

The Paradoxical Structure of Modern “Love” in Korea: *Yeona*e and Its Possibilities

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Abstract

*Yeona*e, a common word in 20th century East Asia, was a new term that was introduced via the West. “*Yeona*e” has a longer history as a term that specifically referred to romantic love between young men and women, but its potential as a broader term referring to love in general was limited by the social circumstances of the time. Love began to be legitimized as a social value with the arrival of Christianity, and its legitimization was confirmed in the explosion of patriotism in the 1890s and 1900s. *Yeona*e developed along with this legitimization of love, and it stimulated changes in mentality, discourse, and social customs. First, *yeona*e was considered a limited and conditioned passion that was necessary for nationalism, but through the 1910s, *yeona*e was explored as a new strategy for the exaltation of private life. *Yeona*e was founded on the authority of self, subjectivity, and sensibility, and was expressed at the level of social activities and relations. *Yeona*e connected the dynamics of self to the revolutionary power that was challenging the old order of Confucianism and family. Important changes, especially on the micro level, were made possible with the popularization of love. However, *yeona*e implied contradictory motivations, such as the absolutism of self and the glorification of love, antipathy to the old family structure and hopes for a new one, and it was ultimately exhausted when it failed to derive energy from that complexity itself.

Keywords: love, *yeona*e, patriotism, Christianity, the public, the private, individuality, family, free marriage, free *yeona*e

Introduction

It was not until modern times that the concept of *yeonae* (romance), which refers to romantic love between men and women, appeared. Romantic love existed earlier, but it was only a century ago that this type of love and the relationship and behavior associated with it came to be called *yeonae*. So, romance can be called a modern phenomenon, as the term itself did not exist in East Asia until modern times. The Chinese characters for *yeonae* appeared for the first time in the mid-nineteenth century. W. H. Medhurst, a missionary, translated “love” into *yeonae* in his English-Chinese dictionary (1847-1848), which is believed to be the first use of the word in East Asia. At that time, *yeonae* was used mainly as a verb, while love as a noun was translated as *aejeong* (愛情, affection), *chong* (寵, endearment), or *in* (仁, generosity). Later, it gradually came to be widely used as a translation of love, while developing its usage as a noun, and by the 1880s, it was commonly used in Japan.¹ It is important to note that Iwamoto Yoshiharu used the word *yeonae* to represent the new concept of Platonic love as opposed to physical love.²

In Korea, where modernization took a slow course, many conceptual words were introduced via Japan. The concept of *yeonae* was produced in China, but it was Japan that spread and established its usage. Though it came as a result of adopting the Japanese usage of the term, the appearance of *yeonae* in Korea serves as a historical symbol signaling the fact that traditional relationships and order had begun to change. Of course, romantic relationships had existed prior to modernization, however they were not part of socially approved customs or norms. Instead, they were usually looked upon negatively as something harmful to social order and morality. Romantic relationships outside of marriage were only socially approved after the concept of *yeonae* appeared. As a concept, *yeonae* is based on a special understanding of human existence and social relationships and emotions. Romantic actors are individuals, individuals with inner minds. For *yeonae* to gain social acceptance, the inner feelings of individuals should be assumed to be truthful and individual autonomy of choice should be regarded as positive. In so far as *yeonae* is a matter of relationship, it includes the autonomy of will and action as well as the inner mind in it.

Yeonae grows on the foundation of specific social conditions and promotes that foundation to mature. *Yeonae* is more likely to occur in urban settings, on the proposition of free association between men and women, and requires the establishment of monogamy and reordering of family relations. Vital youth culture and planning of the life cycle anchored on adolescence are prerequisites of *yeonae*. Furthermore, it is

¹ Sougou and Hida (1989, 602).

² Yanabu (1982, 89-91).

indirectly connected with a decline in the mortality rate and extension of biological longevity.³ Created against the backdrop of all these complicated factors, the concept of *yeonae* in turn produces diverse new social phenomena. It exerts a tremendous influence in all areas, from the development of fashion and modes of behavior, feeling and its methods of communication, to changes in family and national institutions. The concept, institution, and custom of *yeonae*, which played an important role in formulating the modern era, are universal to humanity, but they are also associated with remarkable differences in accordance with the historical experiences of various regions. For instance, *yeonae* falls under romantic love,⁴ but it has a very specific usage, compared with love, amour, and liebe. Its history is also very different in Asia and Europe. While the concept of love existed before the tenth century, romance appeared in the late nineteenth century. Love inherited the spirit of noble passion and Christian minne-piety, but *yeonhae* has no such history. All these differences naturally resulted in discrepancies in the formation and historical trajectory of the concept of *yeonae*. In this paper, therefore, I attempt to examine the history of the formation of the concept of *yeonae* in Korea from the late 1910s to the early 1920s.

The concept of *yeonae* appeared and began to be popular in Korea between the late 1910s and the early 1920s. It played an important role in the formation and development of modern Korea. *Yeonae* bolstered the private realm, promoted the understanding of people as human beings with inner minds and feelings, changed the family system, and offered a new outlook on social reform. It was the subject of literature and art, generated new fashions, and profoundly influenced changes to the minute details of everyday life. Deprived of economic profits and isolated from political rights, the colonized Korean people were rapt with *yeonae* and held the illusion that they were actors who would bring about change. Because *yeonae* is related to changes in various areas, including conceptualization, institution, and custom, this paper aims to trace the process from the emergence of the concept to the provision of citizenship and its relationship with various other factors which contributed to forming modern Korea. It also examines how the specific character of romance, which was different from premodern *sarang* and the Western concept of love, was formulated and how it was engrained in the Korean experience of modernity.

³ Giddens (1996, 87-88); Stone (1977, 54-59, 102-104).

⁴ Giddens (1996, 84-86); Lumann (1986, 136-141).

Love in the Public Domain

Yeona has the same meaning as *sarang* and *ae* (愛 *ai* in Chinese) but its connotation is more limited than the latter. The concept of *sarang* existed before *yeona* emerged as a problematic concept and it was often used as a problematic term itself. *Sarang* and *ae* were not important values in Korea before modern times. The Korean word *sarang hada* (to love) was synonymous with the word *saenggak hada* (to think) and was long regarded as a mere sub-item belonging to the key Confucian virtue of *in* (仁, benevolence, *ren* in Chinese). The Chinese character *yeon* (戀 *lian* in Chinese), and Korean verbs, such as *goeda* (hold in the heart) and *geurida* (miss), which are currently used to mean love (*sarang*) in a broad sense, had negative connotations. *Yeon* referred to a state of mind in which one was unable to overcome lingering feelings of attachment, while *goeda* and *geurida* referred to the state in which one is inclined toward something and the feeling cannot be shaken off. Although the terms *sarang* and *ae* existed as ethical principles for human equality or passionate emotion, they were not looked upon as socially positive.

Why was the term *ae* marginalized when there was also a term like *in*, defined as *aein* (愛人, love for people)?⁵ Mozi (Motzu) regarded *ai* (愛 in Korean) as the highest ethical virtue as shown in his principle of *jianai* (universal love or inclusive care). Comparing him with Confucius, we can imagine why the latter was reluctant to approve *ae*. Mozi preached not only love for oneself but also love for each other and, especially, love for all without discrimination, which was his prescribed strategy to smooth over difficult times. *Jianxiangai* (universal love) and *jiaoxiangli* (mutual help) were new principles asserted by Mozi.⁶ Confucianists, who regarded Yangzhu and Mozi as the two chief rivals of debate, contested that the principle of *jianai* was the same as denying one's own father and demanded order in the subjects of love. They acknowledged that one has different feelings when looking at one's own child or a neighbor's child.⁷ While *in* was-is a more comprehensive term that includes *ae* and could-can be applied to all things in the universe according to a certain order, *ae* is thought to only provides the primal momentum for *in*. *In* is the highest, most inclusive principle, while *ae* is too weak to stand alone as a principle. "The virtue of *in* is so immense like heaven and earth, but *ae* alone is too narrow."⁸ *Ae* was not at the center of

⁵ 樊遲問仁。子曰 愛人。“Yanyuan” in *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects).

⁶ 子墨子言曰 以兼相愛 交相利之法易之。“Jianai” 兼愛 in Mozi 墨子 (The Works of Motzu).

⁷ In criticizing a follower of Mozi, Mencius said, “Do you believe that one loves his neighbor's son as much as his brother's son?” “Tengwengong” 滕文公, in Menzi (The Works of Mencius).

⁸ This view was presented by an imaginary Chinese scholar (*zhongshi* 中士) in *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義

Confucian order in East Asia. Naturally, the extreme mode of *ae*, i.e., love as passion, could not find public acceptance. Although there are numerous accounts of passion between men and women, from the *Samguk sagi* (Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms) and *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) to the novels of the latter half of the Joseon period, it was never accepted publicly as an appealing value. Even famous romance novels ended with a warning regarding the consequences of indiscreet passion.⁹

After the import of Christianity, *ae* and *sarang* emerged in East Asia. As found in *Tianzhu shiyi* (True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), Christian love was initially explained within the boundary of Confucian *in*. This is demonstrated well by such interpretations that love for God and fellow human beings is *in*,¹⁰ and that the injunctions to *aecheonju* (love God) and *aein* (love other people) explains *in* summarily.¹¹ ~~The Because any attempt to readjust the status of re-categorize love as the highest value was such would have come as a possible shock to Koreans, that was neutralized, instead the Christian doctrines of heaven, hell, and eternal soul were emphasized instead.~~ The idea of love became widespread with the growing influence of Christianity, the introduction of Protestantism, and the ~~introduction—influx~~ of missionaries ~~from the United States~~. As is well known, the Christian concept of love is first and foremost “God’s love.” “That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 13:34) is a commandment of love; here, love is understood as the form of God’s equal love. “A strong, noble, rich and wise man and a weak, base and foolish man are equal before God.”¹² The Christian conclusion of love is that, because Christians imitate or practice God’s love, “people across the country love and help each other as brothers without distinction,” and Christian countries are “today the strongest, the most powerful

(True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven) published in 1603. 仁道之大 比諸天地 無不覆載。今日一愛已爾 似乎太隘。Ricchi (1996, 367).

⁹ In *Yingying zhuan* (鶯鶯傳), one of the most famous love stories in East Asia, when the main character, Changsheng (長生), gave up on love with Yingying (鶯鶯), he said that a woman who could make a man fall in love quickly could never be a good partner. “If a beautiful woman’s fate does not bring calamity upon her, someone else will meet with that calamity.” Jeong (1995, 253). However, we see not “cold separation” but “living together after overcoming difficulties” in the end of the play, *Xixiangji* 西廂記 (The West Chamber), which was based on *Yingying zhuan* (鶯鶯傳). In Korea we can see this type of ending in *Chunhyangjeon* 春香傳 (Story of Chunhyang). Here, I point out that passion was not always regarded positively in writings such as novels, though I admit that “warnings against passion” were also not usual.

¹⁰ 仁也者 乃愛天主與夫愛人者。Ricci (1998, 358).

¹¹ 夫仁之說可約 而以二言窮之曰 愛天主 爲天主 無以尙。而爲天主者 愛人如己也。Ricci (1998, 363)

¹² “Editorial,” *The Independent*, September 3, 1896.

and the richest and have the most advanced civilizations.”¹³ Love was a signal of mental superiority and a foundation of material supremacy. It was believed that while Asians sought personal interest, Westerners were dedicated to public interest as a practice of love and shared equal responsibility based on the ethics of love and equality.¹⁴

After Christianity gave citizenship to the word love itself, it was often used in relation to the state, beginning in the late nineteenth century. Patriotic imagination, which we all know very well, is one example. State and love were not interconnected at first. Until the identity of the nation-state began to form after the Sino-Japanese war in 1894, [the prevailing concept of the state–people relationship between the state and people](#) was a contract- or responsibility-based one.¹⁵ However, patriotic passion emerged as an imperative after the Manmin Gongdonghoe (Convocation of Ten Thousand People) in 1898. It became possible to ask such questions as “Do you love His Majesty more than your own life?”¹⁶ The concept that “of all love, love for one’s country is the highest, the most constant and the most righteous”¹⁷ appeared during this period.¹⁸ After this, patriotic love remained fairly lukewarm until 1904. It then reached a peak from 1905 to 1910. The term love found firm public acceptance, and the pathos of bloody passion dominated the discourse. One remarked, “I sit and lie down for my country . . . bend my body and straighten it for my country. My love for my country never leaves me, even while eating, dressing, sleeping or waking.”¹⁹ The country demanded every last drop of blood in the body, and the state held absolute power even in matters of marriage and child-rearing. Every issue had to be interpreted for the state and by the state, even in debates over child marriage, condemnation of concubinage, and encouragement of widows to remarry.²⁰ But here is an amazing fact to note. The ever-touted love allowed all sorts of variations but excluded romantic love absolutely. The land, the people, “The Holy Savior Jesus,” “His Majesty The King,” parents, and even the “enemy” Imperial Japan, were considered subjects of love;²¹ however, romantic partners were not. This paradoxical scene characterized the

¹³ “Editorial,” *The Independent*, January 26, 1897.

¹⁴ “Editorial,” *Maeil sinmun*, May 28, 1898; “Editorial,” *The Independent*, February 6, 1899.

¹⁵ “Editorial,” *The Independent*, July 15, 1898; “Editorial,” *Maeil sinmun*, April 28, 1898.

¹⁶ “Editorial,” *The Independent*, January 8, 1898.

¹⁷ “Editorial,” *The Independent*, June 8, 1897.

¹⁸ The imagination related to the concept of “independence” changed from a task-centered to a passion-centered one. Ryu (2004, 45-53).

¹⁹ “Seoho mundap” in *Daehan maeil sinbo*, March 13, 1908.

²⁰ “Hanguk-eseo yeoja gyoyuk-ui piryo” (The Need for Women’s Education in Korea) in *Daehan maeil sinbo*, December 11, 1907; *The Independent*, June 16, 1896; Yi (1912, 32).

²¹ “Sarangga” (Song of Love) in *Daehan maeil sinbo*, July 11, 1907.

landscape of love during the 1900s. For romance to appear, there had to be a condition in which love could distinguish itself from its dominant discourse and usage. In the 1900s, when patriotic passion was regarded as the highest moral, there was love for god and nation but no *yeonae*.

From Free Marriage to Free *Yeonae*

The origin of the term *yeonae* can be traced back to the 1900s. In his partial translation of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* in 1910, Choe Nam-seon introduced one of the characters as follows: "He is a *yeonaedang* (romance chaser). He loves flowers, plays the flute, and writes vulgar songs. He has compassion for people, feels sad for women, smiles at children, and bears strong hatred against the revolutionaries' beheading of noblemen."²²(인용문 문단 바꾸지 말고 본문 중에서 처리했으면 좋습니다만...) [문제 없는데요...] Since his translation was based on the Japanese translation of the novel, it can be guessed that the term *yeonaedang* was a Japanese word used for the translation.²³ Here, *yeonae* is associated with writing poems, playing instruments, admiring women and children, loving people, and abhorring violence. By today's standards, it is closer to general love than to *yeonae*. Furthermore, in the 1900s, *yeonae* was categorized as free rights, together with thought and action,²⁴ and sometimes discussed in parallel with such activities as fighting, hunting, and gathering,²⁵ which differs from the current usage of the term. Occasionally, it was used in relation to adolescent characteristics,²⁶ but for the most part, its usage was accidental and episodic during the 1900s. It had no consistent usage, let alone developing a usage confined exclusively to romantic relationships.

It was not *yeonae* but free marriage that regulated romantic relationships in the 1900s. As equality between superiors and subordinates, men and women, and young and aged was emphasized with the formation of a new identity of *gungmin* (nation or people), free marriage became a radical method of practicing gender equality. Free marriage literally meant marrying a freely chosen partner. The question is on what such freedom was founded. In the 1900s, it referred to the spirit of a rational contract. Advocates of free marriage asserted that individual qualities such as appearance, talent, and intelligence, rather than family descent, should be the most important criteria in choosing one's future spouse. What they abhorred the most was the practice that

²² "ABC gye" in *Sonyeon* (Vol. 3, No. 7, 1910).

²³ Kim B. (1988, 306).

²⁴ *Mongmong* (夢夢) (1909, 29).

²⁵ Kim N. (1908, 306).

²⁶ Kim H. (1909, 10, 37); Choe M. (1908, 4, 47).

allowed “disabled people [to] marry healthy people or idiots [to] marry bright ones just because they are from a good family.”²⁷ It was believed that this would not guarantee the production of healthy, smart children, and that the wealth and power of a nation depends on healthy and intelligent people. For this, strict marital laws were required. Nice children could be born if good-looking, talented, and intelligent people marry people with the same qualities, thus advancing the nation’s civilization, wealth, and power.²⁸ Because the theory of free marriage was produced entirely within the framework of state planning, it allowed no room for private, accidental passion. As a natural result, the marriage process took a completely different course from that of modern *yeonae*. While *yeonae* was characterized by irrational passion and instant infatuation, or “love at first sight,”²⁹ free marriage was characterized by a careful, rational selection process: First, a person could not rule out the use of media such as newspaper advertisements or mailings to raise the odds of finding a suitable partner. After finding a potential partner, more caution was required. If the person had good feelings about the potential partner, they were supposed to remain “friends for a few years.” If they still felt the same, then a marriage engagement could be made. The final decision would be made several months or years after that point. They also had to file an official registration through the church or public office.³⁰

As this rational spirit of contract was represented in the name of freedom, courtship and marriage could not be private events. The private sphere of individuals had not yet emerged in the social reality that was dominated by public passion for the state. There were not yet any legal measure to protect people’s private lives, including issues concerning sex and disease, from being publicly discussed in newspapers.³¹ This situation continued for a while after the term *yeonae* became popular, from the late 1910s to the early 1920s. As is the case with all new terms, *yeonae* was the subject of heated conflicts and different interpretations for some time, and of particular interest was whether *yeonae* should be placed under government planning. People familiar with the Zeitgeist of the 1900s accepted the new concept and phenomenon of *yeonae* but tried hard to minimize its unsound consequences. It was deemed natural that women and men should marry based on *yeonae* and seek the happiness and advancement of the population based on it, but careless outpouring of passion beyond reasonable boundaries was considered very dangerous. They wanted to distinguish between the *yeonae* whose

²⁷ *Daehan maeil sinbo* (1907).

²⁸ “Editorial,” *The Independent*, February 12, 1898.

²⁹ Sarsby (1985, 30-33); Giddens (1996, 85).

³⁰ “Editorial,” *The Independent*, June 6, 1896.

³¹ Kwon (2000, 221-224).

“intention was marriage” and the *yeonae* which was a “fleeting bond of strong feelings,” and tried to protect the family system by forbidding love between married people.³² Identifying indiscreet, easy love with the old custom of men having concubines, they lamented that the old way reappeared in the form of “uncivilized freedom,” after a temporary halt in the enlightenment period of the 1900s.³³ In their eyes, the new vogue of *yeonae* was nothing more than immature boys chasing girls.

“Free *yeonae*” was a linguistic strategy to counter the attempt to put *yeonae* under the control of family and the state. The freedom in “free *yeonae*” refers to the freedom to follow the desires of one’s inner self, unlike the freedom in “free marriage.” The feeling of love arises from one’s emotions and, thus, cannot be controlled by objective or external forces. While the freedom in free marriage refers to a sort of market freedom, i.e., the efficiency of choice to reach a goal, freedom in free *yeonae* meant the rejection of authority and a goal itself. This concept of *yeonae* was based on a new understanding of human beings, which began to emerge in the 1910s. In the 1900s, humans were defined based on the collective identity of *gungmin* more than anything else, while in the 1910s they were newly understood as psychological beings bearing wisdom, love, and truth. Since the persuasive power of *gungmin* weakened considerably after the forced occupation by the Japanese, the concept of human beings with *ji* (知, wisdom), *jeong* (情, [love/affection](#)), and *ui* (義, truth) spread rapidly.³⁴ What was particularly problematic was the element of [emotion/jeong](#) ([여기서 love와 emotion, 두 가지 용어는 동일했으면 합니다. 모두 ‘정’의 번역어로 쓰신 거지요?](#)), and humans were redefined based on that element as free beings who could [make their own choices/choose their own way](#).³⁵ Humans were supposed to think and act as proactive subjects, following their life desires instead of authority figures, and be guided by their inner light instead of seeking a universal ideal.³⁶ A universal model of a human being no longer existed. Even Confucius, Dangun, and Jesus came to be seen simply as people who expanded their “own selves.” The whole universe came to be seen as the expression of the self.³⁷ There was no desire other than life itself, so one had to dare to reject even goodness if it was hampering their way of life.³⁸ This was the gist of the new understanding of human beings between the late 1910s and the early 1920s, on

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³² Il (1920, 4, 57).

³³ Jugan (主幹) (1920, 4, 57).

³⁴ For a general explanation of *ji* (知), *jeong* (情), and *ui* (義), with a special focus on *jeong*, as they relate to a certain type of person, see Hwang (1999).

³⁵ Yi G. (1962, 504).

³⁶ Na (1914, 12-13); Dolsaem (1915, 2, 47).

³⁷ Mun (1915, 2, 22).

³⁸ Chu (1915, 7, 59); Yi G. (1915, 3).

which the freedom and *yeonae* in free *yeonae* was based.

The Value of the Individual and Romance

The attitude that *yeonae* was only acceptable in conjunction with marriage was related to the concept of eugenics. In this approach, which regarded marriage as a tool for reproduction in public, *yeonae* was merely a surplus. The most it could do was provide the love of companionship between marriage partners. To this extent, claims that “marriage cannot be gauged by individual happiness and unhappiness, or like and dislike” and that “unless it is to produce very talented children, it is not true romance” were only natural.³⁹ *Yeonae* was considered a surplus or a peripheral goal and was not valued for its own sake. Yi Gwang-su expressed this view in *Honin-e deahan gwangyeon* (My View of Marriage). In this piece released in April 1917 in a daily newspaper, while writing *Mujeong* (The Heartless), he stated that the two objectives of marriage were reproduction and happiness. The goal of reproduction was to “produce as many wholesome talented children as possible and educate them as perfectly as possible,” while happiness was to be obtained by “*yeonae* and the positive influence of a peaceful family.”⁴⁰ The role and meaning of romantic love was secondary in this formula that sided tribal prosperity with individual happiness. As for the conditions of marriage, *yeonae* was grouped together with physical and mental health, age, and economic ability. Despite this, however, Yi gave a clue to the new perspective on *yeonae* in his [article](#). He viewed *yeonae* as the greatest happiness one can enjoy and recognized the possibility of *yeonae* standing alone, separate from marriage.

“*Yeonae* without marriage is imaginable, but marriage without *yeonae* is not.”⁴¹

This thesis drawn up by Yi was the basis of the free *yeonae* that mesmerized many young people. In order to imagine the autonomy of *yeonae*, an epistemological leap is needed which places personal happiness and national prosperity side by side. As long as the two goals coexist with each other, *yeonae* is seen as superfluous and secondary. Even if the legal form of the state was shattered by the Japanese occupation in 1910, the value of *yeonae* could not be asserted forcefully while passively accepting softened public pressure. At this juncture, the ideas of reconstructionists, such as Bertrand Russell, Edward Carpenter, and Ellen Key, who earned recognition around the time of World War I, played an important role. In particular, Ellen Key was of critical influence

³⁹ *Hakjigwang* 15 (1918): 3, 54.

⁴⁰ Yi G. (1962b, 54).

⁴¹ Yi G. (1962b, 55).

in establishing the concept of *yeonae* in Korea, China, and Japan. A pedagogue and revisionist well known for her works, *The Century of the Child*, *Love and Marriage*, and *Love and Ethics*, Ellen Key reorganized love as the highest principle in the social turmoil following World War I. In *Love and Marriage*, which was avidly received, Key's underlying theme was that the true wealth of a nation could be amassed "by producing as many healthy, lively, and happy people as possible." She viewed love and happiness as the primary driving force of the individual and the state. Individuals were to be able to pursue love and happiness and to look for new loves. Free divorce as well as free marriage was to be guaranteed. Happiness was the ultimate goal and could be reached only through love.⁴² In this respect, love was the principle penetrating all spheres from the present state of individuals to the future of the society and the nation. Social welfare and national wealth and power no longer rested with material goals. Individuals could be happy only through love, only happy individuals could create a positive future, and only sufficient energy could give true value to society and the nation. Love could not only save an individual but also the world.

Through Key's logic, private and public values were coherently connected from beginning to end. The private goal of personal happiness and the public goal of a prosperous nation were inseparable. Only if individuals were fulfilled in their happiness could the state and nation promise ultimate prosperity. This ideal was amazingly powerful and helped to liberate young Koreans. Having suffered from the parallel structure of private and public throughout the 1910s, they could now pursue the values of love and happiness without reservation. They regarded Ellen Key as the advocate of free *yeonae* and worshipped her fervently.⁴³ *Yeonae* was liberated from the shackles of the public sphere of the 1900s and was given a taste of freedom. Furthermore, as *yeonae* replaced *sarang* as the key word in translations of Key's writings, young people began to enjoy a freedom that was close to recklessness. As we know, there is a difference between love and *yeonae* that cannot be ignored. *Yeonae* only meant love between men and women. Love for god, state, family, and friends is love, but not *yeonae*.⁴⁴ The term, *yeonae*, was based on the idea that among the diverse feelings of love, attention should be given to love between men and women. Because Key's concept of love was translated as *yeonae*, it was believed that she emphasized the link between *yeonae* and

⁴² Key (1912, 7-44).

⁴³ "Choegeun joseon-e yuhaeng haneun sinsuleo" in *Gaebyeok*, Vol. 57, 1925.

⁴⁴ In Europe, confusion arose after the Greek words, Agape and Eros, were ambiguously translated into the Latin words, Amor, Dilectio, and Caritas. The comprehensive nature of the word "love" might cause confusion. Arendt et al. (1996, 38-29).

marriage and approved free divorce.⁴⁵ In terms of the public-private division, Key's thought, which tried to link the two, was actually used to approve only the private.

Furthermore, *yeonae* refers to not only an emotional state but also a relationship and an event.⁴⁶ In this sense, *yeonae* means a romantic relationship or a love affair rather than just love. The distance between *yeonae* and love created a Korean/East Asian condition of love. While love is a concept that represents individuality at a metaphysical level, just like the inner mind or affection, *yeonae* is an individual act at the level of social relations. That is why *yeonae* was so problematic in the early modern period. *Yeonae* had the effect of proclaiming a revolution of lurking individuality. Such claims that the realization and expression of self is a fundamental fact of the universe,⁴⁷ and that self-preservation should be the highest criterion of morality had a revolutionary quality hidden inside but not shown outwardly.⁴⁸ However, *yeonae*, by nature, is predisposed to disclosure. The declaration that “*yeonae* is indeed the paradise of the highest good sought by the life of youth” and “*yeonae* occupies the same status as religion”⁴⁹ could not just remain at the level of discussion. *Yeonae* brought to the fore young people trying publicly to pursue personal love and happiness, and reports of incidents like dismissal from school, divorce, and suicide were found in the newspapers everyday. *Yeonae* played a critical role in turning young people into forces of social resistance between the late 1910s and the early 1920s.

The External and Revolutionary Character of Romance

The term *yeonae* itself is of foreign origins. It came into existence from hearing and reading about the outside world. As can be imagined from the fact that the initial texts which popularized the term were translations of foreign novels,⁵⁰ it was Western and Japanese poems and novels dealing with romantic love that ignited dreams of *yeonae*. Newspapers and magazines also used the term initially to cover what was happening in

⁴⁵ Ju (1923, 5, 16).

⁴⁶ In the earlier period, *yeonae* was used for describing emotions as follows: “*yeonae*, hotter than fire, more dangerous than water” in *Nummul* (Tears) and “*yeonae* is heating up rapidly, though it had once cooled like ice” in *Guk-ui hyang* (Scent of Chrysanthemum).

⁴⁷ Jang (1914, 3).

⁴⁸ Yi (1915, 19).

⁴⁹ Hwang (1923, 50).

⁵⁰ The novels translated by Jo Jung-hwan, *Ssangongnu* (Two Stream of Nobel Tears, 1912) and *Janghanmang* (A Long-Lived Regretful Dream, 1913), contributed to the popularization of the term, *yeonae*, stating that “*yeonae* is holy.”

other countries.⁵¹ In this respect, the first form of *yeonae* was an imitative one.⁵² It is also necessary to remember that the new word *yeonae* was used in parallel with the English word “love” and the Japanese word *koi* (戀). Foreign languages exerted a strong influence. For example, if someone were to say in English to a couple in a romantic relationship, “Love is blind,” they would likely reply in English, “But our love has eyes.”⁵³ People began to express their feelings using foreign words, as shown in expressions like, “I am deeply in *koi* with a girl,”⁵⁴ “Y loves (리브하다) me,”⁵⁵ and “I confessed my *love* to my second cousin, but she rejected me.”⁵⁶ This is similar to what Guriyagawa Hakuson of Japan meant when he said that “there is no Japanese equivalent for the English term love,” or that “I love you” or “Je t’aime” cannot be translated into Japanese. The linguistic emotions attached to these words are not found in Japanese.⁵⁷ *Yeonae* was formed as the translation of foreign word whose equivalent was non-existent in Korean. *Yeonae* was born and raised in foreign lands far from its origins in the world of imported words estranged from the contemporaneous.

One characteristic of youth, the main actors in *yeonae*, is to show the externality of existence. After the 1910s, young people and students had no place in the family or the state. They had no place in family because they, being students, had not yet created their own families despite being physically and mentally mature, nor could they secure a stable existence in the country under the Japanese occupation. They experienced their existence as individuals because they did not have a collective identity as a member of the family or state. The experience of studying overseas or outside their hometowns undoubtedly had an influence. The evolutionistic sense, which took the form of national consciousness in the 1900s, began to be felt at the individual level, and people suffered from doubt and anxiety with their everyday struggles for survival. This led to such responses as: “Who is a powerful person? Is he the one who lies, deceives the world and then walks down the street brazen-faced? Oh, I am content with being a weak person,”⁵⁸ and “Fierce competition for vanity will resume tomorrow morning. My whole body shudders at the thought.”⁵⁹ The wind of change made one realize one’s status as a “weak person” but at the same time, offered an opportunity to unlimitedly experience the power of “subjectivity.” The

⁵¹ *Maeil sinbo*, July 2, 1914; March 6, 1915.

⁵² Ju (1921, 1, 5).

⁵³ Hyeon (1920, 131).

⁵⁴ Choe (1919, 6).

⁵⁵ Kim D. (1987a, 76).

⁵⁶ Kim D. (1987b, 76).

⁵⁷ Guriyagawa (1929, 15).

⁵⁸ Uchon (1919, 14).

⁵⁹ Manha (1919, 18).

contradiction of powerlessness and the power of individuality existed outside of both family and the state. When attention was given to this power, individuality became the basis for changing the entire social order. From this were raised the agendas to abolish the family system and improve individual self-dependence and to stop forced marriage and promote free *yeonae*.

As the autonomy of the private realm grew, *yeonae* began to be represented “not by theory but by passion, not by objectivity but by subjectivity.” As the individual was characterized by feelings and subjectivity, so was *yeonae*. Free *yeonae* had no interest in the objective quality of the subject, unlike free marriage of the 1900s. In *yeonae*, there is no distinction between rich and poor or noble and ignoble. How much land or knowledge one has does not matter. The subjectivity ~~which~~-that produces the feeling of *yeonae* is like the tongue recognizing the taste of food; it cannot be forced.⁶⁰ *Yeonae* escapes its ties to family and state through isolation and subjectivity. The possibility of “*yeonae* without marriage,” which Yi Gwang-su mentioned, comes from its characteristic of existing for its own sake. Paradoxically, however, *yeonae* found its way back to the family by retreating from marriage and the family system. Rejecting marriage and the family system and creating a new solidarity based on *yeonae*, the young devised romantic love to extend the moments of *yeonae* to the rest of their lives and tried to practice it through such terms as a “sweet” or “ideal” home. Rejecting parental authority and refusing to accept the relationship with their spouses from early marriage, they dreamed of “an ideal home in which they could enjoy harmony by helping each other and seeking their individuality without barriers—the paradise of humanity without pain or complaint, the ideal home, the incubator of love full of joy and satisfaction.”⁶¹ Although some wanted to take individual desires to the extreme and remove any “hint of family” entirely,⁶² they instead chose to reform the family system fundamentally rather than reject it all together. *Yeonae* between a man and a woman was assigned a unique role as an expression of individuality and comfort, thus the fact that individuals must live separate lives received no attention.

Of course, among the many notable social phenomena generated by the concept of *yeonae* was the fad of suicide, including couple suicide. But, unless such suicide was undertaken in order to seek the illusion of death and transcendence, *yeonae* was primarily used to reconstruct the family. While the former had a radical negative quality, the latter had a radical revolutionary one. Although they used mild terminology, “to reform the family,” their desire to completely disintegrate and

⁶⁰ Song (1915, 6).

⁶¹ Ongno (1921, 31).

⁶² Im (1922, 23, 29).

reconstruct the family was actually bolder than that. Family reform targeted all aspects of dress, food, and housing. The house, which had been designed to physically separate men and women, had to be recreated as a space oriented for husbands and wives. Food and dress had to change completely according to new standards of nutrition, hygiene, and beauty. Parental authority was challenged, and separate houses after marriage were proposed. The age-old vertical order of extended family suddenly came under critical fire. The traditional family was seen as patriarchal and male-centered, ignoring of individual integrity, and “a despotic home, without laughter or joy, like a desert.”⁶³ The new unit, which was called “home” instead of “family,” was to be based on a new ethic, i.e. love. Family life put forth by romance was very problematic as it was an extension of reconstructionism which stressed humanist love and mutual help between the strong and the weak. It was a revolution at a micro level.

Conclusion

Kim Nam-cheon said in 1939, “Free *yeonae* was a social problem 20 to 30 years ago.”⁶⁴ Five to six years before that, Yi Gwang-su said in *Heuk (Dirt(?)Soil)* that *yeonae* of the contemporary epoch was “indeed scientific and business-like,” “immensely different from the *yeonae* in what was then called the ‘sanctity of *yeonae*’ ten years ago.”⁶⁵ As those writers noted, *yeonae* arose as a social phenomenon between the late 1910s and the early 1920s. In the years immediately preceding and following the March First Independence Movement of 1919, the new concept of *yeonae* emerged and produced many problematic social phenomena. The term itself appeared from time to time in the 1900s, but it was during this period that it developed a consistent usage and became popular. According to Kim Gi-jin’s accounts, the term *yeonae* virtually did not exist until the second half of the 1910s; after that, it rapidly became common as an abbreviated form of free *yeonae*.⁶⁶ The history of *sarang*, which precedes that of *yeonae*, can be traced back even further. Although the term *sarang* existed before modern times, it emerged as a public value in the early modern period. Prior to the modern period, *sarang* was considered taboo, an unsound passion. Throughout the 1900s, it became a public value under the influence of Christianity and statism(patriotism?) [[“patriotism”](#) [맞을 것 같아요](#)], as Christianity preached the

⁶³ *Dong-a ilbo*, January 1, 1923.

⁶⁴ Kim N. (2000, 468).

⁶⁵ Yi (1962c, 114).

⁶⁶ Kim G. (1926, 16).

ethics of love, and devotion and passion for the state was strongly encouraged for nation-state formation.

But even after love was stressed as part of Christian and state ethics in the 1900s, another turn of events was needed to discover *yeonae*. In the 1900s, all kinds of love except romantic love were accepted. It was fundamentally different from *yeonae*, in which romantic love was viewed as the primary form of all love. In the context of Japanese colonialism, following the occupation in 1910, the authority of the state and nation weakened and the influence of political discourse waned noticeably. In this vacuum, expressions related to individuality, which had been negatively affected by the totalizing power of state and nation, came into bloom. However, because public values could not be formed from the individual, self-centered pursuit of self-expression and personal happiness, this private sphere was not easily justified. Following the pressure of national, public values that was felt in the 1900s, individuals, from the 1910s on, were confused in their search for a coexistence of public and private spheres. This search for a new way of reconciling these separate spheres into one was particularly due to the work of Allen Key. Key, one of the “reconstructionists” who emerged in the wake of World War I, claimed that individual love and happiness could be a driving force for true national prosperity. In this regard, love, as a private passion, could perform public tasks. The concept of *yeonae* represented this new way of thinking.

Yeonae declared its existence for its own sake beyond the planning of family and state. This was the era when ultimate unity between the self and the universe was sought, influenced by Emerson and Bergson. Thanks to the reorganization of the public-private structure on the one hand and the discovery of a higher existence, the universe, on the other, individuals were reborn as autonomous subjects characterized by having feelings, an inner mind, and subjectivity. *Yeonae* gave voice to the discourse of modern subjects in a popular, relationship oriented manner. Furthermore, on that basis, it led social change at the micro-level, for which the reconstruction of family played a critical role. As was true with the concept and idea associated with *yeonae*, ~~it's~~ the main actors, young people, ~~who~~ were external to family and the state, and ~~thanks to that externality, they~~ could ~~therefore~~ more easily experiment with radical reform. The expression of individuality through *yeonae* created a new social structure ~~which-that~~ inevitably conflicted with the existing order. *Yeonae* brought generational conflicts to the fore for the first time and introduced ~~a~~ heterogeneity(alterity?) [“heterogeneity” (다양성?) 맞는 것 같아요.] of communication difficulties. Because *yeonae* was love or a special kind of love, this process gave Korea's experience of modernity a unique hue. *Yeonae* originated from pre-modern love but had a completely different meaning. As a

translation of the word love, it established a very specific manner of usage and generated unique modes and customs. After undergoing the social turmoil of the late 1910s to the early 1920s, *yeonae* lost its external and revolutionary character rapidly. Despite the lingering influences of Peter A. Kropotkin, Russell, Carpenter, and Key, who declared that love was the basis of an outlook for world reform, *yeonae* became isolated from the reform discourse. This was because, after the first explosive period, the micro-level character of *yeonae* became focused on romantic relationships and was absorbed into the individual goal of happiness.

Glossary

<i>ae</i>	愛
<i>aecheonju</i>	愛天主
<i>aein</i>	愛人
<i>aejeong</i>	愛情
<i>ai</i> (Ch.) ▶ <i>ae</i>	
<i>chong</i>	寵
Chuangtzu	楊朱
Dangun	檀君
<i>gungmin</i>	國民
<i>jianai</i> (Ch.)	兼愛
<i>gyeomsangae</i>	兼相愛
<i>gyosangri</i>	交相利
<i>in</i>	仁
<i>koi</i> (Jp.)	戀
Mozi	墨子
<i>ren</i> (Ch.) ▶ <i>in</i>	
Yangzhu	楊朱
<i>yeonae</i>	戀愛
<i>yeonaedang</i>	戀愛黨

(Jp. Japanese)

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