

Alternative Forms of Marriage and Family in Colonial Korea

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Colonial Korea's marriage and family system that originated in the West produced diverse and complex practices, suggestions, and visions when it was introduced to Korea via Japan. These suggestions and visions crossed the boundaries of tradition and modernness and revealed dynamic and transitional characteristics of colonial Korean society. The young generation welcomed the import of the West's marriage system and gender identity with open arms. Liberals recognized its significance in principle but called for caution in its direct application. The older generation tried hard to preserve the traditional sexual morality and marriage system. Tensions, contradictions, and confrontations grew as numerous opinions and claims were put forth, and intellectuals searched for new forms of marriage and family. Consequently, lively debates and discussions were carried out about the issues of temporary separation, single life, trial and companionate marriages, friendship between the sexes, and alternative family. Recommendations and ideas raised by the intellectuals were a conservative reaction to imported modernity, a modern demand against oppressed sexual morality, and a critique of and a challenge to patriarchal society. Moreover, various ideas and thoughts like patriarchy, colonialism, liberalism, modernity, feminism, nationalism, and socialism/communism competed in the discussions on alternative forms of marriage and family.

Keywords: marriage, family, New Woman, temporary separation, single life, trial marriage, companionate marriage, intimacy, alternative family

Introduction

Since the late nineteenth century, Korea has shown a wide spectrum of changes as they transitioned from a pre-modern to modern period. Marriage and family

are not an exception. Modern ideas such as women's liberation, gender equality, free love, and ideal marriage influenced public issues and cultural exchanges related to colonial society, public discourses, and sometimes colonial power. In this regard, the very concepts of marriage and family were changed as individual gender identity was redefined (Kim 2004b: 119). The marriage and family system that originated in the West produced diverse and complex arrangements as it was introduced to Korea via Japan.

In general, the boundary between family and community has been considered vague and ambiguous in Korea. From this perspective, the most primitive forms of family are secret societies or pseudo religions which originated from indigenous tradition. Broadly speaking, one can perhaps include traditional rural communities and modified forms of collective farming (Kim 1984; 1987). It should be pointed out that there were efforts—although they occurred sporadically and spread to Manchuria at the time—to build an ideal community based on communal ownership and communal living. And there was the dream of socialists who were inspired by Western intellectuals to lead the social movements.¹

Narrowly speaking, the modern form of family was under the persistent and *long durée* influence of the Confucian patriarchal family system that was developed in the late Joseon period. There came the Japanese modern family system as a new influence, which was a composite form of the American model of family and the samurai tradition (Kim and Jeong 2001:232). Also added were socialist and communist theories such as Bolshevism and Kollontaism, which were imported either directly from Russia or via Japan (Kim 2005:275).

These diverse and complex ideas and practices regarding marriage and family turned out to be transient and dynamic, crossing boundaries between tradition and modernness. Young people became fervent followers of the modern marriage system and gender equality whereas older members of the society considered the Western style frivolous and extreme. Some conservative people took an unbending position of support and protection of the traditional sexual morality and marriage system (Chosun Ilbo, August 24, 1930). It provoked multiple

1. Yi Jae-yu, who was a leading communist in the 1930s, described the future communist society as follows: "With the advancement of social productivity, people will enjoy a high living standard without domination and oppression and the state power will be replaced by a political committee elected by social members with free will. Love between a man and a woman will see no end as high quality cultural life is being chosen and people will practice strict monogamy that is unimaginable today" (Kim 2007:309-10).

arrays of oppressions, conflicts, and contradictions. Descriptions of marriage and family that were often opposite to celebration and happiness should be understood in this context. As one intellectual wrote “Today’s Joseon presents a hell of marriage and sex,”² a tragic situation of conflicts and contradictions of marriage developed in colonial Korea.

Searching for alternatives was as desperate as the reality of marriage and family was miserable. However, the burden of reality came down heavy on those who sought to imagine freely in search of alternatives. One should bear in mind that the discussion on alternative forms of marriage and family was grounded on limited sources. Nevertheless, the overwhelming influence of tradition in colonial Korea did not always parallel the freshly imported Western modernity. Intellectuals who had to live in the institution of marriage and family carried out heated debates, reflecting on the authenticity and meanings, in search of new definitions of marriage and family.

Temporary Separation

One of the tepid solutions to solve the problem of marriage is to avoid or postpone it temporarily. Accordingly, a call for a temporary separation for married couples can be considered one of the most passive alternatives. For example, Ju Yo-seop suggested that while living together, couples should live far apart for a short period, say a month or so, once a year (Ju 1924:109). According to him, “many married couples insisted on *bubu beolgeo*, which means they live apart in separate houses and visit each other when they desire,” and by doing so, they could avoid unnecessary fights, complaints, and annoyances (Ju 1924:109). At the same time, he claimed that the time off from each other could give couples “new hope, new spirit, and new love.”

Ju’s argument reflected the unstable marriages and the relative increase in divorce during the nation’s time of transition, which continued into the 1930s. An article that looked into a couple’s trial separation in *Samcheolli* (1932) would be a good example of the debate. It begins with the problem of the day pointing

2. He added that many women are trapped in the adversity of female slavery called “wife” and listed examples: women who are treated as “useless woman” because they lost their virginity, women who stay in loveless marriages due to pregnancy, and women who wither away from raising children (Yi 1932:76).

to the fact that young intellectual men and women were facing a ‘tragedy of divorce’ in three to four years after marriage. In an open forum in search of a way to decrease the number of divorces, the article introduced a trial separation of three to five months that was practiced in America in order to avoid divorce and critically discussed whether the new trend could be an appropriate method in colonial Korea (*Samcheolli* 1932:70-3).

Out of eight intellectuals who participated in the discussion, only Ju Yo-seop and Hwang Deok-ae had a positive opinion of trial separations for married couples.³ The rest were either against it or skeptical. Yu Gwang-yeol said “Temporary separation is a fantasy that is not for us.” Kim Yeong-pal retorted that it is “a type of indulgence.” Song Geum-seon thought that the separation would not solve anything and Ju Yo-han said that “it appeared to be a pathologic phenomenon.” Furthermore, Bak Hui-do questioned whether it was “a pervert’s trick” and Kim Dong-jin declared that “if a couple lives separately that would be the end.” Most intellectuals showed concern for the seriousness of divorce, but at the same time, they could not accept temporary separation as an alternative. It was not because they thought they had to find a more permanent solution. They were supporters of the traditional view of marriage, which preaches that a husband and wife live together “until all black hair turns gray.” Supporting traditional marriage meant that the unfair treatment of women within the marriage system continued.

Single Life

Another passive alternative to marriage was to remain single. Na Hye-seok, in her article titled “Ihongobaekjang” (Divorce Confession) that was published four years after her divorce, described the pressure she felt in a traditional marriage and family system (Na 1934:425). Having had suffered neurosis because of it, she envied single women and supported the single status. However, in 1935, she expressed a skeptical view about single life by alluding to her “new life” since the divorce. She claimed that leading a single life is not natural in the sense that any relationship with the opposite sex would not become a healthy relationship with

3. Ju said, “It’s possible to give [each other] a break” and Hwang said, “If the couples had mutual understanding, it is a good idea to live separately when boredom sets in in the marriage. It is to prevent any regret” (*Samcheolli* 1932:70-3).

character but a relationship of passion. As a result, single women would experience severe mental instability and a dull psychological state (Na 1935a: 431-2).

Her contradictory and ambivalent view on single life appeared in another article published that same year. In “Dokshinyeoseongui jeongjoron” (Theory on the Chastity of Single Woman), Na expressed her opinion on being single based on her own experience when she stayed in France (Na 1935c: 474). As she described the contemporary trend of staying single in the Western world where, with the progress of civilization, more and more people tended to live a single life and did not feel the need to have a family as long as sexual desire was managed, she claimed that singles in the West did not have time to feel lonely and their job was a mental comfort to them. She said that she was not “promoting single life,” but she just thought that it would be good for everyone to stay single as long as one could. Even though she had some reservations about being single, what she supported ultimately was free love between men and women.

Na’s aspiration for a western family lifestyle showed in her other writings.⁴ She insisted that the “sweet home of the West” was never possible only with the efforts of the husband and wife but also required a free relationship beyond marriage. She focused especially on women’s relationships with the opposite sex. Her argument was based on the premise that marriage and family life produce boredom as couples face each other day and night. Husbands experience the highs and lows of complex society while their wives are trapped in a tiny home doing the same mundane work every day. Wives are not able to understand the ups and downs of their husbands’ emotions and vice versa. No wonder family life is “weary and dry.” Na asked what would become of a marriage that began with dating when the man feels attraction and curiosity toward the woman but then he sees everything in the woman and those feelings eventually disappear as the man matures with constant social experiences (Na 1935c: 475). For this reason, Na felt that it was absolutely necessary for married women to have a social relation with the opposite sex. Chastity is “neither a moral nor a law, it is only a hobby” (Na 1935a: 432) and modern people would rather live a happy social life through buying sex than suffering from neurosis and hysteria caused by a suppressed sexual desire. From this, her famous statement followed: “We need male prostitutes as well as female prostitutes” (Na 1935c: 473).

4. On the Russian family, Na said, “The Russian family system made me realize, for the first time in my life, that family can have a strong influence.” See Na 1923 or Yi 2000:243-5.

Trial and Companionate Marriages

Na represented the first generation of women who were in favor of gender equality, free love, and free marriage and she provided many suggestions and much insight into alternative forms of marriage and family. Another alternative she suggested was ‘trial marriage.’ In an interview with *Samcheolli* in May 1930, Na said that the purpose of marriage is to gain a husband or wife and “children are byproducts” (Na 1930:54). Na explained that the trial marriage, which was proposed in Europe, requires contraception and it could be a way to prevent frequent divorce as well as allowing sex between men and women to be easy. She expressed a positive response to the question of trial marriage that was already being practiced by some new couples with advanced thinking.

In fact, trial marriage was companionate marriage (*uae gyeolhon*), which was widely discussed among intellectuals in the early 1930s. *The American Heritage Dictionary, 4th Edition* (2000) defines companion marriage as “a marriage in which the partners agree not to have children and may divorce by mutual consent, with neither partner responsible for the financial welfare of the other.” It is similar to the trial marriage suggested by Bertrand Russell and the term originated in an article by M. Knight in *Journal of Social Hygiene* in May 1924 (Yi 1932:76). Knight presented companionate marriage as a lawful marriage, co-existing with the traditional marriage system (Knight 1924:258). Companionate marriage was theorized and developed by Benjamin Barr Lindsey and in 1927, together with Wainwright Evans, he published *The Companionate Marriage*.

It is interesting to note that the concept of companionate marriage, which was a hot topic in 1920s America, sparked an active discussion in colonial Korea in the 1930s and on. Fierce arguments occurred about whether it was appropriate in Korea. An Gwang-ho argued that companionate marriage was born out of denying the value of chastity in the West. As for Korea, which seems to move in a similar direction when it comes to chastity, An wrote, “The only solution would be letting a man and a woman who love each other but do not have economic means to support a family get married but not have children” (An 1931:13). Nevertheless, An added a condition: this form of marriage could be used as a temporary living arrangement by promiscuous people and if careful consideration is not given, it could turn into nothing but “long-term prostitution” (An 1931:13).

Intellectuals at the time approached this foreign concept with caution, recog-

nizing its significance but with reservations. Song Geum-seon saw trial marriage and companionate marriage as a continuation of importing western individualism in reaction to Korea's failure of women's liberation and the women's movement (Song 1933:102). In a round table discussion on dating, marriage and divorce, held by *Sindonga*, Yi Yin pointed out that because the main point for trial marriage and companion marriage is sexual intercourse, the marriages produce many side-effects.⁵

A similar view on companionate marriage was expressed by Baek Cheol. He believed that companionate marriage only gratified carnal desires and it was nothing but degrading today's marriage practices (Baek 1933:32-3). Also, he emphasized that in this time of an anomalous system of marriage,⁶ marriage does not remain a private matter centered on emotion only, but it bears "social and class responsibilities" and in these responsibilities the real solution lies. Even though he didn't specify what the social and class responsibilities were, it is clear that he thought companionate marriage could not be an alternative in colonial Korea.

Yu Cheol-su (1931) attempted to critically examine companionate marriage from a socialist point of view. From his perspective, companionate marriage was proposed in America in order to rationalize and moralize the American life of sensual pleasures. Yu saw that it was not a new concept, but a way to legalize the already prevalent sexual practices and secretive contraceptive use in America. In his articles, he summarized the definition of companionate marriage proposed by Lindsey:⁷

1. A marriage candidate should complete medical tests.
2. A marriage candidate must use scientific contraceptive methods.
3. Before having children (here is where the bourgeoisie characteristic of trying to maintain the family institution is revealed), they can divorce freely without alimony.

5. See Yu et al. 1935:29. All of the participants in this round table discussion considered the two marriages the same, but Nam Pa-saeng differentiated between the two based on Lindsey's description. Nam said that trial marriage has no intention of developing into a permanent arrangement, yet companionate marriage can change into a formal marriage (family and reproduction) depending on financial and health conditions and the spouse's free will (Na 1930:35).

6. He pointed out that "unhealthy and obese old men have several concubines, yet healthy young men with talent and courage are single," and "the imbalance continues to rise: divorce is on the increase and wives become prostitutes" (Baek 1933:33).

7. "Companionate marriage is a legal marriage in which spouses practice legalized contraception and divorce by mutual agreement. Usually no alimony is paid" (Yu 1931:89).

4. A couple can live together as long as they like without having children by using contraception and can separate when they don't want to remain together anymore. Sexual satisfaction gives hope that one can be free from the debauchery and mental pain caused by sexual suppression.
5. Companionate marriage may lead to a permanent marriage, which gives hope of a decrease in divorce and debauchery.
6. Singles with financial hardship can be in a companionate marriage until their situation improves.

Yu called Lindsey's suggestion an "empty hope" by making the point that moralizing the existing phenomena does not solve the sexual question itself. Having thought that companionate marriage is nothing but a rationalization of the existing sexual problem in the U.S., for Yu, it would be nearly impossible to prevent American society from falling into a crisis of sexuality and debauchery. He claimed that what is needed is a "fundamental solution" (Yu 1931:89); in other words, a change of the social structure to a socialist society.

But not all socialists agreed with his opinion. Kim Ok-yeop believed that the structure of a specific society expresses itself through sexual life. He drew attention to the fact that a college graduate's income was not enough to feed a family, thus the young generation naturally gives up on marriage and family. It was inevitable to see the emergence of alternatives to traditional marriage as a way of fulfilling sexual desire; corresponding new ethics and morals thus follow. He saw that companionate marriage, in this sense, was an appropriate alternative. Although it was obviously an American style, the reality left no choice but companionate marriage. Therefore, he insisted, rejecting it on the grounds that it is of "foreign" origin does not make sense.

Nevertheless, Kim Ok-yeop kept a reserved view on companionate marriage itself and whether the circumstances of colonial Korea would be fit for it. He was just pointing out that it is frivolous to question the appropriateness of companionate marriage when a phenomenon similar to that of American companionate marriage was found also in Korea. According to Kim, sex ideology changes proportional to social and political changes (Kim 1931:11). One should not pretend that changes in sexual practice do not exist or ignore them as decadence. He positively tried to make sense of companionate marriage in the context of colonial Korea.

A similar argument was presented by Yi Seok-hun. As Kim Ok-yeop

focused on the poverty and unemployment of the young generation, Yi Seok-hun emphasized the tragic reality in which “marriage hell, sex hell” took place. His interest in companionate marriage stemmed from this reality. Yi introduced the definition and history of companionate marriage and proposed that companionate marriage should be introduced into his own society. The ultimate destination of love, according to Yi, is marriage, whether it was pursued consciously or unconsciously. He added that no matter what kind of love one chooses, it is legitimate with a premise for marriage. Especially “for men and women of Joseon in this dismal time, it is a must” (Yi 1932:76-7). The only criticism he had was that the method was wrong.

The way he insisted on adopting companionate marriage should be understood in the context of his will to “correct” it. For him, sex and love have instrumental values subjugated to revolution. He questioned, “How can we spend our precious energy on trivial things like love when we should put all of ourselves into [revolution]?” (Yi 1932:76-7). Love, according to him, “makes us courageous and worthy” and is an absolute necessity for revolutionary fights and survival. He claimed that people should boldly import companionate marriage and at the same time, let go of individualism-oriented love, pleasure-oriented love, and love for love’s sake. What he proposed was comradely love born out of the spirit of helping each other. He believed that it was the “correct way” of love and will resolve the chaotic morality (Yi 1932:76-7). Furthermore, he believed that it gave hope for the upcoming socialist society.

Companionate marriage evolved from changes in sexual morality among white middle-class Americans in the 1910s. In the nineteenth century, men and women, whether they were feminists, supporters of free love or conservative moralists, feared excessive sexuality and called for moderation. This Victorian custom started to fall apart in the early twentieth century. In the 1910s, America saw young middle-class women participate in higher education, the labor market, feminism, and innovative politics. The old sex culture in workplaces gradually faced criticism. These women recognized that the role of wife and mother alone was too weak to form a social power and started to demand equality beyond political participation (Simmons 1989:158-9). This new sexual morality undermined the basis of the Victorian sexual code and encouraged some women’s sexual assertiveness (Simmons 1989:157). Even young middle-class men wanted to break from the nineteenth-century oppression. In big industrial organizations, male office workers doing professional work considered the old politics worthless and corrupted. Many men were attracted to women, leisure, art or radical politics, which they couldn’t as the Victorian Man (Simmons 1989:159).

The first sexual revolution for twentieth-century Americans was the image of the flapper, a young and beautiful woman who popularized dynamic sexual freedom. All scholars, reformists, and a small number of radicals realized that the social changes they witnessed would not reverse its course. They explained, justified, and criticized the popular sexual behaviors and developed them into a modern sex ideology. Lindsey's companionate marriage came out of this trend.⁸

For them, sex was a natural part of life and a positive source of energy and creativity rather than a drain on individual powers. Limiting sex to a means of reproduction was cruel and celibacy was a religious fanatic's effort to magnify "ugliness, original sin, and the fig leaves" (Simmons 1989:161). The companionate marriage represents a new cultural ideal, in which women's new sexuality was accepted while pregnancy was controlled for men's satisfaction. Sexual and emotional companionship was the basis for the relationship. The companionate ideal epitomized the twentieth-century liberal criticism of sexual oppression (Simmons 1989:161-2).

Resistance to Victorian oppression was much more complex than it appeared on the surface. Changes occurred in sex culture as well as the view of the past persisted. In the new ideology, fear of women's sexuality existed similar to the Victorian threat against prostitution (Simmons 1989:171). To say that oppression of women continued means male dominance did not decline, rather it constituted a strategic modification (Simmons 1989:158). New discourses on sex during the 1920s and 1930s did not imply "liberation," instead it was a new form of regulation. Although sexual revisionists, represented by Lindsey, recognized improvements in women's status and power, they encouraged women not to go too far and not to try to control men too much (Simmons 1989:169).

The intellectuals in colonial Korea didn't have a comprehensive understanding of the social changes and their implications in American society, which was

8. Spearheaded by Lindsey, American figures such as Ira S. Wile who was a child psychiatrist and sex educator, Lorine Pruette, a psychologist who studied women's conflict between marriage and career, and sociologist Ernest Groves who founded the field of marriage counseling reshaped the European ideas of Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis, whose ideas were being popularized in the United States in the 1910s, into a distinctive new American discourse on sexuality and marriage. Floyd Dell and Margaret Sanger shifted from attacking Victorian morals to seeking a solution within a reformed marriage in the 1920s. Sinclair Lewis and Fannie Hurst published novels that offered extensive commentaries on sexual relationships. Samuel Schmalhausen and V. F. Calverton, both radicals, collaborated in producing the liberal and socialist journal *Modern Quarterly* between 1925 and 1932 (Simmons 1989:160-1).

the background for companionate marriage. Superficial understanding of companionate marriage appeared as they described it: “a temporary living arrangement by sexually indiscriminate people” (An 1931), “a degraded form only to satisfy carnal desire” (Baek 1933), and “an attempt to officiate a life of follies” (Yu 1931). These intellectuals’ lack of understanding of the progressive changes in American society reflects the reverse of Orientalism, or Occidentalism, which alienates the other based on an overemphasis on the heterogeneity of an alien culture.

The leading socialists also had apparent limitations in accepting companionate marriage. They searched for the contradictions of sex and marriage in colonial Korea, as seen in a mature capitalist society such as America. What they didn’t see were the limitations of American society and the fact that it was a strategic revision of male dominance. The socialists mechanically applied the symptoms of the leading capitalist society to colonial Korea and proposed a bold acceptance of companionate marriage.⁹

Intimacy and Friendship between the Sexes

Another alternative to marriage and family in this period was friendship between the sexes. The issue was frequently taken to be a subject in novels, movies, and other popular media. In a November 1926 *Sinyeoseong* article on conversations between male and female intellectuals, the newspaper reporter Gang Yeong-suk said that “the times when women were seduced by sweet proposals by men are over” (Ssang 1926:40).

Her counterpart in the conversation was her colleague Choe Sang-hyeon. Gang said that Choe was the seventh man who had proposed to her. She harshly criticized all the men who had proposed as “goblins of individualism and chauvinism.” The marriage proposals were on the level of “a slavery negotiation, human trafficking.” Choe responded saying that she “considers sacred love a business negotiation.” Gang retorted that “man’s love is a fake love with which to trick innocent women to have their pretty face and body” (Ssang 1926:41).

9. Lindsey’s companionate marriage included not only the intellectuals and the haves who could afford an abortion or an attorney, but also the uneducated and the have-nots (Nam 1930:34). It recognized the reality of marriage of the economically and educationally lower class and had the intention of relieving their suffering. This aspect may have appealed to the socialists of colonial Korea such as Kim Ok-yeop or Yi Seok-hun.

Gang's remarks reflected the atmosphere of a society where it was very rare to find the authenticity of love in a young man's behavior: They just enjoy the love affair under the name of modern love. She was despairingly negative about friendship between the sexes, as she expressed "finding a true male friend is like catching a star" (Ssang 1926:40-2). This was not limited to her case.¹⁰

In a discussion on family life during wartime, held in March 1940, Hwang Sin-deok reminisced about her student days in Tokyo, where she had a good time with male friends. She maintained these friendships even after her marriage, she said, but "men do not have hearts like that of women" (Bak et al. 1940:242). Despite her own experience, however, she was negative about friendship between the sexes. She considered friendship a necessary process before marriage, but after marriage, it is not needed since love for a husband is everything and enough. Choe Jeong-hui agreed with Hwang on that, saying "between the sexes, with the exception of sexual relationships, no friendship can possibly be built as between the same sexes" (Bak et al. 1940:242-3).

Men also had a skeptical view on this issue. Yi Tae-jun thought that friendship is the most beautiful and persistent one out of all morals of humanity and it is too burdensome for young men and women to achieve. In his opinion, friendship is not needed with the opposite sex, as "love is natural and appropriate." If there's an attraction, he advised, "Do not plan to develop friendship. Rather, love with confidence" (Yi 1944:75).

However, he did not absolutely deny friendship between the sexes. He acknowledged that friendship is possible when the two were family friends or have a huge age gap. Despite this, he still believed pure friendship is difficult to have with the opposite sex and if friendship is claimed when an attraction was clearly there, it was dishonesty. Furthermore, he called such cases mutated lovers. He amusingly described men's weakness for sex as "a high intellect and lofty character that make no difference for one chance" (Yi 1944:74). He made a satirical statement that "friendship between a man and a woman needs to be under probation stronger than that of a political offender" (Yi 1944:74-5).

Yi Man-gyu also said sternly that friendship cannot exist between the sexes. Only a spiritual unity can be considered friendship, but if a man and a woman are connected spiritually, it is love. A true friendship between the sexes, accord-

10. Ju Yo-Seop expressed a similar sentiment when he said that "divorced couples may maintain a close friendship" (Ju 1924:113-5).

ing to Yi, naturally transforms into love, therefore one can say there's no true friendship left in the relationship. He explained that there are three cases for which true friendship seems to exist. First, it is when love between two people has not yet developed. Second, one has a crush on the other. He thought that this doesn't last long, though. Third, love without physical intimacy, in other words, platonic love. He expressed his own anxiety and unpleasantness that he felt toward men and women "pretending friendship."¹¹

Na Hye-seok had a different approach. She tried to establish friendship between the sexes as an alternative to marriage. She, as a new woman, was at a different level. In "Iseongganui uaeron - areumdaun nammaeui gi" (Friendship between the Sexes — A Beautiful Diary of a Sister and a Brother), she describes her experience with her male friend So Wan-gyu. She met So through a mutual friend when she stayed at her friend's house in Seoul after her divorce. So Wan-gyu was divorced from an uneducated, old fashioned woman whom he had married by arranged marriage (Na 1935b: 444). So became her attorney when she sued Choe Lin for alimony in 1934 (Donga ilbo, November 20, 1934; Chosun joongang ilbo, November 20, 1934). Their relationship developed to the point that "we miss each other so much when we are apart and when we meet our hearts are pounding. There are many tempting moments to damage our friendship, but we have been able to be sister and brother so far" (Na 1935b: 454).

They never married, even though they thought about it. So Wan-gyu liked Na as a girlfriend who understood him better than anyone, yet, he was hesitant to take her as a wife because she was so headstrong and independent (Na 1935b: 452). Na was also hesitant to marry him because of his old-fashioned ideas. She said that she couldn't take the role of an obedient wife and couldn't accept the system in which a man can always be a new husband no matter how many times he marries, but a woman becomes a "used woman" after the first marriage falls apart (Na 1935b: 447).

For So Wan-gyu, who was an educated lawyer, the best thing a woman could do was to obey her husband. When a friend commented that the women who would be glad to obey men could be found only in rural areas, for individualism and respect for individuality was prevalent in urban cities of the time, he responded, "Rural women obey unconsciously but we need modern women who would obey consciously" (Na 1935b: 445). He added that "that is a true

11. See Yi 1939. He stated that his argument was based on the Japanese scholar Kawai Eijiro's theory.

individual, human being, and woman.” He hoped that there would be enough obedient women in the cities as well as in rural areas. Having to make money, men “suffer from mental stress,” therefore, “they need to regain the ability to focus at home” (Na 1935b: 445). A wife’s role, according to So Wan-gyu, is not to raise questions, but to obey completely. Na called his way of thinking “a feudalistic idea.” He responded by saying that human life has been the same all along and labeling it doesn’t change anything (Na 1935b: 445).

One day, Na stopped by So’s new office. So comforted her, presuming that her life was lonely after the divorce, but Na told him that her lonely life had become a happy life.¹²

So: I think the kingdom a woman belongs to is family.

Na: It depends.

So: She’d be unhappy if she left her family.

Na: She may be happier.

So Wan-gyu added that because women forget where they belong, there’s no peace in families. Na responded that it is also a product of civilization (Na 1935b: 447). When Na visited So when he was ill with the flu, she encountered a situation where the friendship between “best friends” might break down (Na 1935b: 451-2).

Na let So put his head on her lap. So put his arms around Na and their breathing became heavy.

So: Darling, let’s lie down.

Na grabbed a pillow and put his head on it.

So: Darling, give me a kiss.

Na: My dear, the thought of it would not help your illness (Na 1935b: 451).

She managed to evade a situation which might have broken her friendship with So. She believed and practiced friendship between the sexes. As Na Hye-seok wrote in “*Ithongobaekjang*,” she considered such feelings neither sinful nor mistakes as long as they did not hurt the legal spouses of the involved parties (Na

12. Na 1935b: 446. The original text was written in Japanese and translated into Korean by Yi.Sang-Gyeong.

1934:406). In fact, she thought that such feelings were appropriate for the most modern and progressive intellectuals. As already mentioned, Na's view that "chastity is neither moral nor law, but only a hobby" is reaffirmed as she added that it is never something to which one's heart should be fettered (Na 1935a: 432).

She painfully contemplated love and marriage in colonial Korea where tradition and modern thoughts chaotically co-existed. Her proposals for single living, male prostitution, trial marriage, and friendship between the sexes are the result of her self-reflection and intellectual orientation. In a sense, her own experience with So Wan-gyu was her way of answering the demand of the time.

Alternative Family

The most active alternative to traditional family is "alternative family." However, it is impossible to find a realistic form of an alternative family in colonial Korea. The novel *Jingnyeoseong* by Sim Hun, published as a newspaper series starting in 1934, offered a model.¹³ The protagonist of the novel is the youngest daughter of a declining noble family. Her nickname was Bang-ul, meaning a small round bell.¹⁴ She did not have a real name until five years after her arranged marriage to a much younger boy of a noble family in Seoul. Her in-laws decided to register the marriage finally and the name "Yi In-suk" was made hurriedly.¹⁵ In-suk lived as an "ornament" to old-fashioned in-laws where four generations of the family lived under one roof. Her life changed when she met

13. After the death of Sim Hun in 1936, this novel was published as a two-volume book in 1937 with a preface by Hong Myeong-hui and as part of *Hyeondaejangpyeonsoseoljeonjip* (Collection of Contemporary Novels: Full-length Novels) in volumes 9 and 10. This article cited Sim's novel from the 1987 *Hangukhyeondaesoseolchongseo* (Complete Volume of Korean Contemporary Novels).

14. "She looks like a round bell doing cute things, moving from one room to the other as if a round bell rolls. Her eyes are round and dark with sparks and her voice is clear and has a metallic tone just like a tinker bell ringing. Anyone who saw her was captured by her cuteness that they want to have her as if she can be a bell dangling from a belt. That's how she got her nickname" (Sim 1987:8).

15. The process of getting her full name, Yi In-suk, is confusing. In another part of the novel, Bang-ul entered a private girls' school when her much younger husband went to Japan to study. When she registered at the school, Bang-ul wrote the name of another girl who had just graduated at the top of the class (Sim 1987:337).

Bak Bok-sun who was a high school educated illegitimate child of a servant and an active member of a feminist organization (Sim 1987:198-201). In-suk became aware of herself in the context of women, marriage, and family.

When In-suk heard the rumor that her husband was having an affair with a Japanese woman while studying in Japan, she expressed her despair to Bok-sun. Bok-sun criticized In-suk for her dependency on a husband and firmly stated that all women should prepare themselves mentally to live without a husband. Bok-sun said that if a woman wanted to continue to live like a parasite attached to her husband, she might as well be an undocumented slave (Sim 1987:445).

In-suk agreed with Bok-sun that spouses should respect each other in order to develop love. She also agreed that a chain of oppression and obedience is put on women as soon as they get married; and with lower education and an inability to earn an income, the only choice left for women is to work like a slave in her family (Sim 1987:36-7).

In-suk questioned whether she was “raped” by her husband who was infected with a venereal disease as a result of his active sex life when he had sex with her while she was asleep. After this instance, she became skeptical of married life, which ignores the rights of a wife in the name of marriage, and she started thinking that the system of marriage puts women in a hell called family (Sim 1987:161).

She started to contemplate why women could not live alone and finally arrived at the conclusion that it was due to a lack of economic ability (Sim 1987:163). She lamented the fact that she had wasted her life on taking care of her lifeless in-laws and husband of noble birth who did nothing but womanize all his life (Sim 1987:199). She decided to get a divorce.

After the divorce, she finished school and moved north. She settled “in a small seashore town a few hundred miles north of the northernmost city and worked as a kindergarten helper” (Sim 1987:465) Here, Bong-hui who was In-suk’s sister-in-law and her husband Bak Se-cheol, a revolutionist’s son,¹⁶ were teaching about two hundred children of the poor. Bok-sun joined them after serving a term in prison for a political offense. They started communal living by contributing a proportion of their income and running the kindergarten and school together.

16. Bak Se-cheol never saw his father. His father was in exile in Siberia and no one heard from him for twenty years. Se-cheol’s mother passed away sometime after being imprisoned for the March First Independent Movement in 1919 (Sim 1987:378).

They even drafted a simplified law which specified each member's role as if governing a small country: Bok-sun was a representative for the new family and handled external affairs, In-suk was in charge of fostering children, Bong-hui took care of the finances, and Se-cheol being so busy did not have any specific role, but was in charge of miscellaneous matters (Sim 1987:476).

A revolutionist's son, a daughter of a nobleman, a daughter-in-law of a noble family, and an illegitimate child of a servant gathered together to establish a communal family. There were no masters, servants, rich, or poor. They stripped off the old moral traditions and even the gender differences. They were united by the same goal (Sim 1987:477-8).

In this novel, the author attempted to suggest a new alternative family form as he provided a scathing criticism of the oppression of women, marriage, and family system in colonial Korea. The novel also suggested variations in family relations. Bok-sun and Se-cheol are sworn sister and brother and although it was a time of clear distinctions between men and women, they shared a room while living together in a small house in Seoul. In-suk and Bong-hui were sisters-in-law, but after In-suk's divorce, they are not related. Bong-hui married Se-cheol against her parent's wishes and their first son was adopted by In-suk. This new family overcame traditional blood relations and formed diverse relationships based on comradely friendship, adoption, and modern marriage.

Considering the fact that both Bok-sun and Se-cheol participated in social movements and were watched by Japanese police, it is possible that they sympathized with socialism and communism. The choice of location for this ambitious family should be noted, for it is close to Russia. From a radio that Se-cheol installed with his electrical skills, "an uplifting marching music from Vladivostok was playing like music from heaven" (Sim 1987:475).

There appeared other cases of applying socialism and communism in order to create an alternative family.¹⁷ However, Sim didn't try to impose socialism of that time directly on colonial Korea. Through Se-cheol's practical knowledge and his criticism of opportunistic attitudes and the fantasy of having a happy society overnight, Sim revealed the veiled purpose of his novel.¹⁸ In the last part

17. Isogaya Sueji, who had participated in the so-called 2nd Pacific Labor Union Movement in the Hamheung region from 1931 to 1932, described young women who escaped from arranged marriages and temporarily stayed with the activists (Isogaya 1984:97-8; Kim 2004a: 276-6). The communal mood was full of comradely friendship and peace.

18. Se-cheol, as he explains the purpose of the new family, warns against the grand narrative of class that attempts to build an egalitarian society all at once and criticized that "the bad thing

of the novel, In-suk showed up in “a traditional white Korean dress,” looking like the Virgin Mary (Sim 1987:480-1). Even though religion was not the main subject of the novel, comparing the protagonist to the Virgin Mary is not a small thing. In his idea of the alternative family, an eclectic approach to various Western ideas such as socialism, communism, and Christianity was the source of his imagination.

Conclusion

In colonial Korea, alternative forms of marriage and family were never realized in everyday life but came to life in intellectuals’ abstract discussions and arguments or in literary works. Suggestions and ideas raised by intellectuals were a conservative reaction to imported modernity, a modern demand against oppressed sexual morality, and a critique of and a challenge to patriarchal society. Various ideas and thoughts like patriarchy, colonialism, liberalism, modernity, feminism, nationalism, and socialism/communism competed in the discussions on alternative forms of marriage and family.

Among the alternatives, temporary separation is the most tepid and passive response. It was rarely accepted by conservatives who thought it would destabilize the foundation of the traditional marriage system. Radicals and feminists ignored it because they thought it was not a fundamental solution. Only some liberals who saw it as an attempt to ease the contradictions of modern marriage eagerly supported it.

Single life is also a passive response, although somewhat less so compared to temporary separation. For conservatives and liberals, it was nothing more than an abnormal lifestyle or a deviation. Despite the ambiguity and reservations expressed toward the single life of radical feminists like Na Hye-seok, single life is significant in that it pursued individual freedom and diversity. For Na, single life was something that signified an equal relationship between a man and a woman as well as mental freedom.

about the people of Joseon is that we dream big dreams and want them to come true all at once.” He said that “we should be satisfied that each member of the society tries to live an ideal life.” As such, when colonial oppression was increasing as colonial Korea moved into wartime mobilization, Sim called for reformist approaches through the practice of an alternative lifestyle within the legal framework (Sim 1987:476-7).

First introduced in the 1920s in Europe and the U.S., trial and companionate marriages were the topic of lively discussions among intellectuals who questioned their applicability and significance when applied to 1930s colonial Korea. While conservatives did not pay any attention to these imported ideas, liberals only had a superficial understanding of the concepts and failed to recognize their progressive implications. As a result, liberals sided with the conservatives in criticizing and rejecting companionate marriage. Preoccupied with trying to identify contradictions in advanced capitalist societies, socialists and communists failed to recognize the limits of and characteristics of companionate marriage as a strategic revision of male domination. As a result, in opposition to the conservatives and liberals, they argued for the active introduction of companionate marriage and became blind followers of modernity.

The question of whether an intimate friendship is possible between the sexes is an age old issue. Conservatives who saw any relationship between the sexes as sexual strongly opposed the possibility while, with some degree of difference, liberals took a negative stance. On the other hand, radicals like Na Hye-seok who discerned ideal love and marriage from a women's perspective actively supported friendship between the sexes. They not only argued for it but also practiced it.

Alternative family is the most active and progressive form. Although it would never have been realized in colonial Korea, Sim Hun presented an alternative family free from discriminations caused by feudal social status, modern class, and unequal gender relations in his novel. Sim also strongly criticized women's oppression and the contradictions in the marriage and family system. Moving away from the entrapments of traditional blood ties and inheritance and based on various principles like comradely friendship, modern marriage and adoption, the new form of family eclectically incorporated different ideas like autonomy, freedom, solidarity, and religious tolerance which were based on Western ideas such as liberalism, socialism, communism, and Christianity.

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