Articles

Gendered Korean Colonial Modernity: "Housewifization" of Korean Colonial Women and the Reconfiguration of Domestic Work

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Introduction

Western feminist scholars have noted that injustices surrounding gender are deeply related to the modern separation of the public and private spheres, and are also connected to the social implications of separate gender roles between men and women along the axis of gendered division of labor (Janeway 1971; Eisenstein 1979; Hartman 1981). In analyzing and theorizing patriarchy as a universal system of women's subordination, the issue of understanding how the different cultural, historical, economic heritage and complexities created differences in women; especially, differences between women of Empire vis-à-vis those of colony, and those of the West vis-à-vis those of the non-West, have been situated as important problematics in Western knowledge production (Spivak 1988; Mohanty 1991; Chatterjee 1993; Narayan 1997). There recently have been significant theoretical and empirical studies emerging in the field of gender studies which focus on gender relations and the ways they affect and are affected by nationalism in the (post) colonial era. Regarding the gender-blinded theorization of nationalism, feminist scholars have repeatedly pointed out that most of the hegemonic theorization about nations and nationalism has dismissed gender relations as irrelevant (Jayawardena 1986; Parker 1992; West 1997; Yubal-Davis 1997; Kim and Choi 1998; Mohanram 1999).

Grounded on the above feminist theorizations concerning the difference between women as well as gender and nationalism, this study attempts to reveal the hidden gender politics in (re)defining the modern female roles and their idealized images both ideologically and institutionally by way of analyzing the "housewifization" of Korean colonial women in the context of colonial modernity.[1] In other words, it seeks to reveal the central patriarchal mechanisms conditioning the capitalistic gender(ed) division of labor through a deconstructive analysis of the image of the "wise mother and good wife" in conjunction with the collision, recuperation, and fusion of tradition with modernity in the process of constructing Korean nation-as-family.

1. For a discussion of women's "domestication" and its relation to the creation of the "good wife" as an ideology, see Mies (1986). She argues that capitalism in the nineteenth century was constructed via the establishment of the social and sexual division of labor, the crucial gendered characteristic of modern capitalism. The center of her discussion lies in the "domestication of women" and "housewifization" which served as important means to regulate and restrict women's political power in the public sphere of capitalist society. "Housewifization" is a concept focusing on women's roles within the domestic sphere, while the "domestification" of women emphasizes gendered space itself.

The aim of this paper is essentially two-fold: On the one hand, it shows the historically re-constructed patriarchal form of women's domestic labor in local colonial Korea, focusing on the dynamic forces decisive in defining gender roles for the Korean nation-building project. On the other hand, it reveals the nature of gendered Korean colonial modernity by looking into the lived experiences of Korean colonial women. The dominant ideal figure of Korean women in the 1920s and 30s—the so-called "wise mother and good wife"—and its collision and negotiation with the desire of working Korean women will be illustrated through their own narratives in order to understand colonial Korean women's strategies, experiences and identities as working women. First of all, I look into the Korean nationalist method(s) of constructing discourses of specific female ideals by examining the nexus of capitalism, nationalism, colonialism and tradition. And then, through the question of how Korean women challenged, contested, and negotiated with the historical and social limitations placed on them as modern subjects—female agency of Korean colonized women constructed from the double burden; derived from the double bind of patriarchal feudality and coloniality—will be discussed in terms of the social-historical limitations accorded to Korean colonial conditions. By analyzing discourse of "wise mother and good wife," this article attempts to reveal aspects of continuity rather than discontinuity within definitions of women's roles in the period ranging from the pre-modern to modern (Joseon through colonial period), as well as those of co-operation between colonialism and nationalism, two hegemonic power systems that limited women's proper, primary place to the domestic sphere.

Women as Object for Colony and Nation-building

In the early stage of Meiji nation-state building in the late 19th century, Japanese policymakers and educators were concerned with the gendered role of women in the domestic sphere in relation to biological reproduction and the Westernization of their country (Kwon 1997; Kawamoto 1999)[2]. The Japanese enlightenment

2. Kwon and Kawamoto view the historicity of *ryōsai kenbo* discourse as a re-discovery of women's roles by the state. According to their interpretation, as Western women's experiences during the First war period were introduced to Japan, a similar ideological model was created in Japanese society by male intellectuals. Also, those male intellectuals understood Japan's new-middle class housewives as the main target for this ideology, and the role of the modernized home was added to women's (list of national) tasks. The main focus of Kwon and Kawamoto's argument is that Japanese *ryōsai kenbo* discourses were historically constructed through comparison with the West and western women.

project of making the "good wife and wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*) a standard in terms of both ideology as well as institutions were rapidly furthered through female education and its agendas (Hong 1997, 2009; Ahn, 2006; Kim 2006; Park 2008).[3] The Japanese view of women constituted in the transition period ranging from the nation-state to empire, was also adapted to colonized women during the colonial period.

In tandem with the Japanese colonial project, Korean colonial women were incorporated into the modern Japanese education system from the 1910s, a project carried out via journalist debates for the necessity of female education in terms of the civilization of the Korean nation.[4] From the beginning of the colonial government, the Japanese modern educational model shown in the Korean colonial women consistently revealed that the "proper" place for women was in their homes/domestic spheres, and as time passed, the "wise mother and good wife" came to be considered the ideal for Korean women.

Nationalist Discourse on Women's Work: Enlightenment and the New Nation

Not only Japanese colonial policymakers, but also Korean nationalist intellectuals were deeply concerned with the issue of Korean female education from the late 19th century. Regarding the question of the ways that Korean females could be emancipated from the oppression of traditional family bondage, articles in the April

3. The discourse of Korean *hyeonmo yangcheo* discourse has been dealt with in the field of existing Korean social and women's history in the colonial period. Park (2008) argued that female students studied in Japan returned to colonial Korea as experts in home-economics, and that they were significant subject groups in the construction of *hyeonmo yangcheo* discourse. Ahn (2006) shows how Korean colonial women functioned in subsidiary roles in the making of the royal subject (*sinmin*), focusing especially on mothering in the total war period ranging from 1938-1945. Kim (2006) gives emphasis to the modern construction of the 'good wife', and Hong (1997; 2009) looks at *hyeonmo yangcheo* as an ideology in which the colonial power attempted to incorporate colonial Korean women into the category of the Japanese by articulating discontinuity in the definition of Korean women's roles. Korean *hyeonmo yangcheo* discourse in the colonial period, especially during the 1920-30s, was constructed via the medium of Japanese *ryōsai kenbo* discourse. It was produced by mutual, interdependent relations among highly educated Korean women in modern home-economics, colonial education institutes, and male national subjects.

4. In case of colonial Korea, the rate of school attendance for females was 0.7% and that of males was 5.3% in 1919. In 1930, the female matriculation rate in common schools was 5.7% while male rates rapidly increased to 25.8%. The female rate accounted for 19.8% of all registered students in secondary education in 1930. Still, the overall illiteracy rate was approximately 80% in 1930 (Yu 1999: 289-291).

1925 issue of *Sinyeoseong* suggested women's economic independence as a priority in relation to the matter of the self-hood of the female, claiming that it could be realized with women's participation in the public sphere as a wageworker. The possession of economic power was thus understood as crucial to the changing of human nature within the intellectual discourse of the reform of the Korean nation since the early 1920s, and female emancipation was also dealt with as part of the above nation-building project. This understanding meant that the issues of female work in the public sphere were posited within the sociopolitical context of the reform of the Korean nation and the construction of a new nationhood.

The following two *Sinyeoseong* articles accentuated the necessity of altering the dominant public view in which being a working women was portrayed as a miserable existence unable to garner economic support from the male breadwinner-husband. Not only did the new intellectual discourse criticize the stereotyped images of women working in public, but they also strongly demanded Korean females' independence with harsh critiques of the Neo-Confucian, old-customed way of Joseon life:

> Korean women have not known anything at all about independence and self-government. They still live like that. Throughout childhood, they were raised under protection, and after that, they live in the care of their husband and later of their son. There was not a chance for them to be independent. Their existence is a life-long chain of subordination from parent to husband to son. Therefore, not only female orphans but also those women whose husbands died early, or who divorced, or women having many children who were inevitably forced to remarry or remained dependent on relatives and others. The poverty she suffered would be tremendous. (*Sinyeoseong*, April, 1924: 18)

> We hope that Korean women take as many jobs as possible and do not allow themselves to become preoccupied with the idea of marriage. Not only mental exertions but also physical labor is required… This seems to be good in terms of the economy and society. Married women too must either keep their jobs, provided it doesn't cause problems in the home, or try hard to get a new job. As mentioned above, Korean women lack the courage and ability to be independent. However, their will to challenge patriarchal power seems stronger that those of Japanese and Chinese women. Therefore, it is

> necessary for Korean women to take part in social activities as they enter into the job market as much as possible in order to have the capability to respond to outside impetus. (*Sinyeoseong* April, 1924: 21-23)

The logic embedded in the argument above is that Korean women must shoulder an additional "share" of social responsibility in order to partake in the man's burden. However, the premise on which the above is anchored is that Korean females' participation in public as workers would only be allowed on the condition that female jobs were not in conflict with their female obligation in the "home." Here what is clear is that the home was still recognized as the supreme value accorded to the Korean female within the Korean nationalist discourse articulating enlightenment and emancipation of the Korean female in the project of reforming the Korean nation.

The gender role and position of Korean women in the domestic arena was actively discussed in conjunction with the issue of the reform of the nation and Korean colonial society even more explicitly in the 1930s. Central to this discursive formation surrounding housewifery and motherhood was the notion of improvement of customs, in particular, that of the home. The home within the intellectual nationalist discourse was encoded as the core unit in which the social reform of the Korean nation and colonial Korean society was to be effectively performed, and was also seen as the fundamental, significant space in which every Korean individual could be reborn in relation to the above:

> In the contemporary context in which civilization was crystallized and all kinds of thoughts seamlessly change, the urgent business of Joseon lies in the home, and it was the young generation who we must be concerned about it. In order to make a perfect and harmonious home, the progress of individuals should come first, with married couples simultaneously being supportive of each other. Doing so promotes peace in the home, and finally, the revolutionary reform of society. (*Sindonga*, June 1932: 78-9)

The harmonious, peaceful home was represented as an ideal type of "modern" domicile differentiated from that of Joseon in relation to the issue of civilization of the nation, and equal partnership between husband and a wife was articulated as an important factor in constructing a new, ideal domesticity in contrast with the hierarchical "slave and master" relationship of the Neo-Confucian family order.

Sin Bo-seok, the writer quoted above, suggested five guidelines for Korean New Women regarding the issue of how to make the new, modern home: first, love must be the foundation; second, economic power; third, utilizing time efficiently; fourth, concern with child rearing; fifth, a couple-centered culture.

The intellectual discourse advocating the necessity of female work in the public sphere and its encouragement were shown in 1920s' Korean journalism in relation to the independence and enlightenment of the nation: however, powerfully emerging dominant discourse since the 1930s, in relation to women's work, accentuated the importance of housewifery, and the specific female image was the "wise mother and good wife". Here, the oft-repeated key rhetoric was the role of the modern(ized) housewife as well as the linkage and positionality of the home with society and nation:

> The home is the cornerstone of society. In terms of biological perspective, the home is important for the matter of continuing the race [generation], and socially, it is an important institution transmitting customs, heredity and morality to the next generation. In addition, the home is the first school in which the individual's socialization begins. Knowledge is power and ability. If there is a mind that seeks to know, the path to learning is wide open. We have to read books dealing with common sense by learning the Korean language. Regarding the question of how to make the home a peaceful, wealthy household, how to nurse children, we have to read books dealing with hygiene, education and side jobs. (*Sindonga*, November, 1932: 150)

Regarding the issue of how to make the modern home fit into the new nation, what was emphasized by (Korean male intellectuals) was the efficient, scientific management of housewifery and mothering. In deploying such arguments, what is notable is that the standard method for the scientific household and child-rearing was illustrated and suggested to the Korean New Woman in the name of the advice of experts in the field of domestic science, obstetrics and gynecology, juvenile education and family nutrition. In this context, the acquisition of Western knowledge and new information was instrumental in understanding the new ways of governing the household and caring for babies. Of course, learning the Korean language to read books dealing with the above issues was the most fundamental task of Korean housewives.

Especially, having effective budget plans for the household was emphasized

to Korean housewives in terms of scientific home economics. From the intellectual discourse that women's new knowledge was pointed out as an important factor in handling households and family livelihood in a modern, scientific and efficient way, what we are able to discern from this is that on the one hand, modern-Western knowledge gained power over Neo-Confucian ways of managing the household and, on the other hand, the articulation of the necessity of modern female education was in the patriarchal scheme of producing a new housewife and mother capable of household management and home education for the children, the nation's next generation.

Women's "Proper" Place: Wifely Domesticity and Motherhood

The Korean housewife's exact location in the domestic sphere is more clearly revealed in thinking about her relation with her husband in terms of gender, symbols and power. The best key term enabling us to expose the nexus of the above was her "inside support" (*naejo*) for her husband in the private sphere. In fact, the literal meaning of *naejo* is "support" (*jo*) from the "inside space" (*nae*). Here "*nae*" is juxtaposed with the term, "*oe*" (the outside) and a husband's location corresponds to the "outside." It exemplifies the woman's position in the domestic sphere by designating men's place as the public sphere: however, the real problem lay in the fact that it legitimized and solidified the role of women (housewives) as supplementary to that of men (husband)'s work, reducing them to the status of an assistant. The following excerpt from an article published in 1932 explicitly indicates to us the scope, content and implication of Korean women's "*naejo*" in the colonial context:

> When the home is harmonious, society becomes perfect; and when the family is unhappy, the nation becomes so, too. When a housewife is wise and smart, acknowledging her responsibility, a bright future will come to the home. Inside support seems so trivial, yet it is tremendously important. Crucial to inside support is to cook, make clothes and raise the children—the natural support of a wife for a husband, like eating food and drinking water. Private work in the domestic sphere has to be handled by a wife much like a husband's "right-arm." (*Shindonga*, October, 1932: 128)

The discursive formation of the middle-class housewife was combined with

the newly constructed gender division of labor in colonial Korea: The call to professionally support a husband at home reconfigured women's role, while the husband worked in the public space as a breadwinner. Until the end of the Joseon period, managing the household was primarily associated with the patriarchal power of the family-head. However, in the colonial period, the domestic area was transformed and encoded into a new wifely domain (*Jogwang*, September, 1936:248-50).

Since the 1930s, the housewife's role in managing the household and their responsibility in home economics through the balancing of revenue and expenditure was becoming more articulated in women's magazines. This derived from their endeavors to overcome the economic crisis of colonial society resulting from the impact from the Great Depression.[5] During the same period, another layer of gendered role ascribed to the Korean female was that of mother.[6] Special editions of women's magazines dealing with the issues of female sport were frequently shown. "The spiritual culture of the nation is possible only with the physical health of the nation" was the main logic underlining the articulation of mother's health (*Singajeong*, September, 1933:12-20). Motherhood became the nexus of the nation, female body and health. The following article explicitly shows the juncture in which the above factors intersected:

> The happiness of the nation is directly connected with the health of the mother. Perfect thought as well as the will to strive for improvement, are derived from the health of the mother. In other words, unhealthy people will come to failure. Women have a responsibility and a mission regarding health, both in the home and in society. Therefore, the unhealthy individual is not

5. The classic research of Milkman on women and the Great Depression pointed out that the impact of economic crisis including the Great Depression which occurred in 1929 brought different results in respect to gender and marriage status. In the depression period, married women were the first to be laid-off from their jobs, and they returned home. Newly constructed discourses on gender roles emphasized women's role in the domestic sphere as a professional housewives, and also legitimized women's job firings. In case of colonial Korea, the numbers of women in service jobs gradually increased in the 1920s, and dropped slightly during the first half of the 1930s, due to the effects of the Depression, and increased again from the late 1930s under the semi-war system (Kim 2004: 348-9).

6. The notion of childhood was a modern invention which did not exist in the Joseon period. Parallel with the newly constructed capitalistic mode of production, the existence of the child was newly recuperated as a future labor force by capitalist as well as (imperial, colonial and nationalist) policy makers in Empires and colonies. Colonial Korea was not exceptional in this modern trend. Regarding this historical invention and deployment of childhood and its impact on the role of housewife in the colonial home (Kim, 1999).

> merely an affront to themselves, but a crime to their offspring, and such is a misfortune for society at large. Furthermore, women have a vocation, obligation and responsibility to give birth and raise healthy children. (*Sindonga*, March, 1934: 46)

In deploying the importance of health in connection with women's bodies and motherhood, the "healthy" bodies of Western women were frequently compared with the "poor, bad" bodies of Korean women. This meant that the Western (female) body was suggested as being the ideal size and model that Korean women had to catch up with. Within the nationalist discourse on international competition of nations, the issue of "population" both in quantitative and qualitative terms was seen with the Western women as a standard and it subsequently brought emphasis on the matter of mother's health and body shape. In this context, women's body—and in particular that of mothers—was viewed and treated as the physical carrier of spiritual national culture and the future generation. For the nationalist aim of producing a strong, healthy female body, discipline and exercise were recommended as important:

> Given Korean women's body shape, there is no room for comparison. They are so slim and backward compared to western women. Why are women generally weaker than men? Although it is rooted in biological factors, the main reason lies in the fact that women do not do physical exercise. (*Singajeong*, September, 1935:25)

The issue of how to improve Korean women's health was frequently raised in round-table discussions:

> Physical training is a critical issue that affects national and social issues. Through exercise, the body becomes healthier, height increases and the body grows slimmer… What about encouraging physical training for all females rather than mere school-centered physical education? It is better to organize small women's physical clubs and start with easy games." (*Sindonga*, March, 1934: 50)

Gymnastics was one of newly introduced disciplines in the curriculum of modern educational institutions. Its necessity was articulated for the improvement of health and body shape of family members, especially women and young children. In this

regard, regular exercise in gymnastics at the level of daily-life, was regarded as one of the main responsibilities of the housewife as a caretaker of family members' health.

From the newly appearing discourse articulating the importance of public health and a healthy body through regular physical exercise and training, what we perceive is that creation of the healthy body of the mother was parallel with the ideological aim of producing a healthy nation—another gender role added to the Korean housewife's work, entailing not only scientific, professional management of the household, but also monitoring the health of family members and her own.

Given that modern-scientific housewifery and mothering were newly configured forms of domestic labor for the colonial Korean female, the latter was regarded as a more significant priority for Korean housewives beginning in the 1930s. In such discursive formations of mothering, (its) legitimacy was drawn from the biological essentialism that defined woman as mother and as the primary caretaker of children in the home. Giving birth and nursing were thus pointed out as the fundamental role for Korean women:

> If breast milk is nutrition for the body, a mother's love, stemming from her beautiful nature, is the precious food that nourishes the hearts and minds of her children. It is the mother with whom a baby has first contact, so there is no relation more intimate than that of the mother and child. The importance of home education carried out by the mother is beyond question. (*Yeoseong*, April, 1937:70)

In a similar vein, as early as 1925, Yi Kwangsu already asserted the importance of female education in terms of mothering/motherhood by stating that "To become a good mother is the obligation of women for humankind, the nation(-state), and society and only women are able to do this" and "becoming a mother" was praised as the greatest pleasure, and not permitted to men" (*Sinyeoseong*, January, 1925: 19-20).

In colonial Korean society in the mid 1930s, motherhood was thus represented and encoded as a worthy thing, the only "natural" role allowed women. The problematic embedded in such rhetoric is that those women who did not give birth to a baby, or who had no intention to become a mother, were automatically excluded from the category of respectable woman and stigmatized as dangerous and bad women—the Others. Yi Kwangsu's critique of (young) women's birth control and negligence to commit themselves to child-care explicitly shows the public condemnation of women who did not consider mother-based modernizing a life priority:

> [Magaret] Sanger's method is a form of birth control for married couples. However, it is monstrous if practiced by young men and women. If women give birth to babies but don't like to breast-feed them, the consequences are truly disastrous. At least breast- feeding should be done regularly**…** if an era ever comes in which women don't like to nurse and raise children, a major disaster will result. (*Yeoseong*, May, 1936: 12-3)

The project of the making of the modern-scientific mother and housewife was located in the realm of the intersection of modern education, nation, capitalism and gender. Within Korean nationalist thought on female modern education, it had to be a space in which Korean female students would be able to understand new (Western) culture and (scientific) knowledge before their marriage, and later, transforming them from student to "wise mother," thereby making possible the future of the nation through reproduction in the domestic sphere. In sum, motherhood was a conjuncture at which Korean patriarchal interests and nationalist interests met within the historical context of the Japanese assimilation policy and the Japanese project to construct Korean women's "housewifization" in the 1930s.

According to studies on nationalism in colonial India, the Indian male elite represents the external, the outside world, the public, and the material; and females symbolize the internal, the home, the private and the spiritual. The original domain of the Indian male was supplanted by the material superiority of the colonizer, and the British Empire attempted to re-situate Indian Women and the Women's Question within the domain of the internal area of sovereignty, and thus consolidate Indian authenticity (Chatterjee, 1993:116-126).

In case of Korean nationalists, they constructed discourse on motherhood as an essential aspect of women. Weaker than Western Empires, the Japanese Empire's colonial maneuvers were directly applied, and assimilation and civilization were the two main axes utilized in legitimating colonial governance over Joseon (Kim 2006: 32-35). The strategy of the Korean nationalist was the same as that of the Indian male elite nationalist, in terms of constructing the "proper place for women," as well as situating women's work essentially in the private domain. This strongly suggests that nationalism and colonialism were interdependent in constructing/solving the "women's question"—women's emancipation—and also draws on an interpretation that colonialism and nationalism functioned in re-constructing a new Korean patriarchy during the colonial period.

Dis/Continuity of Feminine Virtue and New Womanhood

Scientific and rational management of the household and mothering were central to the discursive formation of the ideal new Korean womanhood beginning in the 1930s. In constructing such specific female imagery, the principle of inclusion and exclusion was activated via the dichotomous categories of "good" vis-à-vis "bad." Condemned female groups were those women who possessed only feminine vanity:

> The leisured wife is literally the housewife who does not work. In other words, those who can do as they please at their leisure. However, she is a person who lives off of others. She seems not to have any plan and vision as a serious person. She also seems not to have any responsibility and obligation, nor any love for mankind and nationalism. She doesn't have any pain or anxiety. (*Singajeong*, Septermber, 1935: 12-3)

The Korean New Woman unskilled at managing the household was discursively represented as a symbol of vanity. Those women who were neither traditional woman nor those stained with vanity were represented and praised as ideal and respectable women, and as professional housewives and mothers possessing modern knowledge about nurturing and raising children, and accordingly were held up as model women for the nation and for the colonial society (*Samcheonri*, July, 1931:78).

Given the discourse formation of ideal womanhood—wise mother and good wife in 1930s colonial Korea, the question of continuity and discontinuity of Neo-Confucianism is a compelling one in terms of the problematic of the reconfiguration of gender roles, in particular, women's work in the domestic sphere.

In fact, "filial piety" was central to Neo-Confucianism and ancestor worship, in the sense that "filial piety" was extended to even dead ancestors, whose expression was revered as the most important ritual in the Joseon period. The role given to *yangban* ruling class women was to take care of the parent(s)-in-law. The labor of caretaking and the role of daughter-in-law was regarded as most important, exceeding even that of wife and mother in importance. However, the newly reconfigured female role was not only for the purpose of creating domesticity and professional mothering for effective capitalistic reproduction and household system. The newly constructed divisions of space—public vis-à-vis private, the outside vis-à-vis the inside, the world vis-à-vis the domestic—conditioned and legitimized the gender(ed) division of labor, both spatially and ideologically.

Those women was could not gain respect from colonial society were those who had to maintain jobs for their family's livelihood rather than relying on an often competent husband as well as those seeking the meaning of selfhood through work in the public sphere. Within the dominant discourse and monolithic imagery that women's proper place is the home and the female role of the care-taker, such women were automatically posited as "other," and viewed as odd and pathetic by the public.

Maria Mies (1986) argues that capitalism in the 19th century in the West was constructed through the establishment of the social and sexual division of labor and is a crucial gendered characteristic of modern capitalism. The imagery of ideal men ran parallel with the imagery of the "wise mother and good wife," centered on being the breadwinner, working hard to provide a living for family members.

As in the West, cooperation between the Japanese-led "housewifization" of the Korean women and Korean nationalist construction of the Korean nation old family, played a role in relocating women again within the place of the home, excluding them from the politics of the public. As a consequence, the respectable Korean New Woman became a subject concerned with only reproduction—i.e. domesticity and mothering for the aim of capitalistic production in colonial society and as dependent economically on a male breadwinner.

The Korean "Woman's Question" and Job-Seeking in the Public Sphere

The internal colonial social changes occurring in the Japanese transformation of Korean colonial place conditioned new social relations which eased out old relations both in the public and private spheres. As women began participating in the public sector in the early 20th century, the spectrum of women's jobs broadened and grew more complex and specialized.[7]

If we briefly look at job statistics in the colonial period, while the Japanese served in the non-agricultural sector, the majority of Koreans served in the agricultural sector. 93.3% of Korean women in 1920, and 89.7% in 1940, worked as agricultural laborers, compared to 82.4% and 78.4% of Korean men, consecutive to the aforementioned years (Lee, 1990: 249-59) Working women's jobs ranged from upper-middle class's professional jobs to white-collar working

7. Women working as paid employees in the public sphere was a new phenomenon. Terms indicating "working women" were numerous in the colonial period. *Jigeop yeoseong* and *jigeop buin* were common ways to describe them (Kang 2004: 179).

women dedicated to art, technology, and simple labor (work).[8] The gender division of labor was explicit in the non-agricultural sector. However, most Korean female workers served in the spinning industry within the broader expanse of the industrial sectors. The gendered division of labor brought about sexual inequality in wages and labor conditions between men and women. Korean female factory workers received 50-60% of the pay that the Korean men received. The lowest positioned young Korean female worker received only 15% of the pay earned by the Japanese adult male worker (Shin 1989: 68-126). From such facts, it is evident that the industrial development of Korea during the 1930s had a profound effect on the Korean population as a whole. As industry expanded, hundreds and thousands of peasants found themselves employed as factory workers. The increase in landless peasants driven off their land by the worsening situation in agriculture provided the pool of labor needed for industrial expansion. The concentration of landownership and spiraling indebtedness of the rural peasantry became a driving force for young unmarried women to move into newly developed urban areas and were incorporated into low-paying jobs in the burgeoning industry of the colony.

The cultural renaissance enjoyed by colonial Korea in the 1920s played a crucial role in producing opportunities for highly educated female writers and journalists, which proved to be the most popular occupations after teaching jobs in educational sectors. In the initial stage of female professional jobs in Korea, these Korean Women undertook tasks similar to those of people employed in the medical, domestics and arts sectors; however, the job market was limited by the high number of female graduates of higher education in colonial Korea. Thus, the opening of the labor market to Korean females was in a general sense accelerated with the expansion of Japanese hegemony in the 1930s as well as its impact on the industrial restructuring of colonial Korean space and the creation of a female labor market. Yet, Korean female workers in the manufacturing industry during that period were incorporated in the labor market as an extension of existing sexualized jobs. Structural sexually biased factors are shown in the unfair pay and the explicit bias in the labor market.

Even in the mid-1920s, Korean women had themselves already acknowledged that economic dependence upon men was one of crucial factors in creating and

8. Female participation rate in agricultural industry and fisheries was 90% of the overall female participation rate in productive labor throughout the colonial period. The female population in the agricultural industry and fisheries was 2,979,350 in 1920; 3,437,426 in 1930; 3,213,092 in 1937 and that of males was 4,289,150 in 1920; 4,448,786 in 1930; 4,310,238 in 1937. Statistical Yearbook of the Residency General of Korea, taken from Kim Kyeong-il (2004: 342-3).

sustaining female subordination to male dominance. Regarding the question of "Why women must have jobs," economic independence was suggested as the best way to free oneself from the yoke of the traditional family:

> Nowadays, women seek emancipation from their shackles, from pressure and from maltreatment, and view all unequal systems negatively. They long for gender equality. However, in order to realize all their claims and arguments, economic independence, that is, independence from "customs," should be a priority. Women's problems will be solved if they become independent, not asking help from others. (*Sinyeoseong*, April, 1925: 27)

The Korean New Woman criticized ordinary Korean women as suffering from a "defect" and a "serious illness"; namely, their dependence (on men), "parasites" without any spirit of independence. They viewed such tendencies as due not to the women themselves, but to five thousand years of morality and conventions. The woman writer Im Hyo-jeong, pointed out that [Joseon] Women's dependence was taken for granted, and structurally (re)constructed. In order to escape family bondage, she argues, "woman has to be independent" (*Singajeong*, September, 1935, 20-1).

In this way, within the Korean female's intellectual discourse, women's economic independence and social contributions were articulated as a prior condition to a female's rights as a human being. However, the social-historical limitation of 1920s colonial Korea became clear as highly educated Korean New Women attempted to enter into the job market. The question of whether to get married or to get a job or to study abroad was cast to Korean female students standing on the verge of graduation. Even though there were teaching job sectors in modern educational institutions in which most Korean educated women participated, job-seeking was never easy for them throughout the entire colonial period. There are scores of female narratives bemoaning such difficulties in female magazines. The following is just one:

> The onward way after graduation! There is nothing more important! Upon graduation, my heart pounds so fiercely. What are the possible paths Korean women can take? Are there any jobs for female graduates? Are there any higher-education institutions in Korea? Female students cannot so easily study abroad as Korean male students. There are no real educational institutions within Korea. (*Byeolgeongon*, July, 1927: 118)

The above passage was written in 1925, yet similar female narratives can also be seen in articles from the mid-1930s. Reportages for the colonial magazine, *Byeolgeongon* dealt with the frustrating working experiences of female workers in the public sphere; for example, officials, female tailors, female drivers, female factory technicians, pharmacists, bank clerks, etc. The common difficulties experienced by those women who entered into fields generally viewed as belonging to the male domain originated in the "skeptical gaze at their capabilities" and "devaluation of their work, as well as the male view of them as "sexual object" rather than as "labor subject" (*Byeolgeongon*, June, 1930: 30-1).

The Agency of Colonial Korean Women

The discourse on women's work in the 1920s was grounded in the idea of Enlightenment, and accentuated the importance of female contributions to the public sphere. However, the tone and language surrounding women's employment switched to an emphasis on women's domestic roles in the 1930s. Concerning the issue of professionalization of housewifery, Kim Hwal-ran, one of the representative liberalist New Women in the 1920s, stated that:

> First, let's not advertise the notion of job as a condition. Don't put a condition that working women must be out of the home. As much as possible, hope that lots of women participate in the job market, but simultaneously, let housewives exist as working women at home…we ourselves look at the home as part of society. Let's upgrade the household as a social household and as social work… Let's make the household a profession. (*Sindonga*, September, 1932:142)

Narratives and logic similar to the above were also shown in round-table discussions by Korean female New Women. Especially, colonial Korean society's internal crisis derived from the Great Depression in the late 1920s, seemed decisive in the creation of female discourse of the necessity of housewives' side jobs and of the planned management of the household.

From the public display of the end of those women's pathetic life, as well as the economic crisis of internal Korean society, other liberal as well as conservative Korean "New Women" inevitably contested the given role of the "wise mother and

good wife." The female intellectuals' dialogues surrounding the iconic Nora, the female antagonist of *The Doll's House*, explicitly show the radicalness of the views of the "other" New Woman:

> So Ui-sik: How was Nora after she left home? There were two different narratives that on the one hand, she came back home, and on the other hand, that she did not return home for good.
> Heo Yeong-suk: There is a saying that goes, "become a human being before becoming a wife and mother." In my opinion, Nora must have had a mental problem or it was a compulsory act derived from temporary feelings. She must have regretted so much… in terms of motherhood, it really cannot be understood how a mother who had already two children left home. Her husband at least gave her love even (though) it was not entirely grounded on personhood.
> Choi Jeong-hui: How can women who are unable to mobilize a husband reform this society?
> Choi Hwal-ran: Given that those women who left the home are not respected by society, it is better to live with children at home in a spirit of self-sacrifice. (*Sindonga*, November, 1932: 77-83)

There existed differences in approaches to the issue of the role and status of wife in the home among Korean female intellectuals. Since the mid-1930s, the highly educated Korean New Women also claimed that the proper place of women is the home, and that becoming a professional housewife was a female virtue to earn respect from society. In this regard, what should be contemplated is the intersection of class and gender. As a wife of the middle class, women's work in the public realm was still not treated as a woman's main job, but merely a side-job (*Sindonga*, October, 1933, 24-85). Women were allowed to hold employment in the public sphere, but denied due recognition as full and equal public workers.

Kim Hwal-ran employed the term "double and triple pain" in her clear summarization of the reality faced by colonized Korean women as they carried out the labors of production and reproduction in the public and domestic domains:

> I would like to remark on the double and triple pain of Korean women**.** Managing the household as one would a business, she undergoes pain in her struggles with old family customs as well as the misunderstandings of

> her husband and father-in-law. Also, in the public, generally, job-seeking is difficult; and for females, there is the stereotyped view that it is impossible for a woman to do a man's job. Fortunately, it is possible to get a job, but female workers are unequally treated because they are women. This pain that we experience because we are women must be done away with by means of a good measure of personal pride, support, self-esteem, and the backing of our social visionaries. (*Sindonga*, September, 1932: 144)

Korean males under colonialism unanimously emphasized the mother's role as home educator, praising motherhood as an ideology, linking maternal love with the salvation of the nation. In contrast, women of the period began to voice the problems they were experiencing as mothers in reality, and began searching for pragmatic alternatives.

The issue of the day-nursery was dealt with as one of the main problems surrounding the working Korean female in the 1930s (*Singajeong*, June, 1935: 17). Nursing children was viewed and discussed as the greatest burden for the Korean New Woman who desired to have her own job in the public sphere. Women's obsession with nursing was derived from the dominant ideology that motherhood is the most beautiful thing and mothering is women's fundamental task accorded (them) by nature. In handling this matter, the solution which they sought was to set up reliable modern institutions in which women were able to deposit their children without worry for safety and sanitization (*Samcheonri*, April, 1933:103-6). To those working Korean females, the day-nursery, much like the Western-style day-care center, was viewed as an ideal scheme (*Singajeong*, January, 1936:83-4).

In the writings produced by Korean New Women, what is notable is that fathers were left free of any concern about sharing responsibility for child-care, the issue yielding the strongest dissatisfaction in women. Strong complaints about their husbands, who still held fast to the patriarchal idea that child rearing is women's work, were frequently expressed in the articles of women's magazines in the 1930s:

> A couple (*naeoe*) means sharing lives. Under this condition, there is no difference between the poor and the rich. It is inevitable that we must have jobs for a living, but even if they have time it is not spent for their wives. What a violent thing to abandon a wife in order to be with his friends! Such is an explicit indicator of their perspective which regards women as only fit for taking care of children and managing the household. (*Yeoseong*, October, 1937: 73)

As seen in the fact that the Korean husband's lack of understanding about the double burden of the working wife at home and the mother in the public sphere, the traditional way of thinking regarding the gender(ed) division of labor seemed to continue into the colonial period. A female writers' round-table featured in magazine *Samcheonri* shows, on the one hand, the juncture in which the modern Korean female's desire to stand as a public subject collided with patriarchal hegemony in the colonial context. On the other hand, it also reveals the genealogy of contemporary gender equality in the public area as well as the Korean female path-finders' compromising strategy with the given social structure in handling the double burden of mother and worker-writer.

In this round-table discussion, Noh Cheon-myeong outlines a highly criticized gender-stereotyped approach to the female writer's work by pointing out unfair perspectives, such as that which patronizingly regarded female writers as "lady writers" (*yeoryu jakga*), an image prevalent within the colonial Korean literary world. Another a similar critique raised by Mo Yun-suk dealt with public curiosity about the private life of the female writer, curiosity which often overshadowed interest in her literary works, and which activated biological determination—being a woman—as a crucial criterion in understanding women's novels. Regarding Mo's argument, Noh agrees that male writers and critics only deal with forfeited gossip on female writers without any serious concern about the messages their works contain, the content the female writers are really trying to deliver to the readers.

All participants in the round-table discussion criticized the male-centric representation and narration of the heroine's stereotyped image as passive, mild and weak by pointing out that Korean New Woman's mentality and way of thinking is not so very simple, but rational as well as independent. Their discussions clearly expose the patriarchal structure's way of excluding female writers from the male centered literary world, which can be analyzed as the modern genealogy of the "glass ceiling" for female professionals in the public sphere.

Regarding strategies for surviving in the public sphere, and especially in connection with the experiences of women writers, not only did they discuss the structured gender inequality embedded in the male-led literary world, but they also shared the deep, personal pains they had to undergo on the path to becoming, and standing as, an independent writer in addition to working as both wife and mother in patriarchal colonial society as pathfinders--the first generation of modern female writers.

> Bak Hwa-seong: I usually start to write after the children fall asleep. However, sometimes I urge the children to play with each other and start writing then. When I write at night, my body feels so tired from my daytime duties (as a mother and a wife).
> Mo Yun-suk: We have to carry out the duties of a housewife as well as work as professionals in the public realm. It is hard to get relief from the double burdens we undertake with one body. However, as a modern woman, we have to do it. (*Samcheonri*, Februray, 1935: 214-35)

The dialogues above show that women writers felt trapped under the double burdens of writer and housewife/mother. In order to be appropriated into the socially mandated gender role as a housewife and a mother, they had to be a "super-woman." Even though they expressed deep pain and desperation, the patriarchal social structure since the Joseon era, as well as their husbands' misunderstanding of their wife's desire to be a modern self through the work of writing, was the reality they had to compromise. In such a circumstance, they had little choice but to accept the roles of motherhood and professional housewife as their first priority, while struggling with the desire to be a writer by securing precious time during their daily routines during which they were able to write as they pleased.

There must be some insight to be gained in expanding the first-generation of Korean female's experiences into all categories of Korean women in the colonial period in terms of class as a crucial axis in creating differences between women. Some Korean middle-class women tried to handle the given circumstance of their double burden by hiring kitchen-maids or creating public discourses on the necessity of providing institutionalized nurseries. However, the role of main controller of the household for family members, and furthermore, that of being a perfect wife, was given as the dominant ideal virtue nearly irresistible to married women during that period. As New Women who witnessed the end of other rebellious, radical first generation Korean New Wome such as Na Hye-seok, Kim Il-yeop and Kim Myeong-sun, what they were able to do was to negotiate with patriarchal power within the social scope allowed them.

However, they *did* write and also speak out about the patriarchal society by expressing female desire to be a modern subject through their work, and criticizing the gender-biased critics of their literary works. Here, modern education produced a new subject. However, the limited job market for highly educated women, and both colonial as well as nationalist projects, were aimed at producing a "wise mother and

a good wife." Here, the Korean New Woman's acceptance of their place as resting primarily in the home is not to be understood as some passive response, but rather should be reinterpreted as the non-negotiable context within which they struggled to find a way to be modern female subject. Such struggle took place in turn within the context of the backlash of Korean colonial society, as a way of making room in which they might produce their discourse.

Conclusion

This study presents colonial social change and its relation to both the Japanese as well as Korean nationalist constitutions of women's "housewifization" and their reconfigured gender role. In particular, Korean women's domestic work as represented in Korean male and female intellectual discourse, in conjunction with the discursive formation of Korean nation-as-a-family, is accounted for in terms of the newly constructed gendered division of labor between public and domestic spheres. Regarding the compelling question of what power relations intervened in the historical (re)constitution of this specific representation of female imagery both "national as well as modern," this study posits an answer by analyzing the nexus of Korean nationalist methods of dealing with the "women question" and the moralistic conservatism of Korean colonial society.

The Korean nationalists' reaction to the cultural politics of colonial assimilation was to redefine themselves as the Korean nation (*minjok*) through the new identity formation of themselves vis-à-vis "other" nations such as the West and Japan. During this nation-building process, the nation, as a new artificial entity, played a crucial role in the condensing and binding of the Koreans as a homogeneous, "pure-blooded" family.

In the discourse of *minjok* led by Korean male elite nationalists, Korean women were relocated and projected as an object who had to keep the "blood" of the Korean people "pure" and as a biological carrier able to reproduce, rear and teach the new generation. In this sense, biological determination and its legitimation of split gender roles was recuperated not by means of tradition but by modern scientific language and Western knowledge about birth (control), childcare and professional housewifery for the realization of the Western notion of domesticity and motherhood. Therefore, the enlightenment project of the making of the modern Korean nation, with the cooperation between Japanese colony- and

Korean nation-building, conditioned the creation of colonial modernity, as well as also opened the doors of emancipation for the Korean female from Neo-Confucian family bondage and created the possibility for them to stand as a modern self as working women in public space. Yet, the patriarchal aspect of colonial modernity revealed itself via the fact that the Korean New Women's question was subsumed by the discourses of male nationalists.

Given the historical fact that the New Women were forced to take on the gender role as "wise mother and good wife" with its basis in the conservative Neo-Confucian female ideal, it is clear that the capitalist mode of production and the gender(ed) division of labor both functioned as crucial internal dynamics. Presenting males as breadwinners and females as housekeepers was the core mechanics constituting the modern capitalist gender(ed) division of labor. Thus, women were held responsible for reproduction and the men for production; an argument that made the capitalist mode of accumulation possible. Through the historical emergence of the female ideal—the "wise mother and good wife" in colonial space, it may be that the historical genealogy of Korean capitalism and of the modern(ized) form of the Korean family system can be traced back to the period of the early 1930s.

The precondition for the image of the "a wise mother and a good wife" was the setting of the home—the domestic sphere—as the proper place for the female. Thus, within discourses dealing with women's work, professionalization of the household and scientific mothering were required first and foremost, and the housewife was displayed as well as internalized as a more respectable female figure during the colonial period than those women having jobs in the public arena (i.e., the highly educated Korean women).

The ideal female image during the colonial era—the "wise mother and good wife"—was thus reproduced as the model respectable woman, the embodiment of the national and the modern. In this colonial double-bind, those New Women who wanted to achieve their own goals in the public sphere had to, using every means possible, be able to digest both roles as mother and wife. This may be interpreted as the double burden of the colonized Korean women; not only in historical genealogy but also the social mechanics creating the modern "super woman" in both the historical and the contemporary context.

The dualistic aspect underlining modernity to the Korean (New) Women in the colonial period might be interpreted as a *new* emancipation within the extrinsic layer, and a *new* oppression within the intrinsic one; that is, what might be called

the de(con)structive constructiveness of gendered colonial modernity. There was a gap between the ideal and reality of the Korean New Woman during the colonial era. Collisions occurred between the new and the old as well as traditional neo-Confucian values and the modern knowledge and education received at school. This was the colonial modernity that the New Women faced and experienced, a gendered dilemma distinguishable from that of colonial males.

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Abstract

This article looks at capitalist social change in colonial Korea from 1920 to 1937 and its impact on shifting nationalist discourse on women's work and wifely domesticity. Particular attention is placed on historically appropriated gender roles accorded to Korean colonial women, especially those who were housewives in the domestic sphere. By methodologically setting the historical debate of the "wise mother and good wife" (*hyeonmo yangcheo*) as an analytical prism, this study deals with the question of how the Confucian patriarchal system collided with newly established social relations, and how this specific historical conjuncture conditioned the emergence of modern Korean female subjectivities. At another level, by way of analyzing the collision between Korean nationalist resolution of the "woman's question" and the vision of highly educated Korean female intellectuals, this article ferrets out the substance and meaning of Korean female subjectivity constructed from colonial women's working experiences and their double burden under the given modern patriarchal structure. This study also draws on the gendered implication of Korean colonial modernity, that is, not a fixed structure but a reconstitution of patriarchal relations, a process of de(con)structive constructiveness derived from continuous interactions among nationalism, colonialism, modernity and tradition relative to the making of "Koreanness" as an imagined fraternal community and a collective gendered national subject.

Keywords: housewifization, modern creation of public and private spheres, domestic work, woman question, female subjectivity

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