into turmoil. He treated his main wife cruelly, abused her, beat his children, turned his back to his parents’ orders, and rebelled.128

In the neo-Confucian scheme, rebelling against one’s parents, particularly against their “orders,” is a serious offence, much more so than beating one’s wife or children (who are seen as absolute subordinates in any case). This passage portrays Suyŏng as detestable from both a “traditional” perspective (which is overwhelmingly neo-Confucian in Korea) and a “modern” one. However, the beginning of his violent behavior is described as rooted in his incompatibility with his first wife, to whom, presumably, he was married through a traditional arrangement. His traditionally condoned infidelity is also portrayed as a source of his marital troubles and familial problems. In using the terms “plaything” (hŭilong mul) or “to play around” (hŭilong hada) to describe his involvements with women, the narrator emphasizes the supposed triviality of heterosexual relationships in the traditional paradigm. Yet, Suyŏng is clearly affected by the outcome, which makes him lash out at his family. In the portrayal of Suyŏng as a brutal man, the narrator appears to implicate the entire traditional system. Ch’unch’a is portrayed as the innocent victim—her innocence symbolized in her virginity until the day she dies.

Ch’unch’a is a delicate feminine figure who needs to be protected and saved. She is described as being yŏnyak,129 a feebleness associated with delicate femininity; her fingers are as white as icefish; she has expressive, large eyes; and when she clasps her hands together in prayer, she appears celestial, like “a heavenly maiden”—in other words, Ch’un-ch’ae is constructed as a beautiful angelic woman who is physically and mentally delicate.130 In a key scene from which the story derives its title, Ch’un-ch’ae collapses in the most elegant way: she “slowly closed her remarkable eyes and quietly sat on the snow. What a pale face with the blue blood vessels

---

128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid., 44. The portrait of a big-eyed and fair-skinned girl is also reminiscent of images of young girls starting to circulate in Japan at the turn of the twentieth century, with the prominence of Young Girl novel (shōjo shōsetsu) writers such as Yoshiya Nobuko (1896–1973) and widely published visual artists such as Takehisa Yumeji (1884–1934).
showing like streaks!" The scene articulates each movement in detail, through a gaze full of awe, describing her moving as though in slow motion.

Ch’unch’ae is first seen by Suyŏng, and then the second time she is seen, it is by Úippuni, who at first appears to be an inconsequential figure, but with Ch’unch’ae’s deterioration in health becomes central. Úippuni initially appears in the narration as a witness to Ch’unch’ae’s escape from her living quarters:

Sweeping her over two-feet-long black hair to the side, bowing down her head, hiding her round beautiful face, she crossed the chaotic courtyard like a swallow toward the main gate. The seamstress’s daughter, Úippuni, saw this when she was giving food to a beggar at the main gate and, lightly stomping her feet, asked, “Oh sister, where are you going?”

The description of Ch’unch’ae uses classical literary vocabulary and imagery to produce a portrait of a beautiful woman. She has long black hair and a round okan (literally, “jewel-face”). She is also elegant, being able to cross the chaotic courtyard unnoticed by most, like a fast and light-moving swallow—a bird that often appears in the classical literary tradition as a symbol of feminine elegance and beauty.

Úippuni, a servant’s daughter and therefore a nonthreatening younger woman, notices Ch’unch’ae’s escape and intervenes while she is in the midst of taking care of the poor. The omniscient narrator portrays events from the perspective of Úippuni thenceforth. At first appearing to be a marginal figure, Úippuni holds up upon a closer reading as a central figure, the only one who has links to modern education, and through them, future hope.

~The Purpose of Educating Women~
Throughout Yŏja gyae, education—deeply related to social advancement—is presented less in relation to academic achievement and more in relation to cultivating desirable and honorable characters in its students. Education is expected to culminate in the development of a strong and caring mother, as shown in “Maiden’s Song”: “My heart is a still ocean / My arms solid piers / Heavy waves cannot break though.” Kŭmjju’s physical strength is described in almost masculine terms. The strong mother figure resonates with the physically strong young maiden figure from which she grew, but it also parallels the stable and monogamous union, and the house that she and her future husband will build together: “The solid house that we build /

---

131 Ibid., 45.
132 Ibid., 43.
133 Namsŏng, “Ch’ŏnyŏ ŭi norae,” 17.
Cannot be broken with any force.” The strong and unbreakable bond between herself and her future husband is emphasized and symbolized in its materialization in the form of a “solid house.” The key to pursuing and actualizing this ideal is in going to school. Another crucial aspect of a woman’s modernity is her becoming a “do-er” instead of waiting to be acted upon. This feature is one of the most distinguishing of a modern woman’s portrait. With this revelation, it suddenly becomes clear that Úippuni of “In Front of Grandmother’s Grave” is in fact the central character who acts upon the classically beautiful backdrop that is Ch’unch’ae. Ch’unch’ae is treated like a part of the scenery in the story where Úippuni, the daughter of a seamstress, acts.

Education for women at this time, however, worked to make sure that they stayed within subsidiary positions—in other words, schoolgirls were to become not commander in chief, but assistant to the commander. Scholars agree that this is the reason that when the New Woman came to prominence in the 1920s, such women parted ways with these educational ideologies driven by both Christian and nationalist agendas. The texts under discussion here, written before this split happened, express the overwhelming significance “education” held for women despite the conflicting agendas behind it.

In “In Front of Grandmother’s Grave,” explicit Christian references are not made until the very end, when the narrator states that Ch’unch’ae converted to Christianity immediately prior to her death. However, the text is adorned throughout with a culturally and historically specific Christian imagery from the time Ch’unch’ae collapses and becomes Úippuni’s “patient.” The revelation that Úippuni attends school happens close to the end of the narrative, after Ch’unch’ae’s collapse into sickness: “From the time Ch’unch’ae fell sick, Úippuni became restless on her way back from school every day.” This is the first time in the narrative that anyone, not to mention someone of the servant class, is shown as attending school. Úippuni rushes to Ch’unch’ae’s bedside every day after school, painting a portrait of a studious girl who primarily spends her time in school then passes any remaining time caring for the sick. Úippuni also sings songs by Ch’unch’ae’s bedside, which are Ch’unch’ae’s only source of comfort and good sleep: this highlights the importance of music as an intermediary device that could facilitate

134 Ibid.
135 This characterization of the modern woman as the “do-er” has important ramifications for the model of personhood.
136 Women’s roles in the household were often described in military terms, probably taking a cue from Japanese women’s magazines, which increasingly took on military language when describing such roles from around the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905).
137 One of the more famous pieces included in Yŏja gyae is Na Haesuk’s “Kyong-hŭi” (1918.3), which is about a girl who returns home after completing higher education. One of the most prominent scenes dwells on the excellent housekeeping techniques she learned in school.
138 Ibid., 45.
sacred and intimate bonding between people and a divine presence.

Singing songs (particularly hymns), caretaking of the sick, and acquiring literacy through attending school are all activities intimately associated with the agenda of Protestant missionaries in Korea from the late nineteenth century and beyond. As Hyaeweol Choi explains, these were the three main fields in which female missionaries were particularly successful and active. According to Choi, missionaries in Korea envisioned that the “Korean modern woman” would overcome “the inferior status of women in old Korea" and become “a real companion to her husband, an educated mother, and a practitioner of modern knowledge, and more importantly, a woman of Christian faith that can serve as the foundation and spirit of the ideal home.”139 She further clarifies that “the new ideal of the educated wife and mother here goes beyond her role as a moral influence, which was firmly embedded in traditional womanhood. Her new and modern contribution to the family involves material improvement in such areas as hygiene, nutrition, and the raising of children.”140

~Mingling Christian and Confucian Imagery~

“Noon” is a short (only three-page-long) prose narrative written by Kalhyang, another writer whose identity is unknown. The stares in this explicitly Christian devotional narrative, contrary to the usual imagery of stares and scrutiny as sources of pain and humiliation, are framed as an opportunity for spiritual growth. This message is relayed to an earnest schoolgirl who is practicing piano in the classroom by the “thirty-year-old woman…dressed in pure white cloth with gentle-looking features and quiet manners.”141 The text is mostly a soliloquy of this woman who talks about her past mistakes, the scrutiny she endured, and how she rose up from it through her religious faith.

Repetition of the color white and the superimposition of it on blood are distinct features of this text revealing its mystic Christian origins: the woman who suddenly appears is clad in “pure white cloth”; she comes in “white light” (hayan nalpit), that is, broad daylight; and her youth is described as having been “sun-bleached” (p’opaek).142 Imagery of whiteness as proof of newfound devotional faith, purity, and “light” continues throughout the narrative and is contrasted to blood. The keywords that appear in the text are “sun-bleached,” “bathe” (mokyŏk), “Lord” (chu), and “(Lord’s) precious blood” (pohyŏl), specifically referring to the blood Christ shed on the cross.

140 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
The imagery of blood is used to create a link among the woman clad in white, the narrator, and Jesus Christ. When the woman wearing white first appears, the narrator is suddenly reminded of the tension that she had been experiencing for the last three hours. With this realization and a subsequent relaxation, she suddenly “becomes aware of blood circulating to the end of [her] right foot…and [her] lips starting to taste a little salty.” She had been biting down on her lip so hard that it had started bleeding. “With my tired right hand, I took the handkerchief to the bottom lip…and this one drop of blood…softened my heart.” Foreshadowing the soliloquy that is about to be presented by the woman who speaks of Christ’s blood, the schoolgirl narrator expresses the centrality and importance of the blood she spills.

The woman, in her soliloquy, twice talks about “basking in the Lord’s precious blood.” The blood acts as the ultimate purifier of her sinful past, uplifting her to new religious heights. She also reveals in the narrative that she had experienced humiliation and undue scrutiny by the public as Christ had. The startled schoolgirl is preached at, but she also simultaneously appears to be a Christ figure—having already spilled her own blood. Her actions are already correct; only the correct faith needs to be instilled. The two women’s bodies are layered over the body of Christ, whose concrete image never appears and whose presence is only evoked. The schoolgirl’s blood and Christ’s blood seem to mingle in the same way that the words of the woman in white mingle with the schoolgirl’s, vaguely hinting toward the creation of a female Holy Trinity. Death and suffering, then, take on a cleansing and purifying dimension, as the repeated imagery of the sun-bleached white cloth reinforces.

In “Noon,” hope appears in the face of explicitly posed difficulties. Hope comes from penitence and in seeking God’s approval—by answering to a higher calling, as stated at the very end of the narrative, when the protagonist hints at her departure toward “the Cape of Hope.”

143 Ibid., 39.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid., 40. The puzzling mention of the Cape of Good Hope provides a link to Andrew Murray (1828–1917), a mystic Christian writer and educator who lived in South Africa. He wrote over 250 books concerning devotional Christian practice that were translated into Chinese and Japanese as well as major European languages. A. M. Lewin Robinson writes that Murray “emphasised the importance of devotional life and of prayer” and that his mysticism is “marked by contemplation of the world round him and by extroversion.” Murray was also active in establishing missionary schools and seminaries for women and had cultivated affiliations with the Mount Holyoke Ladies’ Seminary in Massachusetts, which provides clues to how his writings reached and circulated in Korea. See George Thomas Kurian, ed., Nelson’s Dictionary of Christianity (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2005), s.v. “Murray, Andrew”; Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa, vol. 7 (Cape Town: Nasionale Opvoedkundige Uitgewery, 1972), s.v. “Murray, Andrew.”
In the case of Ch’unch’ae of “In Front of Grandmother’s Grave,” hope is encapsulated in enduring heinous human actions. In her death, she is memorialized as a Christian—a sudden revelation at the end. We are meant to be comforted by the thought that she has been brought closer to God through her death, matching the angelic image of Ch’unch’ae herself. The narrator seems to be whispering to readers that death is not the end but can give us hope for the future—just the way Christ’s death gives hope to people.

Hope appears to be inseparable from the imagery of death, tainting the optimistic emotion with desperation. Symbols of modernity appear as elusive ideals that do not carry a concrete sense of reality and instead ask for self-sacrifice, particularly on the part of women. In these literary works, we see the prominent symbol of a “productive” death that leads to a rebirth or a “better” future. Here, death does not connote an ending. Rather, it functions as a marker of new beginnings, paralleling the image of Christ’s death leading to resurrection and evoking the image of a positive and even productive death. In “Noon,” the narrator appears to endorse sacrifice as a path to a better future, the stance subtly attacked in “The Sacrificed Maiden.” But, this image of a self-sacrificing woman was already a very familiar one.

The image of women’s martyrdom in early twentieth-century Korea is linked to the literary image of the yŏllŏ (virtuous woman), which first appears in the classical Chinese text Lienü zhuan (Korean: Yŏllŏ chŏn) written by the famous Confucian scholar Liu Xiang (77–6 B.C.E.). The title, Lienü zhuan, corresponds to the term lie zhuan, meaning “biographies,” but lienü is also a cognate to the word for “virtuous woman,” one who protects her honor by committing suicide, and this latter meaning has spanned a tradition of neo-Confucian scholars extensively writing about exemplary behaviors for women in Korea. The yŏllŏ figure who follows her husband to the grave without remarrying, in order to protect her honor, first begins to appear in Korean texts in the sixteenth century and continues until the early twentieth century.146

The figure of the yŏllŏ is perhaps surprisingly fierce to some who imagine the self-sacrificing Asian wife to be docile, self-effacing, and subservient. Quite to the contrary, the “virtuous woman” is often depicted as strong and serious in her mission to remain loyal to her husband even after his death, driving her to chakyŏl, literally meaning “to self determine,” but in fact meaning “to commit suicide.” This Confucian image appears to bear a large influence on Korean literature of the early modern period as well. We see this in the portrayals of female figures that appear too ready to sacrifice themselves for a better future. However, we also see tension between the Confucian and Christian imageries that hint at the complex relationship between women and the agenda of Christian missionaries and Korean nationalists.

---

In contrast to “In Front of Grandmother’s Grave” and “Noon,” “Maiden’s Song” portrays Christianity with ambivalence. The perspective presented in “Maiden’s Song” appears to be highly nationalistic, steeped in “reformed” Confucian values that were present in late Chosŏn Korea and during the colonial period and that formed the basis of some early thought of Korean reformers such as Yi Kwangsu. In other words, Christianity does not appear as the superior worldview that comes to substitute for neo-Confucianism.

When Kŭmjŭ’s mother dies, she is not described as being in heaven. Rather, she is far away, beyond high mountains and deep oceans—the imagery of physical, but still terrestrial, separation. Her voice is sweeter, perhaps *better than* a “melody,” most probably referring to a Christian melody. Her protectiveness, even as a person, is just as strong and secure as that of angelic “guardians.” The mother comes to signify the Christian-like protector, replacing the image of the Christian God. Even in her death, she continues to nurture and protect Kŭmjŭ from the world of the afterlife—recalling a sentiment rooted in Confucian and East Asian ancestor worship.147 In this sense, this poem appears to compete with Christian imagery through an appropriated neo-Confucian imagery that emphasizes heredity, parental guidance, and mother-son bonding.

The theme of hope among educated Korean women in the early twentieth century was articulated in terms of social reform—the key to enlightenment and social advancement, which were thought to naturally lead to national independence. The first very exciting and then eventually tormenting relationship many Korean writers expressed in relation to hope and the promise of enlightenment must be understood both from the perspective of a modernizing nation and from that of a recently colonized nation. Hyaeewol Choi and Kim Kyŏngil discuss how the Korean nationalist agenda converged with the Christian missionary one, causing an interesting dynamic of collaboration in regards to women’s education. Kim claims, however, that “women yearned to attain a sense of self and a higher social status through education.”148 The ultimate goals of the Christian missionaries and Korean nationalists were different: the nationalists wanted an independent Korea, while the missionaries were focused on converting Koreans to Christians. Both sides met on common ground, though: the missionaries desired “to civilize and

147 Catholicism also includes an element of ancestor worship through incorporating the idea of its people possibly becoming saints or guardians after their death. However, I do not consider that a possibility here because the prevalent Christian images at the time were those circulated by Protestant missionaries and because of the strong identification of certain images with Confucian values throughout the text.

Christianize Korea” through educating women; Korean nationalists wanted to push forth “modernization and nationalist agendas” also through educating women.¹⁴⁹

Those who stood for the independence of Korea (broadly termed “nationalists”) hoped that modern women would help advance their cause. Central to this image of a modern woman was one who would become a physically strong and educated mother. Kŭmju of the poem “Maiden’s Song” appears to embody this perfectly strong, committed, and nurturing modern mother figure who is also a product of a successful conjoining of “traditional” (neo-Confucian) and “modern” (Christian) elements. These perfectly modern women figures, however, appear to be masculinized.

The mother in the poem nudges Kŭmju to “quickly grow up.”¹⁵⁰ She is portrayed as caring, loving, and protective, but also ambitious for Kŭmju’s future. She engages in curiously “modern” practices: she measures Kŭmju’s height once a month and then urges her, each time: “quickly, get taller.”¹⁵¹ Modernization has been identified with regimen, measurement, quantification, and statistical studies; the periodic measurement of one’s height, and using one’s height as a barometer for appropriate growth, are markers of modernity. The mother’s insistence on schooling also seems to point to an ideological mother figure who is modern (at least in sensibilities), encouraging, and all-accepting, like many other mother and grandmother figures that appear in Korean texts of this period, particularly in poems.¹⁵² But Kŭmju’s mother is never individualized through being named or being described in any specific terms. In fact, she dies and is then evoked as an inspiration for Kŭmju’s growth. Her function is similar to the muse or the angelic female figure who, through her death, enables the modern male artist to become great. In this portrait, the daughter, Kŭmju, is masculinized. The re-feminization of Kŭmju happens later in the poem, when she starts describing her future role as a mother. What is striking in the description of motherhood, however, is the emphasis on her physical strength. Where she describes her future family, it is her physical contact with them that characterizes the relationship. She will embrace her future children and husband. Her arms, like “a solid pier,” will protect her house and family from “the world’s turmoil.”¹⁵³

“Maiden’s Song” is firmly rooted in the late Chosŏn practice of an intimate mother-son relationship referred to by many scholars, including Theodore Jun Yoo in The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea. In the context of discussing systematic women’s oppression in late neo-Confucian Chosŏn Korea, Yoo argues that “despite the outward rigidness of Korean

¹⁴⁹ Choi, Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea, 87.
¹⁵⁰ Namsŏng, “Ch’ŏnyŏ ŭi norae,” 16.
¹⁵¹ Ibid.
¹⁵² For instance, see Yi Kwangsú’s “Ŏmŏni ŭi mulupae” (On mother’s lap) printed in both the second (1917.3) and third (1917.9) volumes of Yoja gyae.
¹⁵³ Namsŏng, “Ch’ŏnyŏ ŭi norae,” 17.
patriarchy, the otherwise unbending samjong chido (three rules for women)—that is, to cultivate obedience to one’s father before marriage, to one’s husband during marriage, and to one’s son after the death of a husband—were softened by the intimate mother-son relationship, which became a unique feature of Korean family life.” Yoo’s portrayal of the effects of patriarchy in a woman’s life is problematically optimistic, but it helps in elucidating the mother figure who took her responsibility seriously to prepare her children for “the complex world of Confucian adulthood,” as Yoo puts it. He continues: “in Choson society, self-improvement began at home under the care of the mother, who provided a moral foundation through proper child rearing and character building”—reminding us of the ideal Victorian Christian mother figure. “At a more practical level, elite women who successfully reared their sons (to pass the national exam) and daughters (to marry them off to a wealthy family) could legitimize an elevation in status and power as they aged.” The mother figure Yoo portrays comes very close to the mother figure in “Maiden’s Song,” except that the traditional “son” figure in the poem is appropriated by the daughter. Kûmju’s mother’s eagerness for her to grow up and be educated, and her intimate ties with and pride for Kûmju (to the exclusion of the father), are similar to the neo-Confucian Korean mother figure in relation to her son.

~Vision of an Alternative Future: Creating a Female Lineage~
Education is the key to “advancement,” which is why these Korean texts show yearning for education as the basis of hope. Instructive in thinking about the almost compulsory relationship between colonization and hope for advancement is the work of anthropologist David Scott, who in Conscripts of Modernity analyzes The Black Jacobians by C. L. R. James, a historical account of Haiti’s anticolonial uprisings. Scott argues that in the anticolonial movement there is a utopian romanticization of the postcolonial future, which will bring ultimate salvation to the entire population of colonized people. Particularly relevant here is how Scott describes the relationship

154 The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 30. Yoo’s optimistic portrayal of the mother-son relationship is problematic because it does not engage with the implications of the system that can have dire consequences. Because the mother’s relationship to her son is so important, first of all, the pressure to have a son becomes insurmountable and causes problems early in a woman’s married life. Then, after her husband’s death, how well she is treated becomes entirely dependent on her relationship to her son instead of on her personal integrity—she becomes a hindrance to her son’s marriage because she has to compete for his affection with his wife, reinforcing the vicious cycle of difficult relations between wife and mother-in-law. Because the mother is forced to wield her power through manipulating first her father, then her husband, and, finally, her son, she intensifies female rivalry within the family. The effect is often women turning against one another and also enforcing sexist practices on one another, causing them to become isolated. The perspective of any “softening” of sexist practices appears to come from a standpoint that underplays the fact that sexist practices manifest in many ways other than direct enforcement by men.

155 Ibid., 31.
between modernity and the concept of choice: “modernity was not a choice New World slaves could exercise but was itself one of the fundamental conditions of choice.”¹⁵⁶ That is, in order to “have a choice,” the New World slaves—who are the oppressed protagonists in James’s historical narrative—had to accept the conditions of modernity (which included enslavement). The idea of having a choice, including accepting modernity or not, could only exist within the conditions of modernity, thus exposing the tautological nature of the argument of whether one “chooses” to accept modernity or not. The logic blind to this condition yields the perspective that if one is subjugated as a slave, that is a “choice” one has made.

In this context, Koreans first had to accept the logic that they were inferior in order to begin the game of choosing to attain modernity. As with the New World slaves, there was no real choice. By the time Koreans decided to strive for “social advancement,” they had to accept that they were “behind.” In other words, while the logic that one could “choose” to stay traditional or become modern theoretically existed, in fact it did not. The very notion that one could choose one over another was already enmeshed in the logic of modernity, as was the framing of “tradition.” Korean intellectuals’ hope for the future intensified within the ambivalent parameters of having accepted the premise that Korea was inferior to Japan.¹⁵⁷

Stuck in this tautological argument, the colonized can only fervently want and hope to “progress” or “advance” within the modern system; this partially explains the religious fervency with which education is symbolized in the texts discussed here. Construction of a strong female lineage in opposition to a patriarchal one gains importance as an alternative vision for the future. What becomes key, then, is establishing the basis of this vision: women’s education.

In “Maiden’s Song,” while the mother is portrayed as boastful of Kŭmjju’s academic achievements, the ultimate aim of education is presented as a way of cultivating a strong and loving household: young Kŭmjju sits in her mother’s lap and listens to her say, “come Kŭmjju, get big and go to school.”¹⁵⁸ School, here, is put side by side with physical growth, revealing the perspective that schooling, like physically growing tall, is an integral and inevitable part of healthy human growth. The site of hearing these words of encouragement, the “mother’s lap,” creates an association between education and parental warmth and guidance instead of a cold image of discipline or an impersonal institution: “Words I heard on mother’s lap / Still ring in my

¹⁵⁷ Leo T. S. Ching cites the Taiwanese critic Lü Cheng-hui’s argument that the colonial intellectuals’ anxiety is foregrounded by the asymmetrical colonial relationship. This, Ching argues, “is presented in several literary texts that depict the Taiwanese intellectuals’ longing for metropolitan Japan and their impatience with colonial Taiwan after returning from study abroad in Japan” (28).
¹⁵⁸ Namsŏng, “Ch’ŏnyŏ ūi norae,” 16.
ears. “Considering the poem’s neglect of the father and his role in nurturing and inspiring Kŭmjø and other texts that more obviously construct a female lineage to the exclusion of men, the underlying desire to construct a strong female lineage in “Maiden’s Song” becomes apparent.

“Maiden’s Song,” beginning with a powerful exclamation by the young modern woman figure, appears to be all about Kŭmjø. However, as the poem progresses, it becomes apparent that the poem is just as much about Kŭmjø’s bond with her dead mother and the specifically female lineage they create. The mother figure in this poem is prominent, as shown through the narrator’s introduction of the parents. Kŭmjø first introduces her mother and then her father. The order of introduction is unusual, but it is also interesting that the father quickly fades away and is forgotten. The only significant relationships in this text are those between Kŭmjø and her mother and Kŭmjø and a later and vaguely imagined future companion, a daughter named Okju.

“In Front of Grandmother’s Grave” constructs an even more obvious and unusual female lineage, one that explicitly crosses class lines. Ch’unch’ae is the favored granddaughter of a prominent female painter, Lady Ungyae. However, she is also a sŏja, the child of a concubine—in other words, not a part of the direct line of Lady Ungyae’s heirs. Still, she is the favored heir to Lady Ungyae over her own father (Lady Ungyae’s son). With Lady Ungyae’s death, Ch’unch’ae’s fate becomes uncertain and her lineage faces extinction by her marriage and cooption into another family structure as a concubine. This possible interruption of the female lineage is successfully intercepted by Ch’unch’ae’s death, which allows her to remain unmarried and a virgin forever.

The connection with the next generation, after Lady Ungyae to Ch’unch’ae, is preserved through the bond created between Ch’unch’ae and Úippuni, who have no biological connection but are bound in their spiritual intimacy mediated by music. During Ch’un-ch’ae’s illness, Úippuni provides comfort by singing funeral processional songs at her bedside. It is thanks to these songs, the narrator relates, that Ch’unch’ae is able to sleep soundly: “In that moment [that Úippuni sings], Ch’unch’ae’s emotions are soothed and her soul is reborn upon Úippuni’s.” Mediated by music—a Christian symbol—Ch’unch’ae and Úippuni create an intimate bond and continuous lineage. Ch’unch’ae’s soul will continue to live in Úippuni even if her body dies, much as Kŭmjø’s mother’s words and legacy continue to live on in the figure of Kŭmjø in “Maiden’s Song.”

“In Front of Grandmother’s Grave,” like other stories and articles of its time, strongly criticizes the practice of traditional marriage. Ch’unch’ae’s tragic fate aids in demonstrating the necessity and importance of Christian values and education in advancing and improving “primitive” society. What is unique about this story, however, is that it also shows the fragility of

159 Ibid.
160 Kim, “Ch’omo ŭi myojŏn ae,” 45–46.
female power in a patriarchal society while clearly wanting to seek solace in it. Positing a young woman, Ŭippuni, as the bearer and practitioner of nascent key values, the text also expresses hope that even the least powerful person, a young servant-class woman, can be at the forefront of vital social transformations. The text is full of ambivalences and hopes for true female sovereignty—and yet seems too aware of its impossibility (at least in the near future).
Chapter IV. Seeking Female Solidarity

Late nineteenth-century Japanese texts written for women, whether political or cultural, show that the collective category of “women” does not usually refer to all women but rather to a specific category of women.161 These were the literate daughters of affluent families, primarily of the samurai class or the nobility, who could afford the tuition, loss of labor, and other costs associated with modern educational institutions. At the same time, these texts assumed “women” to be a self-evident and natural category that called for an instantaneous sense of solidarity among its members.

In literary texts of 1910s imperial Japan, a female protagonist might register the presence of men and women of other classes—particularly those of the working class—but this mostly takes place within the safe confines of her home, school, or dormitory, while male protagonists are often shown coming and going as they please among people of different genders, classes, and sometimes even ethnicities. The figure of the flaneur—the wandering urban observer—was inevitably a man. Women characters, to the contrary, were rarely depicted as mingling with men in general or with women of different classes or ethnicities. In this role, adult “men” could be portrayed as interacting with women of all categories, acting as mediators between women of different classes.162 This chapter examines portrayals of the intermingling of women from different classes, specifically the relationship between geisha and upper- or new middle-class women. The exploration uncovers the narrators’ underlying ambivalence toward and suspicion directed at the universalistic category of “women.”

Denise Riley, the poet and literary scholar, argues that women in late nineteenth-century Europe and North America came to signify a “sociological collectivity.” “Women” as a category became significant within the idea of the “nineteenth-century ‘social’ [that] is the sum of progressive philanthropies, theories of class, of poverty, of degeneration;…a blurred ground between the old public and private, voiced as a field of intervention, love, and reform by socialists, conservatives, radicals, liberals, and feminists in their different and conjoined ways.”163 That is to say that the “Woman Question” operated within the grounds of the “social,” which was seen as a nonpolitical site of philanthropic intervention for women, children, and the

161 For instance, Shimizu Shikin’s (1868–1933) “Naite aisuru shimai ni tsugu” (In tears I declare to my sisters) is directed at an educated female audience that could read and comprehend classical Chinese-style Japanese. The proximity between the female narrator and the female audience is expressed in the usage of the term shimai (sisters).
162 I put “men” in quotation marks here because, just as the “women” category was latently class-defined, so was the category “men.”
163 Denise Riley, “Am I that Name?”: Feminism and the Category of “Women” in History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 49.
poor. At the same time, “women” were expected to act as a collective and to support or advocate for one another: “Women’ both come under and direct the public gaze in the late nineteenth century as sociological subjects in a double sense.” Women became sociological subjects as a category to be observed or studied as well as sociological subjects who had a voice as a group. Riley points out that the engendering of the women category as a sociological group that can be saved allowed “for some women to enter upon the work of restoring other, more damaged, women to a newly conceived sphere of grace.” In other words, the class difference between women who can save and those who need to be saved was newly circumscribed and through that circumscription reinforced past divisions in new ways.

In Japanese texts from the late nineteenth century onward, we can observe the impulse for women to become and act as one collective beyond other divisions while at the same time expressing profound ambivalence and doubt toward the project of creating a unified womanhood. The ambivalence is observable through portraits of heterosexual relationships. These portraits expose how the unified category of womanhood is a patriarchal paradigm that betrays reality and undercuts modern women’s efforts to create a new vision of gender relations premised on that category. The stories analyzed in the following are underlined by a deep sense of betrayal and resignation.

The stories studied here are also representative of Japanese Naturalism (shizen shugi), the most salient literary influence among women writers during this period. Yukiko Tanaka, a scholar of modern Japanese women’s literature, asserts that “writers of [the Japanese Naturalist] school were most concerned with the representation of authentic experiences.” Also: “in the work of the French Naturalist School [the Japanese writers] found a professed ‘scientific’ approach with which they could scrutinize how various aspects of social reality and moral conventions affect individuals. They found an affinity in the school’s focusing on the main character’s disillusionment, their sense of penitence, and, ultimately, their rejection of the philistine world surrounding them.” This influence from the French Naturalist School encouraged a literary style that on the linguistic level projected the image of a dispassionately observing narrator who focused on the “inner lives” of individuals. One of the main concerns was to depict the interaction between the “inner life” with the social context and conventions of the character. An example of this literary style is also evident in the narrative of “Curse of the Water God,” analyzed in Chapter I. This literary mode most frequently leads to a portrayal of a

---

164 Ibid., 50.
165 Ibid., 48.
167 Ibid., 110.
sense of disappointment and melancholy or angst at being human. These sentiments are coupled with the narrators’ cynical stance as evident in the two main texts explored in this chapter.

“Otoya and Brother,” (“Otoya to ani”) written by Hayashi Chitose, focuses on the commonalities a naive schoolgirl perceives between geisha and schoolgirl figures. Hayashi was born in Tokyo and grew up in Osaka. She evidently came from an affluent family (she entered today’s Japan Women’s University, Japan’s first university for women), but the details of her birth are unknown. Including “Otoya and Brother,” she published three texts in Seitō. Most of her career afterward was in supporting stage roles and in film acting.168 She performed in New Style (shimpa) theater and in controversial plays, for example, in the first Japanese performance, in 1911, of “A Doll’s House” (Danish original: “Et Dukkehjem”; Japanese: “Ningyō no ie”) by Henrik Ibsen.

The second story analyzed in this chapter, “Beginning Wifehood,” (“Nyōbō hajime”) was published in the January 1915 issue of Seitō, when the editorship changed from Hiratsuka Raichō to Itō Noe. Ueno Yō, the author, taught in various women’s high schools while following her husband’s job postings and was one of the earliest contributors to Seitō.169 The narration begins in a self-reflective and philosophical tone but becomes light and superficial (in a way that suggests suppressed unhappiness) as the protagonist Teruko is faced with multiple disappointments in her newlywed life in a new city, Chūkyō (present-day Nagoya City)—the largest commercial center located between Osaka and Tokyo.

~Geisha as “One of Us” or Not~
In literary discussions of the late nineteenth century to 1910s, methods of biological organization as the definitive and authoritative taxonomy figured prominently. Humanism, a new concept, reorganized perception of the human social hierarchy, casting doubt on seemingly firm class distinctions. Suddenly, the lines that divided women by their profession, class, or circumstances of birth seemed frail or tentative. Social categories such as class were also challenged by biological organization, which reigned as the superior form of categorization and made gender more important than other distinctions. Following this new paradigm of human categorization, women with a modern education sought to reach out to women of other classes, including geisha. At the same time, competing scientific notions such as those of causality, natural order, and eugenics (then firmly established within the field of biological sciences) provided justifications for upholding earlier notions of class and for the innate superiority or inferiority of certain groups of people. The difficulty of how to discern what is biologically determined and what is socially determined subtly appears in the female protagonists’ confusion about whether to

169 Ibid., 50–51.
consider a geisha a fellow woman on par with herself or not.

In “Beginning Wifehood,” from the start of the narrative, geisha are portrayed as people of another class, somewhat vulgar, but also potential friends of Teruko, the female protagonist, as members of the same sex. We read of Teruko bustling around setting up the new home she and her husband, Utsumi, will live in when a geisha named Koyoshi appears at the doorstep. This appearance is marked as a surprising moment of intrusion:

“Excuse me.”
Someone came to the door. The maid answered and came back with a wrapped cloth bag.
When [Teruko] opened the wrapping, there was an impressive red snapper laid on a bamboo leaf on a plate. On a fashionable name card was the name: Koyoshi of the Matsu’ura [geisha] House. Teruko was surprised. She was totally taken aback.… She felt deceived…. She began to feel like she was very naive for blindly and completely believing that he [her husband] was a virgin.170

It was common for geisha to visit their clients for purposes of celebrations like this, but the narration invites the readers to read this scene as if Koyoshi is asserting her position within a polygamous structure. Teruko’s shock and disappointment are communicated in the abundant use of words such as “surprised,” “totally taken aback,” “deceived,” and “naive,” within close proximity. The geisha suddenly appears as a live person at the doorstep of Teruko’s new home. She is so surprised partially because Utsumi had said in his letters to her that he did not see geisha. In her confusion, she is not sure how to consider Koyoshi. The narrator shows how Teruko wonders whether she should consider geisha as just “playthings” (ganrōbutsu), “frivolous women,” or “like a friend.”171 Although she is unpleasantly surprised at the revelation that her husband consorts with geisha, at this point in the narrative she is still able to keep her feelings contained because, ultimately, she decides to see geisha as inferior substitutes to her. Reading a diary entry of Utsumi’s, Teruko no longer is startled by the descriptions of his sexual encounters with geisha. In fact, the comment that Utsumi could not stop himself from kissing a geisha on the lips because she reminded him of Teruko flatters her.

On an explicitly narrative level, Teruko’s confusion and surprise at the revelation of Utsumi’s consorting with geisha is attributed to his letters saying that he never saw geisha. However, the philosophical musings that she launches into stemming from the knowledge that he has already experienced sexual relations with other women—that is, only geisha, as far as she

171 Ibid., 62, 71.
knows—betrays such an easy explanation. By seeing geisha as women with whom she has to compete for Utsumi’s affection, Teruko also clearly sees them as women who could possibly take her husband away from her. Her disturbance is portrayed as stemming from her desire to consider her relationship with Utsumi a unique once-in-a-lifetime bond that conjoins spiritual and carnal love, following the ideal of a romantic love culminating in marriage. If Teruko were to consider geisha as fellow women, their relationship with her husband would nullify the myth on which her “modern” marriage stands. She is thus forced to think of geisha as women of another class, that is, to admit to the existence of a divided “woman” category, if she is to consider her marriage truly modern.

The unnamed protagonist of “Otoya and Brother,” on the contrary, is depicted as trying to bridge the difference between geisha and schoolgirls (representatives of modern women) by assuming that geisha are essentially the same as schoolgirls and are also a part of the new love paradigm. After the protagonist receives negative feedback from her classmates about what they think of geisha, she is shown articulating the belief that if only “a geisha were given a little refinement and were given even a low level of higher education, she probably would be just as good if not better than the average schoolgirl at managing the household as a wife. Plus, she would be pretty.”172 The word for education used here is chūtō kyōiku, specifically referring to the modern institution of higher education instead of any general term such as kyōiku (education) or kyōyō (refinement associated with formal education).173 The protagonist’s optimistic belief in the attainability of modern womanhood by all women, regardless of class or lineage, is shown in her laying out the specific requirements—obtaining a little bit of class and receiving a higher level of institutionalized education.

While demonstrating the protagonist’s strong belief that geisha and schoolgirls are essentially the same as their fellow women, the passage quoted previously also portrays her as a privileged schoolgirl who is out to reform “less fortunate” women, seeing them as a social problem. In other words, in this way, the narrator subtly points to the fact that the sister sees geisha as a category of pretty women who are only provisionally a part of the “women” category including schoolgirls.

~Beautiful Geisha~

Geisha appear as embodiments of feminine attractiveness in the minds of both Teruko of “Beginning Wifehood” and the unnamed younger sister of “Otoya and Brother.” When Teruko thinks of Utsumi’s drinking in a teahouse, it is verbalized as him being “surrounded by beautiful

173 Chūtō kyōiku in today’s Japan refers to the middle school or junior high school level, but earlier it referred to the equivalent of high school.
women.”  

The younger sister thinks of geisha as “pretty” above all. Representations of geisha as beautiful or as embodiments of feminine attractiveness are in common with historical literary conventions. In juxtaposing the legitimate “wife” and geisha as “female lovers,” we see the emergence of an increasingly sexualized “wife” struggling to find a new self-definition.

Popular literature and theater of the Edo period (1603–1868) often portrayed geisha as beautiful tragic heroines or coquettish sexual beings. The literature of the late Meiji period (1890s–1912) tended to portray geisha as women who could potentially become socially distinguished through receiving a modern education or else as lower-class women who tainted the sexual purity of husbands—and, by extension, tainted the blood of family lines. In other words, geisha in texts changed from being literary devices used to portray passionate love affairs divorced from mundane life to complex human characters in narratives containing portrayals of lives lived outside the pleasure quarters.

In “Iro” to “ai” no hikaku bunkashi (A comparative cultural history of “lust” and “love”), literary scholar Saeki Junko shows how in many canonical Japanese works (written mostly by men), the female objects of love gradually shifted from geisha and other female entertainers to modern educated women—who were often members of the upper or new middle class. She argues that even when geisha remained the object of love, as in the novels of Nagai Kafū and Izumi Kyōka, their characterization still changed to include more “modern” aspects and moved away from the previous model, which emphasized the transcendent communion of lovers through death. Through her analysis, Saeki demonstrates that there were symbolic characteristics of women and that these were often placed in opposition: the “amateur” (shirōto) modern woman had the capacity to achieve self-actualization through the experience of marriage, which made her a fitting marriage partner for the modern man, while the spiritually void and uneducated geisha or other “professional” (kurōto) woman was valued only because of her perceived sexual availability and her being anatomically female.

Teruko, playfully tormenting herself to try to gain insight into how she feels about her husband’s infidelity, looks back to when she was still single and used to imagine how lonely she might feel if her man went to the pleasure quarters. The narration portrays a bride trying to reconcile her feelings by poking fun at herself, trying to keep a good sense of humor about the

---

175 The anatomical femaleness of the geisha is noteworthy for contrasting the exclusively heterosexual nature of the relationship between geisha and their clients. This is significant because of the existence of young men and feminized men such as wakashū and onnagata as lovers or sexual interests of men in the Edo period and continuing into the early Meiji period (1868–1912). For more on this, refer to Gregory Pflugfelder’s Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950 (Berkeley: California University Press, 1999) and Gary P. Leupp’s Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
whole thing: “And look at how jealous I am now!” This feeling of jealousy is then shown transforming into insecurity, depicting her fear that she perhaps lacks the “charm” (chāmu) to keep Utsumi beside her. In this sequence, the narration relays the disappointment and loneliness Teruko is beginning to feel about her marriage.

_Hōmu or katei_—both Japanese neologisms for “home”—became the sacred space where the ideal of romantic love was to be implemented. Teruko had dreamed of establishing a _hōmu_ full of fun and fulfillment, but by the middle of the narrative, she begins to concentrate on “creating an ‘ie [house],’” having given up on the idea of the “home.” The linguistic shift from “_hōmu_” (from the English “home”) to “_ie_” (the traditional Japanese word for “house”) is significant, for _ie_ connotes not only the physical structure of the house, but also the specific Japanese family structure that came into being in the Meiji period. The distinct sense that “_ie_” is old-fashioned and feudalistic is strongly implied in the sister-in-law’s use of the phrase “_genkaku na ie_” (“a proper household”), which initially amuses Teruko because of the disjuncture from her ideal of constructing a warm and fun “home.”

The new house Teruko is about to establish with Utsumi is, however, a house that has just been vacated. This implies that the architecture is that of a “traditional” house instead of a “modern” Western or Western-influenced one. From the beginning, Teruko encounters great difficulty in constructing the new and modern home she had envisioned building with Utsumi. First, she is unable to understand the speech of the local carpenters employed to help her make the necessary structural changes to the old house so that she can remodel the interior. This ominously foreshadows her unplanned but eventual co-option into a literal and metaphorical “provincial” (synonymous to “traditional” and “antimodern”) family structure.

Just as Teruko begins to change her focus from creating a (modern) “home” to creating a (traditional) “house,” she discovers that the boundaries of the “house” are also different from the sacred notion of her “home.” As her new home containing her husband and their imagined future offspring nears completion, a local geisha appears at the doorstep with a whole red snapper—the traditional way to elaborately celebrate a great occasion such as a marriage or a move to a new house. In this moment, the narrator shows how Teruko’s new house is being invaded and her ideal home is falling apart at the seams.

~Family Purity~

---

176 Ueno “Nyōbō hajime,” 75.
177 Ibid., 63.
178 The _ie seido_, or “Japanese family system,” is associated with Confucian ideas of the family, a hierarchical ordering of branch families according to male birth order, and a microcosm of the emperor system.
The literary portrayal of modern women’s partial identification with and awareness of courtesan women like those portrayed in the two stories here is related to the new ideal that permeated literature, that of an ongoing sexual relationship between husband and wife. This was a significant shift from the previously common literary portrayal, which located all of the family life in the home (managed by the wife) and all of the lust, love, and fun in the pleasure quarters. Teruko’s unease in the presence of geisha involved with her husband is contrasted to her sister-in-law and female cousin-in-law’s matter-of-fact attitude. In the “traditional” scheme of things, it is normal for a man of a certain social standing to be involved with multiple women. Teruko, as an “enlightened” modern woman, does not accept this scheme and is more concerned with the modern notion of sexual purity. This is the new paradigm that gives her grounds to criticize her husband and his behaviors.

The narrator in “Beginning Wifehood” initially shows that Teruko’s sister-in-law imagined Teruko as vulgar, implying that she was a “loose” woman equivalent to a prostitute because she met and corresponded with Utsumi before marrying him. The sister-in-law is the prototype of an “old-fashioned” person who is not privy to “modern” ideas of the nuclear family, sexual purity, and romantic love. Instead, she perceives the new and modern courting process as lewd, inappropriate, and unbecoming for a marriageable young woman. Teruko, the educated and orphaned modern woman, is portrayed, in contrast, as completely unconcerned with such judgments—even finding them amusing because they are so different from her own assumptions and ideas. Instead, her concerns are shown to lie with the “purity” of her love, coupledom, and family.

According to David Notter, a sociologist of Japan, in the scheme of Meiji and Taishō (1868-1925) family purity (maintained by the sexual purity of both husband and wife), neither Teruko nor Utsumi should have been engaged in any sexual or romantic affairs, including before marriage. This precludes Utsumi having had a past with any woman, including a geisha. Yet, as Teruko learns about her husband’s past and present sexually charged involvements with other women, she starts to question the very ideology that appears to create an asymmetrical love relationship.

Notter, in his study Junketsu no kindai (Purity’s modernity), thoroughly explores the social and intellectual discourse surrounding promiscuity and the demand on women to remain “pure.” He argues that the idea of “purity” (junketsu) in modern Japan, specifically sexual purity,
was intimately tied to the discourse on “love” and the emergence of the modern Japanese family. His study is presented as a comparative study of the evolution of Japanese and American models of the ideal modern family that uses the U.S. case as a concrete reference point from which to discuss what happened in Meiji and Taishō Japan. One of Notter’s main contentions opposes the majority consensus within Japanese academia that Japan accepted romantic love ideology and then began practicing “love marriages,” and that, as in the West, this spread was concurrent with the formation of the modern Japanese nuclear family. He argues that, unlike in the United States, in Japan the modern family emerged without the intermediary of the love marriage. 181

Japanese romantic love ideology was part of a complex web of ideas intricately tied to that of the home (hōmu), cultural sophistication (kyōyō), and personal character (jinkaku). Notter states: “‘Purity’ became the axiomatic concept of modern sexuality and the glue for the order of a modern marriage, which presupposed the ‘trinity of love-sex-marriage,’ to function properly.”182 The importance of sexual purity is emphasized in “Beginning Wifehood” within the narrative assumption that if Teruko and Utsumi were to engage in sexual intercourse, they would need to marry. The narration also shows Teruko as having “naively” assumed that Utsumi had “saved” himself for her. She is disappointed when she finds out that he had been regularly seeing geisha, making it unlikely he was a virgin. Teruko is still shown as trying to establish the new, fulfilling, and fun-filled home she envisioned building with Utsumi, but her decreasing confidence in his participation in the project is implied at this same time. This decrease in confidence is caused by the gradual disclosure of Utsumi’s “impurity” (both to the readers and Teruko herself).

With the incident of the geisha on the doorstep as the catalyst, the narration begins to elaborate on Teruko’s philosophy of marriage. She contemplates how unfair it is that one half of the couple can enter the marital relationship already having had sexual partners while the other had none. She articulates this as one half of the couple being “pure” while the other is “impure,” 181

---

182 Nottā, Junketsu no kindai, 12, 26. As Notter mentions, his study is intimately related to studies concerning the idea of a new nationhood in Japan, a topic that is extensively explored by sociologists such as Koyama Shizuko (Ryōsei kembo to iu kihan [The prescription of good wife wise mother; Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1991], among others) and Muta Kazue (Senryaku toshiteno kazoku—Kindai nihon no kokumin kokka keisei to josei [The family as strategy: The shaping of modern Japan’s national citizenry and women; Tokyo: Shin’yōsha, 1996], among others).

Notter’s construction of this concept in the trinity form is no accident. It would be impossible to discuss Japanese modernity without acknowledging the deep influence Protestant Christianity had on Japan and its intellectual life (the same is true in the Korean case, as we have already seen). Saeki articulates the Protestant influence like this: “Christianity turned the age-old Japanese notion of sexuality upside down. It lowered sex from the sacred realm of the gods to the realm of ‘beastly desires.’… If ‘lust’ was the means to approach the gods through physical relations, ‘love’ was the way towards the Christian monotheistic world through ‘the mind’” (’Iro’ to ‘ai’ no hikaku bunkashi, 15).
echoing the discourse on the ideal of sexual purity: “Marriage makes us establish a ‘home’ like this, a place where one pure person and the other, an impure person, live together.”

It is noteworthy that, in the paradigm of marriage she articulates, sexual relations are limited to one’s marriage partner. Sexual relations outside of the institutionally sanctioned marital system, including premarital sexual involvements, are excluded. Thus, no consideration is given to the chastity or “purity” of the geisha, women existing outside the system of institutional marriage. Still, the married man’s sexual involvement with geisha is threatening and problematic for Teruko. The focus is solely on the purity of the institutionally sanctioned couple and of their family, which is maintained by the appropriate sexual conduct of the wife and the husband. The model family here is the new Japanese modern family—the nuclear family defined as containing a man, a woman, and their offspring.

~The Geisha as One of “Them”~

The geisha on one hand is portrayed as distinct from the modern woman because of her exclusion from the modern family structure, but on the other hand, she is considered a part of larger womanhood. In “Otoya and Brother,” the first pages suggest that the geisha and the younger-sister protagonist are conflated: in this scene, the omniscient narrator speaks from the brother’s perspective. The brother enters his younger sister’s room, but she remains in the darkness, still. Her immobile, dark profile reminds him of an exchange he had had that morning with Otoya, a geisha whom he sees regularly, in the room where they had spent the night. He reminisces about their exchange until his sister suddenly turns on the light: “At that moment, the man thought a little about the woman called Otoya, as he looked at the young woman’s eyes shining under the bright electric light.” The narrator reminds us again and again that the brother compares his sister to Otoya, establishing a definite link between the two based on their proximity to “the man” and their shared gender, and probably their proximity of age as well. Even in that moment, when the sister’s identity becomes obvious in a stream-of-consciousness style, the brother conflates her with Otoya.

Through the intricate link in the brother’s mind between the younger sister and the geisha, the narrator shows how, from a young man’s perspective, both geisha and schoolgirls are subsumed under the larger “young women” category. The younger sister, represented here by a modern educated schoolgirl, seems to agree that she is also a “woman” like Otoya as long as she does not understand the nature of a man’s relationship to the other classes of women. In other words, the universality of the “women” category is premised on women’s ignorance.

In the first pages of the story, the narrator establishes the unnamed protagonist’s elder

---

184 Hayashi, “Otoya to anī,” 60.
brother and the geisha as “man” (otoko) and “woman” (onna), as shown in the previous quotation: “the woman named Otoya.” Through this choice of appellation that abstracts the characters out to the largest unit of gender differentiation, any class line between them is blurred. They are portrayed as related to each other within the abstracted notion of whitewashed gendered individuals. At the same time, it is the very class difference between them that allows the “man” to relate to Otoya as a sexualized woman who is available to him. In contrast, the protagonist is always the “younger sister” (imōto)—defined exclusively by her place in the family. In “Beginning Wifehood,” Teruko is released from such familial contexts through being an orphan—pointing to the strong definition of a woman through the family structure.

The only characters with names in “Otoya and Brother” are geisha who appear in fantasies, flashbacks, musings, and conversations between the unnamed protagonist and her elder brother. At the same time, there are no direct descriptions of any individual geisha, and the geisha figures remain elusive throughout, emphasizing their distance from the protagonist’s world. Geisha appear only as imagined figures, and yet there is an effort to concretize and individualize them by naming them. The protagonist has no direct contact with Otoya and can only try to grasp at Otoya’s image in her mind. Ironically, the narrator alludes to the fact that the brother spends the night with more than one geisha—one of them being Otoya—but the protagonist, in assuming that her brother is engaged in a platonic and monogamous relationship, also assumes that all of the women she hears about are the one “Otoya.” In other words, while the protagonist tries to individualize and humanize this completely unknown (to her) geisha figure, the supposed individual name becomes a mere label for all the geisha with whom her brother consorts. Thus, her imaginations and efforts to humanize Otoya become irrelevant. The narrators in both stories subtly point out that the “women” category is a patriarchal construction that has little bearing on the self-identity or reality of women. The sense of disjuncture expressed between representation and portrayed reality is also a central theme in “Beginning Wifehood.”

~Words Written and Spoken~

The narration of “Beginning Wifehood” begins and ends with love letters, signaling the centrality of letters exchanged between lovers in a relationship. The first lines of the story read: “Their love was dominated so heavily by exchanges of letters that it was almost as though their love had been ignited by pen and paper.” Teruko’s suspicion of the dissonance between Utsumi’s projected image on paper and his actual image in person are disclosed in the lines following the opening sentence: “In fact, Teruko was observing Utsumi with suspicion for half a year since their meeting. This was because the personality of the man she met face to face was so different

---

from the man faraway.” Her nagging sense of discomfort is justified as his involvements with other women—both past and present—are narrated as unpleasant surprises to her.

Teruko’s feeling that Utsumi’s words in letters he addressed to her during the courting process were a smoke screen for his true nature is strengthened as the narrative progresses. The feeling ultimately culminates in a strong conviction and sense of betrayal when she finds a stack of letters stuffed into his desk drawer. Notter describes in his study the importance of love letters within the ritual of American courtship in the nineteenth century. He points out that love letters were important because they were exchanged frequently, read multiple times, and both written and read in the bedroom, the symbol of an enclosed private space. He unfortunately does not tie this discussion into the Japanese case, but the comparison is important here and can yield productive insights into the narrative.

Teruko’s physical attraction to Utsumi and her ultimate decision to marry him is portrayed as having been encouraged by brief physical contact points such as light kisses and hand-holding during their courtship period. On the contrary, their getting to know each other on a “spiritual” level, considered to be the most important aspect within the context of a romantic love ideology, was relegated mostly to their exchange of letters, since Teruko lived in Tokyo and Utsumi in Chūkyō. Here, we see the importance of exchanging love letters as a part of the courtship ritual that Notter describes in the case of the nineteenth-century United States.

The letters that Teruko finds stuffed in a drawer are the remains of Utsumi’s past love affair with another woman. Until then, Teruko’s reaction to finding out about his extramarital affairs (including those prior to marriage) was simply described by the word “surprise” (odoroki). Now, the narrator provides a long physical description: “The dates showed that this was quite a long time ago, but Teruko turned pale in an instant. The hands holding the letter shook and her heart was thumping. Teruko, who was already on the verge of losing her enthusiastic feelings, could no longer stand the anger and regret she felt.” Betrayed, she is livid. At first she had tried to elide the fact that her husband had betrayed her and tried to focus on the tasks at hand: building her new household, her sweet and fulfilling home; establishing herself as a wife; entering her husband’s landscape; and becoming his most valued companion. By the end of the narrative, though, she is bitter and angry: “Why did I pursue such a fate? Why did I believe him? How blind could I be!”

To accentuate the shock that Teruko felt, the narration draws deliberate parallels between the characterizations of Teruko and this ex-lover, revealing the superficiality of the earlier distinctions Teruko drew between herself and geisha. The woman who wrote the letters is

---

186 Ibid.
187 Nottā, Junketsu no kindai, 29.
188 Ibid., 80.
described as wealthy and of a similar socioeconomic class to Teruko. She writes passionately of her love for Utsumi, and she appears to have maintained and developed her relationship with Utsumi mostly in letters, just as Teruko had with him. Being of a higher social class than a geisha and feeling free to write passionate letters suggests that this woman too had attended a women’s school of advanced education. Not only her literary expression, but her very act of writing such explicitly passionate letters implies that she has been educated to express her feelings in the nonclassically Japanese way, which is a marker of modern institutional education. In other words, Utsumi’s past lover was also a self-conscious modern woman—like Teruko herself. In the scheme of romantic love ideology, heavily influenced by monotheistic Protestant thought, one’s first love should be one’s final and sole destination. Teruko’s indignation demonstrates the internalization of this value.

~Women, Men, Servants, and Provincial~

Teruko’s realization that Utsumi’s involvements with other women are just that, “involvements”—in other words, relationships in their own right—suggests to readers that in a man’s world, women are, after all, only “women,” as in “Otoya and Brother.” The social rhetoric of marriage and heterosexual relationships tries to distinguish between the educated and noneducated woman; the modern and nonmodern woman; the upper-class and lower-class woman; the marriageable and nonmarriageable woman; and the faithful wife and promiscuous prostitute. Teruko’s narrative reveals that often a single man will carry on relationships with all kinds of women (if at different points in his life), while the educated woman is expected to hold her lines firm. In the discovery that all these supposed boundaries mask the man’s lack of sexual purity, female readers are again reminded of their shared humanity with fellow women of varying classes, despite the seemingly firm lines drawn between them.

I say “again” reminded of their shared humanity here because, throughout the text, the narrator depicts geisha and women of the servant class in the same narrative frame as Teruko and shows her awareness of their presence. After the first dinner Teruko has with Utsumi’s family, they are “alone” again for the first time since their honeymoon. They are not really alone, though, because the presence of a maid is implied in the lines that they exchange, and suddenly it becomes clear that while this presence is supposedly nonconsequential, the maid is still there.

The maid’s presence is registered and noted by the narrator as the presence of a stranger and a part of the “public gaze” that regulates and alters Teruko and Utsumi’s behavior towards each other. Because of the behavior-altering presence, Utsumi acts as though they are a conventional couple, using the intimate command form *omae* when speaking to her instead of the

---

189 Saeki, ‘Iro’ to ‘ai’ no hikaku bunkashi, 15; Nottā, Junketsu no kindai, 26.
more respectfully intimate form, *anata*, that he had been using. This is something that Utsumi had lightheartedly told Teruko on the train from Tokyo to Chūkyō that he would have to do because they were “going into an old circle.” What seemed to be an odd but inconsequential statement to Teruko on the train, when put into practice, startles her. When Teruko hears Utsumi switch the term of address for the first time, the narrator tells us that while Teruko believes that such terms did not have any meaning on their own, she feels as though she is gradually being fit into a straitjacket. Here, we see how the disjunction between written and spoken words as well as the dissonance between ideals and “reality” is strongly interjected.

Teruko’s arrival in Chūkyō marks the beginning of her awareness and contact with people of the “lowly” classes. The narrator repeatedly refers to “people like this” or “people of such social circles” when Teruko is unsure of how to act or communicate with the carpenters or the geisha that visit her home, implying her lack of ease with people of a lower social standing than herself. One of the main ways in which the narrator marks class distinctions between Teruko and the carpenters and geisha is in the depictions of their speech. Although there is no description or mention of her having difficulties communicating with her in-laws, the narration says that Teruko could not at all understand the carpenters because they “spoke entirely in their native language (*dogo*).”

With the geisha, she initially is not sure how to address them, because she “had never associated with people from such social circles,” the narrator relates. Teruko evaluates the speech of the geisha with whom she converses. Tarō, for example, speaks “a mix of Tokyo and Nagoya dialects.” Teruko’s perception that Tarō seemed “not especially flirtatious” further puts her at ease and makes her feel like she might even be able to strike up a pleasant friendship. Descriptions concerning speech and Teruko’s reactions to it also point to another latent but important theme in the story and many other texts: Tokyo as the cultural center and other regions—even if commercially successful—as countrysides that represent vulgarity, backwardness, and antimodern values.

Even after a few uneasy incidents that make Teruko question the institution of marriage, she is still shown happily bustling about her new home—with many repressed feelings. As her disappointment deepens, the narrative tone lightens and shows Teruko’s increased focus on the

---

190 Ueno, “Nyōbō hajime,” 58.
191 Ibid., 61. The word for “native language” (*dogo*) here is not a term in use today. The characters that form this word are those for “earth” and “language,” corresponding to the term “*dojin*” (natives). This implies Teruko’s anthropological (and condescending) tone towards the carpenters as “natives” even though they are also Japanese.
192 Ibid., 71.
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid., 72.
superficial and immediate. This further accentuates her shock and sense of deception at the end. Signaled by Utsumi’s change of language and behavior, she is gradually boxed into her role as a *nyōbō* (wife), one who is continually referred to as being “old,” implying how drab she is, and who is described as being like a servant. The last lines in the story reveal her resignation to the life of a *nyōbō*, instead of the modern, respectable *shufū*: “She decided that she had no choice but to keep on the path of compromise she had entered, the path called ‘being the wife (*nyōbō*),’ in as free and as liberated a way as possible.”195 She has resigned herself to becoming a *nyōbō*, a traditionally hard-working wife who bears little sexuality. Perhaps the absence of the word *shufū*—meaning a modern and stylish housewife—is intentional. When the house is physically set up and she has a little time for self-reflection, her suppressed discomfort and disappointment exhibits itself as feeling strange about her public performance as a *nyōbō*. As the narrative nears its end, though, she suddenly seems to realize that this is no performance—it has turned into her lived reality.

~Different “Women”~

Many articles and recorded debates of the 1910s show women struggling with the notion of a monogamous marriage when it did not match their observations or experience. Fictional texts, as if reflecting this, expressed the melancholy, anger, and sadness of a nonfunctional marriage that claimed ownership of modernity and happiness. However, when one takes into account the literary trends of the time, which emphasized writing about the inevitable sadness of being human, one may find it difficult to know how much of the texts were influenced by the sociohistorical context, the author’s experience, or the writer’s artistic pursuits.

Through these texts we see narrators pointing to contradictions in the romantic love ideology, contradictions that lay out a clear pathway to a successful and happy marriage and family, as well as the construction of a warm “home.” The ideal dictates that heterosexual love must be realized through mutual respect. Courtship must remain sexually “pure,” and relations should be physically manifested only after sanctioned by the institution of marriage. In other words, the spiritual bond is expected to precede the physical one, which occurs only within the context of a monogamous and heterosexual marriage.

In “Otoya and Brother,” the protagonist who believes in the romantic love ideology is portrayed cynically. The narrator hints at the protagonist’s naïveté by juxtaposing the protagonist’s fantasy that her brother is having a monogamous and platonic relationship with a geisha and his promiscuous actions. This text uncovers an underlying similarity between the geisha and the schoolgirl as sexualized female bodies in the eyes of men. It also portrays the

195 Ibid., 81.
educated woman’s desire to save less fortunate women who represented a “social problem.” The narrator contests the view (presented by the protagonist) that class difference is superficial and easily overcome.

“Beginning Wifehood” represents texts that treat the disillusionment of the newlywed wife. The modern woman, Teruko, is eager to establish a home full of fun and modern sensibilities, including a modern notion of egalitarianism, which considers wives to be in full charge of the household and children’s education while the husband supports that project materially. Through her marriage, however, the newlywed modern woman finds out that nothing matches her ideals. Her supposed modern marriage is gradually repackaged as no different from a traditional one, in that she acts in conformity with the expectations of her in-laws. Through finding out that she has unwillingly entered into a polygamous relationship, Teruko is forced to reconsider the category of womanhood.

In these stories, the geisha figure functions to challenge the modern woman’s notion that men treat women equally in a heterosexual relationship. The definitive difference drawn between a geisha and a modern woman is in modern men’s treatment of her: geisha clearly exist outside the romantic love ideology paradigm. In other words, whereas the modern scientific paradigm presented a possibility of considering all women under the same category, there was clearly a category of women excluded. Through making this explicit, the stories force their readers to reconsider who defines and limits the “woman” category—a supposedly self-explanatory and natural biological categorization.

Both texts argue that although women distinguish themselves based on class, profession, and regional affiliations, men ultimately see all women of childbearing age as a single category. This points to the modern woman’s sense of dissonance between her self-identification and her externally imposed category—a problematic that continues for many modern women.
~In Closing~

This dissertation begins with a close examination of the modern woman figure as the authoritative narrator for the story of the “traditional” woman. Here, it appears that both Korean and Japanese women are simultaneously constructing themselves as self-conscious historical subjects and as witnesses to “vanishing” traditional figures. Already at this point, significant differences between the Korean narrator and the Japanese narrator begin to emerge. The narrator of the Korean story shows how her very body represents the nation (a point that is discussed in Chapter III), while the narrator of the Japanese story appears more concerned with the individual.

Chapter II focuses on the schoolgirl figure who strongly opposes marrying in the traditional way—through parental arrangement. This chapter shows how, for the schoolgirl figure, school is the site of ethical education. Her knowledge of the wrongfulness of parentally arranged marriage and her inspiration to rebel against her parents are represented as products of her education. Education is shown instilling the “modern” sensibilities befitting the modern citizen of a properly modern nation. The conflict is fierce in both cases, and readers are left with a sense of grim prospects for both characters, but, again, stark contrasts between the Japanese and Korean narratives emerge. The Japanese schoolgirl figure is portrayed as simply pondering her own future, whereas the Korean schoolgirl figure presents her story as significant for the entire nation, while she herself is left dead.

When first approaching the Korean and Japanese women figures, their significance appears to overlap, even be identical. However, a closer examination reveals that the differences are so great that a theoretical framework that considers only “influence” is insufficient. Chapter III analyzes Korean modern woman figures and shows that these stories are colored by fervent hope of national independence and “advancement” through heavy use of Protestant Christian imagery and neo-Confucian images of self-sacrificing women. Chapter IV focuses on figures of the Japanese modern woman who realize that the promise of a new marital paradigm is an illusion.

Many scholars have discussed the correlation between women and modernity and women and education as two separate problematics, but not one has addressed the relationship among women, modernity, and education. This triad is crucial for understanding East Asian modernity because it can reveal the Japanese and Korean strategies of modernization stemming from their positions as “latecomers.” The fiction of the early twentieth century shows the idealistic way the method of modernizing was taught as a philosophy or subject in a school setting instead of emerging out of everyday concerns. This study reveals how, in Korea and Japan, the ideology of modernity and the strategy of how to be a modern woman were taught to women in school and thus became intimately tied to promises of social and personal...
advancement—promises often not kept.