

Special Feature

# Feminist Ideas of Intellectual Women of the Enlightenment Period and the New Women

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## Introduction

In modern Korean history, the period between the 1870s and the 1900s marks the beginning of modernity with the introduction and acceptance of Western civilization. This period is called the (Patriotic) Enlightenment era. In the history of Korean women, women's efforts to attain modernity gradually began during this period; however, no distinctive modern content had developed in women's self-consciousness or social movements of the 1870s and the 1880s.<sup>1</sup> It was only in the early 1890s that Korean women began to show some conscious efforts as the different waves of change across Korean society began to converge. Some radical movements led by a small number of pioneers who challenged tradition emerged during this time. Although weak, collective actions that called for women's self-recognition and enlightenment were launched in response to the prevailing social conditions of the time (Lee 1972, 37-38; 45).

Hahr Nansa 河蘭史 (1875-1919), Pak Esther (1877-1910), Cha Mellisa (1879-1955), and Yun Jung-won 尹貞媛 (1883-?) are prominent women who represent this period. Born between the 1870s and the 1880s, they received modern education in Japan or in the United States because there was no institution that provided higher education for women in the late Korean Empire period.<sup>2</sup> They returned to Korea between the 1890s and the 1910s, and were involved in various social activities. Except for Yun Jung-won who studied in Japan,<sup>3</sup> the other three were from poor lower-class families and had experienced

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1. Lee Hyo-Jae (1972) notes that during this period women's conscious reactions to the Enlightenment were meek and cautious (37). In general, women continued to be resistant to new ideas: either they regarded these ideas as unrealistic hopes of a distant future irrelevant to their lives—or they rejected them as a hazardous influence and tried to find safety in their homes, secluding themselves in women's quarters.

2. A symbolic event that demonstrates this point is the welcoming reception for returning female students held in April 28, 1909, at Gyeonghui Palace. The event was co-convened by governmental and private organizations, including the Korean Women's Association, Jahye Women's Association, Hanil Women's Association, and women's schools; among the invited were Pak Esther, Hahr Nansa, who returned from the United States, and Yun Jung-won, who studied in Japan. About seven to eight hundred people, including Henry Appenzeller and Horace Underwood, government officials of the Korean Empire, and other figures of social influence attended the event. During this time, Cha Mellisa was still in the U.S. and thus was not invited (Lee 1972, 77; Choi 2003, 132; 143).

3. It is interesting to note that except Yun Jung-won, all three women went to the United States. This is partly due to their connection/affiliation with the Western missionaries, but it also

discriminations against women. Also unlike Yun Jung-won who could keep her maiden name after marriage,<sup>4</sup> the others took their husbands' last names<sup>5</sup> and adopted Western names following the modern Western and Christian custom.<sup>6</sup>

Then, were these modern women who appeared between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century different from the New Women of the 1920s? If these modern women were essentially similar to the 1920s New Women, then can we also use the term New Women to describe them as we do the latter women? Given that the former group of women was occasionally called New Women, as we see in references from the period—such as “the dignified New Women,” “the byword of the New Women,” or “a pioneer of the New Women”<sup>7</sup>—we can ask whether and how these women differed from the New Women who appeared in the 1920s, as this paper does as its starting point.

In modern Korean history, the term New Women (*sin yeoseong*) is used in general to refer to a group of women who, influenced by the 1910s Japanese

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reflects the fact that America (the West) offered more educational opportunities to women than Japan. Even so, at least during the 1910s, there were overall more people who went to study in Japan like Yun Jung-won did than those who went to the States. Not only did Japan's proximity in the East Asian region attract more students, but also the colonial immigration policy implemented since the 1910 Japan-Korea Annexation continued this trend for some time. Since the Annexation, the Government-General of Joseon favored a policy that restricted studying abroad in the U.S., so Koreans had to go to China and acquire Chinese citizenship in order to go to the U.S. The March 1<sup>st</sup> Movement (*Samil undong*) of 1919, however, forced some relaxation of colonial restrictions (Kim 2009, 185), and consequently the trend was gradually reversed.

4. Her pen name was Namhwi 藍輝. The reason she could keep her maiden name was not just that she went to study in Japan. Consider the fact that she came from a wealthy, 55-*kan* household as the daughter of a *yangban* government official (Lee 1972, 56; Choi 2003, 129-32).
5. In the Enlightenment period, changing one's surname after marriage was a distinctive practice among educated women in Korea. Lee Hyo-Jae points out that it was common for these women leaders to take up their husbands' last names in the 1900s. Even in the 1900s, Korean women had no given names, but were simply called Mr. Kim's wife (*buin*) or Mr. Yi's wife if married; late Mr. Kim's widow (*Kim sosa* 金召史) or late Mr. Yi's widow (*Yi sosa* 李召史) if widowed; and Miss Kim (*Kim seongnyeo* 金姓女) or Miss Yi (*Yi seongnyeo* 李姓女) if unmarried. Having an individual name was the mark of an enlightened woman, which only seemed absurd to conservative men of the time (Lee 1972, 55n30; 69).
6. Hahr Nansa's last name was Kim and Nansa was from the English name Nancy. Pak Esther's real name was Kim Jeomdong and Esther was her baptismal name. Cha Mellisa's real name was Seopseop, and Mellisa was also her Western baptismal name.
7. Rhie Deok-joo evaluates Hahr Nansa as “the most avant-garde female activist and women's emancipation activist” (1987, 90; 2007, 115-16). Kim Sung-Eun (2012) describes Hahr Nansa, Pak Esther, and Yun Jung-won as the early New Women or “pioneers of the New Women” (109).

New Women (*sinnyeoja* 新女子), made their appearances in the 1920s colonial Joseon.<sup>8</sup> However, the term's ambiguity has already been pointed out by the contemporaries of the New Women. Later scholars have also suggested the various scopes and ways of conceptualizing the term New Women (Lee 2003, 21; Kim 2004, 44-45; Kim 2011, 61-62).

Lee Sang Kyung (2002) expressed skepticism over the scholarly tendencies to lump together the different ideas of women from the decades of 1900s, 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s by exploring them with a single theoretical framework of the New Women. She suggests that we need to consider the different courses of action and thoughts of the New Women by taking into account the different historical circumstances they faced including changes in social condition or various individual perspectives (79). In a similar vein, Inoue Kazue 井上和枝 (2003) points out that there is a confusion between the original meaning of the New Women as used in those periods and the later concept of the New Women as a subject of scholarly investigation. Inoue warns us of the potential prevalence of the scholarly concept of the New Women over the contemporary concept that it may create an imagery of the New Women detached from the reality (159).

## Defining New Women

This paper attempts to define the concept of New Women by examining the lives or endeavors of the women activists of the 1900s Patriotic Enlightenment period. Like the 1920s New Women who shared both similarities and differences with the Modern Girls who also appeared during the mid-1920s (Kim 2004, 22-30), the 1900s New Women shared certain similarities with the New Women of the 1920s, who were analogous to their daughter-generation, and also had distinctive traits from their daughter-generation, i.e. the New Women of the 1920s. In order to clarify the differences between the two groups of New Women, we will first conceptually define the New Women of the 1920s

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8. Kim Young Soon (2011) notes that the term *sin yeoja* was used before 1925 due to Japanese influence, but since 1925, *sin yeoseong* was more commonly used. This paper uses the term New Women (*sin yeoseong*) to refer to all its synonyms used at the time, including *sae yeoja*, *sin yeoja*, *sinjin yeoja*, and *sinsik yeoja* (63-66).

and then see whether the essential characteristics of the daughter-generation also applied to the mother-generation. The concept of the New Women of the daughter-generation can be defined by the following criteria.

- (1) Modern knowledge and education
- (2) Modern behavior with their body and consumption
- (3) Feminist consciousness, values, ideology, and practice

First, all discourses on the New Women mention modern knowledge and education as a common characteristic, but there are diverging opinions regarding categories and the levels of their education. For example, in terms of the level, some scholars list women's official graduation, Western education, intellectual women, and some modern education to broadly characterize the New Women (Shin 1986, 183; 1989, 14; Oh 1987, 129; Cho and Yoon 1995, 188; 195), while other scholars subdivide the group according to such types as studying abroad, high school graduation, and literacy level. As for the categories, discussion on the differences between ordinary women and women of bourgeois intellectual class (Shin 1985, 87-88), or categories of women laborers (*nodong yeoseong*), working women (*geunro yeoseong*), and pro women (*puro yeoseong*) are included.

The second criterion includes all external markers, visual and auditory, of a New Woman, including not only her clothes, makeup, shoes and accessories (Kwon 2002, 189-90; Kim 2004, 46-47) but also her body, gestures, expressions, and use of a particular pattern of speech and vocabulary. In general, the term New Women tended to be associated with social reform and political activism whereas the idea of Modern Girls was associated with consumption and fashion. However, the relationship between the two remains ambiguous in most cases, not just in a colonial Korean society where both appeared almost simultaneously, but also in the West (MGWRG 2008, 9-10). Thus, the external features such as body, gesture, language, clothes, and accessories, can be considered as markers of the New Women.

Finally, feminist orientation in their consciousness, values, and practices can be considered as part of the last criterion for defining New Women. This includes a range of movements and claims for equal rights and opportunities for women in certain social realms such as education and profession, economic independence, gender equality, free love, free marriage, and ultimately, women's

emancipation. These went hand-in-hand with women's self-recognition as independent and voluntary human-being as well as criticism of patriarchy and male dominance.

If we apply these criteria to the women of the Patriotic Enlightenment era, they all meet the first criterion since they studied abroad in Japan and in the U.S. These women were also differentiated from traditional women by the second criterion on modern body and consumption. Hahr Nansa, for example, displayed modern aspects by "wearing a black dress and a black hat (*gat*) with long black quill" or by "covering her face with a round hat with broad rims and black lace veil, and going out in her car" (S. Kim 2012, 123; Rhie 1987, 90; Lee 1985, 251). In addition to following Western fashion and driving a car, she also maintained her household in "enlightened fashion" (Choi 2003, 149), and spoke English and Japanese. These qualities also meet the second criterion.

In other words, if we compare the New Women of the 1900s and that of the 1920s by the first and second criteria, we see that both generations were very similar and shared many commonalities. The last criterion, involving feminist consciousness, ideology, and practice, however, clearly differentiates the two groups of New Women. Although both groups shared feminist thoughts as their common denominator, its content and implications were different. The New Women of the Patriotic Enlightenment era were different from women of the traditional society in that they demanded gender equality in education, women's economic independence, and the need for women's participation in professional and social activities. However, they also diverged from the New Women of the 1920s, who raised the issues of free love and women's emancipation.

This is also true in the West and Japan. In the 1880s, or the first half of the Meiji era, a group of women represented by Kishida Toshiko 岸田俊子 and Fukuda Hideko 福田英子 called for gender equality, women's education, women's economic independence, and women's suffrage.<sup>9</sup> The Korean New Women of the 1910s were comparable to these early Japanese feminists in that they, inspired by patriotism, also called for women's emancipation on a public

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9. See Sievers (1983, 26ff). If the first-wave feminism focused on women's emancipation in the public sphere, the second-wave feminism led by Raicho Hirasuka 平塚らいてう and the Seito 青踏 circle promoted women's emancipation in the private sphere. The latter is considered as the origin of the Japanese women's emancipation movement (Kim 2011, 60).

level.<sup>10</sup> But unlike in the West and Japan, where freedom of *political* activity and suffrage were at issue, in colonial Korea the meaning of public was confined to specific areas such as national liberation and the spread of women's education for it. In this respect, the two feminist groups were different.

During the Patriotic Enlightenment era, Korean women's self-consciousness was based on the premise of women's education and acquisition of knowledge, and was projected as the commitment to contribute to national liberation. This was ultimately merged as a part of the grand scheme of modernity laid out by Korean male enlightenment thinkers who attempted to integrate women into a modern nation-state. However, this does not mean that women only played a passive role in the modernization project. Despite the limits set by modernity, women's self-consciousness persistently pursued feminist vision and sought alternatives beyond the modern through modern education and knowledge acquisition.

These two lines of thoughts—education and acquisition of knowledge, and national independence movement and nationalism—were closely correlated in this way for the women thinkers of the time. I will first examine the correlation between the two, and hence analyze the women's feminist ideology and practice more closely to explore the similarities and differences between the feminist ideas of the New Women of the Patriotic Enlightenment era and of the 1920s. By focusing on the differences, I hope to make some contributions to clarify the ambiguities in the definition of the New Women.

## **The Great Cause of National Liberation and Women's Education/Knowledge**

As reflected in lyrics from the period—"Don't trust the Chinese, and don't be fooled by the Soviets. The Japanese are rising"—Korea in the early 1900s was struggling for national survival and independence against the European and Japanese imperial powers. Not only men but also women had to resist the threat of invasion and colonization by such imperial powers. The new historical task

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10. Reflecting nationalistic commitment, Kishida Toshiko argued that excluding women from the great project of building a nation was irrational and even immoral (quoted in Sievers 1983, 35).

of national liberation and prosperity was an obligation for, if not all Korean women, at least those female intellectuals who had received modern education. Lee Hyo-Jae suggests that due to their society's backwardness, Korean women of the Patriotic Enlightenment era could adopt the slogans of neither the liberalist movements based on individual emancipation nor the political movements which demanded women's suffrage. She writes that the women of this period demanded opportunities for education as a part of the patriotic movements which sought to restore national sovereignty through achieving national prosperity. The women also participated in enlightenment movements that attempted to break away from old customs and followed new customs of the Western civilization. In other words, Korean women's modernization began with (a collective) commitment to nation and nationalism rather than awareness of individualism (Lee 1972, 69).

In a weak peripheral state soon to fall under a colonial power, women had to face a far more difficult and complex reality than men. In addition to the existing suffering of women under longstanding male dominance, living in a small, powerless nation struggling for independence and sovereignty against the background of escalating competitions among the imperialist superpowers posed a heavy and severe burden on women of this period. It was a double challenge: on the one hand, they shared the historical task of national independence while on the other hand, they had to cope with existing women's problems under traditional patriarchy and modern oppressions on women. For these women, the feminist goals of achieving women's self-recognition of their individuality, gender equality, and women's emancipation were as important as the national question. Modernity provided a device or an arena that allowed them to efficiently address these multi-layered and complex questions. In their pursuit of modernity, liberation from the long-established customs and one's awakening as a modern woman became tasks equally important as the task of building a prosperous, modern nation-state.

Then, what aspect of modernity—political, military, economic, social, and cultural—did the women pursue? Overall, the women of the era of patriotism and enlightenment focused on realizing modernity through knowledge and education. “The Announcement of Women's Rights” (*Yeogwontongmun* 女權通文), which is considered to be the first modern declaration of women's rights in Korea, claimed that “there is gender equality in civilized Western countries because these countries have scholarship and education” and insisted

on women's right to acquire education. As a consequence of the declaration, the first Korean women's organization, Chanyanghoe 贊襄會, was established in September 12, 1898, with the goal of founding and running a women's school (Park 1984, 59; 61-62). Evidences of the women demanding gender equality and women's education from a patriotic standpoint can be seen often in this period (Lee 1972, 104-05)

Women's early pursuit of modernity in the areas of education and knowledge can be observed not only in Korea but also elsewhere as a universal trend of the modern era. We often see that feminists in European countries also prioritized the demand for education and knowledge during this period. As was the case in the West, education was the only way for the feminists in Korea who were excluded from political and social positions to resist male-oriented society and re-write the reality (Kim 2004, 273). Nevertheless, instead of being passively swayed by the tide of the time, the women could use this as an opportunity to enhance their self-consciousness and to demand gender equality by actively engaging in building a modern nation-state. Through their commitment to the modern nation-state project, the women of this period could pave the way to women's self-consciousness and emancipation. In general, nationalism and feminism developed separately in Western Europe and North America, whereas national independence and women's rights were tied together in weaker, relatively peripheral states in Northern Europe. Korea also had similar grounds for such co-development during this period (Kim 2004, 42-43).

Thus, feminism, which focused on the issues of modern education, engaged with the male-led modernization projects through the medium of nationalism. *The Independent (Dongnip Sinmun)*, the representative media of the Patriotic Enlightenment era, emphasized that women must free themselves from male domination and barbarity, and achieve their rights by expanding their knowledge and learning (April 21, 1896).<sup>11</sup> Not all male intellectuals agreed,<sup>12</sup> but giving access to learning and widening education for women

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11. *Dongnip Sinmun* also claimed that educating the people was the most important duty of the government and opportunity for education must be granted for both men and women without discrimination (May 12, 1896).

12. One example would be the debate between Seo Jeapil and Yun Chi-ho, who had both studied in the United States. When they participated at an open youth forum held in Jeongdong Church in December 31, 1897, Seo argued for women's education against Yun's disagreement,

gradually became an important and mainstream idea of the time. The novels that represent the first modern novelistic form in Korea<sup>13</sup> uniformly dealt with the issue of women's new education and overseas study.<sup>14</sup> Note that in these novels, each with a female protagonist, the heroines pursue modern knowledge and education as a solution to the problems they face.

In these novels, written by male writers, the female protagonists depart to America, Britain, Japan, and other advanced countries in pursuit of modern knowledge and opportunity for learning. The male authors' attitude towards these women's adventure to the lands of unknown is ironic and paradoxical. On the one hand, the writers are enthusiastic and encourage such attempts—but only as a part of their plan for modernization. On the other hand, the writers feared these women becoming armed with the weapons of modernity and felt anxious that they might pose a threat of betrayal or rebellion. This fear and anxiety lurk in Lee Injik's *Tears of Blood* (*Hyeol-ui Nu*).<sup>15</sup> This fear became a reality when the later generation of the New Women appeared and developed arguments and actions for women's emancipation.

## Women of the Patriotic Enlightenment Era and Their Ideas of Woman

*Habr Nansa* 河蘭史 (1875-1919)

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using the U.S. as an example (Rhie 2007, 48).

13. This includes novels such as Lee Injik's *Hyeol-ui Nu* 血淚 (1912), Yi Haejo's *Jayujong* 自由鍾 (1910) and Choi Chansik's *Chuwolsaek* 秋月色 (1912), which represent the modern Korean novels (*sinsoseol*) published between 1907, the latter half of the Enlightenment period, and 1912, the beginning of the Annexation period.
14. Here, we should also take into account commercial motivation since most of the readers of these *sinsoseol* were women (Lee 1980, 87; Choi 2000, 257).
15. Oknyeon, the heroine of the novel, has the ambition of spreading the new knowledge and education she has received in the U.S., which would liberate Korean women from patriarchic oppression and achieve gender equality, thus contributing to her country and society. However, the author is rather skeptical. The author reminds the readers that she is "someone who was sent abroad very young" and adds that her aspiration is based on "the naivety of a young student who studied abroad and is ignorant of her country's reality" (Lee [1907] 1978, 86). At this, Jeon Gwang-yong (1986) pointed out Lee's passiveness in his novel in terms of indication of women's future or aspiration for new knowledge (96-97). This reflects the idea of women during this period shared by the male writers, as well as educated men in general.

Hahr Nansa was born in 1875 to a poor family in the outskirts of the Northwestern region of Pyeongan Province. She studied in Ewha College (Ewha Hakdang) in 1894-95, and moved to Japan in 1895. Then she went to the United States in 1897 to study at Howard University in Washington D.C. She graduated from Ohio Wesleyan College with a bachelor's degree in literature in 1906, and returned to Korea. She actively engaged in women's education and liberation movements until she died in 1919 in Beijing. Although she lived only for 45 years, she led a life of a pioneer for national liberation and women's enlightenment despite poverty and hardship suffered under prevailing discrimination and traditional customs against women. *Shinhan Minbo* mourned her death, describing her as "the most progressive personality in Korean women's society" who "dedicated her efforts to women's education [for many decades]" and "devoted her heart and blood to national movements" (April 24, 1919). Choi Eunhui (2003) described Hahr as "a heroine of the time and a national liberation activist" (153). Lee Hyo-Jae (1972) writes: "she was full of patriotic spirit in her life dedicated to teaching and social activism" (76).

It is not easy to trace Hahr's awareness of women's issues in her life, which was consistently dedicated to the Korean people and national liberation. We can see snippets of her thoughts on the women's question in her debate with Yun Chi-ho, which was conducted in English. In his "A Plea for Industrial Training," Yun Chi-ho (1911) argued that education in missionary schools in Korea was failing to raise better wives, daughter-in-laws, and housekeepers. He criticized such shortcomings as not being good at cooking, washing laundry, or sewing, being disobedient to mothers-in-law, and avoiding hard work (87).<sup>16</sup> Although he treated higher education as an exception, he claimed that raising "an intelligent wife, sweet daughter-in-law, and good housekeeper" was the goal of women's general education (187-88).

Hahr Nansa (1911) harshly rejected Yun Chi-ho's criticism that female graduates of missionary schools were ignorant of basic house chores such as cooking and washing laundry. She claimed that even if those chores were not a part of the schools' curriculum, the female students learned them from school life. Even if such complaints and shortcomings were indeed true, she argued, high schools in Europe and America did not teach cooking and sewing as a

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16. Note that similar complaints were later made against the New Women of the 1920s.

part of their regular curriculum. Furthermore, the purpose of education was to nurture a “new type of women” who were “wise mothers, dutiful wives, and enlightened housekeepers,” and not to train cooks, nurses, or tailors. She found faults in Yun Chi-ho’s ignorance about women’s education, blind prejudices, and conventional, oriental attitude towards women, despite his Western education and enlightenment influences (352-53).

Admitting that Hahr’s criticism had sufficient grounds, however, that was not completely valid since Yun Chi-ho did recognize as an exception the need for a New Women’s education focused on humanities instead of vocational training in women’s high schools in Western countries.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, both Yun’s and Hahr’s ideas do not diverge significantly from today’s so-called wise-mother-and-good-wife ideology: what Hahr Nansa called “dutiful wife and enlightened housekeeper” and what Yun Chi-ho called “intelligent wife and good housekeeper” were essentially the same despite slightly different nuance and emphasis.

A major difference is the basis of their ideas: while Yun Chi-ho emphasized “sweet daughters-in-law” under the rubric of traditional big-family patriarchy, Hahr based her idea of “wise mothers” on the modern concept of wise-mother-and-good-wife. The contrast in their ideals of woman was as dramatic as that between the modern and the traditional ideals of women. Hahr’s ideal image of a wise-mother-and-good-wife could be classified as a radical idea which emphasized a woman’s status and autonomy as an individual.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, Hahr Nansa can be differentiated from the radical New Women of the 1920s who were critical towards the wise-mother-and-good-wife ideology. The “new type of women” Hahr Nansa mentioned in her writing could never be the New Women of the 1920s.

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17. It is unclear what level of education qualifies as higher education according to the educational standards of the time; Yun Chi-ho’s criticism was directed towards primary school (*botong hakgyo*) level of women’s education. If we take high school (*godeung hakgyo*) level of education as higher education, then we can argue that Yun Chi-ho did not reject the educational content on which Hahr Nansa commented.

18. In contrast to this, Yun Chi-ho’s argument reflects a typical conservative attitude. For further discussions on the two ideas of wise-mother-and-good-wife, see K. Kim 2012, 235.

*Esther Kim Pak (1877-1910)*

Pak Esther was born in Jeong-dong, Seoul, in 1877 as the third daughter of Kim Hongtaek 金弘澤. She entered Ewha College in 1886. She went to the U.S. in 1894, where she attended Liberty High School in New York and graduated from the Women's Medical College of Baltimore. She returned to Korea in 1900 and became the first Korean female doctor. Passionate for learning since childhood, Pak Esther fulfilled her goal of becoming a doctor with her strong motivation and persistent efforts. After she became a doctor, she provided medical service to lower-class women, children, and the disabled who were poverty-stricken and could not seek medical attention. She enlightened the lower-class and rural women oppressed by tradition and old customs, promoted hygienic practices, and spread the gospel as a missionary doctor. As a pioneer among professional women of the Patriotic Enlightenment era, Pak Esther selflessly dedicated her life to helping others and left significant legacy in Korean histories of medicine, women, and Christianity until her death in 1910 at age 34 from overwork (Choi 2003, 143-44; Lee 2007, 211). Lee Hyo-Jae (1972) describes her as “a comet of the Enlightenment period” and wrote that “albeit her short life, she left a dramatically new model of woman” (72-73).

Unlike the case of Hahr Nansa, concerns for patriotism and national liberation did not dominate the life of Pak Esther, who had a professional career as a doctor in the turbulent era. Such patriotic concerns as well as feminist criticism were rather subdued and not quite apparent. Nevertheless, it is clear that nation and the women's question were important motifs in her life. Particularly in the time of poverty, ignorance, and diseases, her interest in the welfare of women and children most intensively exposed to the harsh reality was something directly linked to the historical agenda of the Patriotic Enlightenment period. In a society with a high infant mortality rate, preference for boys over girls, segregation between male and female, lack of hygiene, and blind superstition (Lee 2007, 206-09; Chung 2009, 47-52), enlightenment and taking care of women and children were prerequisites for national liberation. After all, the fact that Pak Esther was a Korean female doctor reflects how her career choice was inevitably shaped to avoid the barriers of racial and gender bias

of the time.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Pak Esther's devotion to women's better life was more a means to fulfill her mission and calling and therefore, we rarely see her raising feminist questions in her private life. For instance, she was rather passive in selecting her spouse. Her marriage was arranged by the missionaries like Rosetta Sherwood Hall, who was Pak's patron before her study abroad and later became her lifelong colleague. Similar to the attitudes of today's professional career women, Pak Esther initially tried to avoid marriage as much as possible so as not to hinder her pursuit of medical education in the United States (Lee 2007, 198). The reason she got married was to follow the convention that said one must have a spouse in order to study abroad. For Pak, God's will was the most important factor in deciding whom to marry.<sup>20</sup> Hence, it is difficult to say that love or romance figured into her selection of a husband.<sup>21</sup>

### *Cha Mellisa* 車美理士 (1879-1955)

Cha Mellisa was born in 1879 as the youngest of six children to a family in Ahyeon-dong, Seoul. As her childhood name *Seobseob-i* indicates,<sup>22</sup> she grew up in the predominantly patriarchal society, enduring discrimination against as the youngest daughter who disappointed her parents for not being a son.

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19. The idea of gender segregation made contact between male doctors and female patients difficult. Even if the doctor was a woman, a Korean woman's "body and heart was not entirely opened" to a Western doctor (Rhie 2007, 61; Lee 2007, 196). We can speculate that not only her will but also such challenges the missionaries faced figured into Pak Esther's decision to study medicine.

20. In her letter to Rosetta Hall sent before her marriage, Pak Esther writes:

Do you know how my heart feels? Three nights I could not go to sleep, and feel troubled, because I never like man, and also I do not know how to sew well; but Korean custom all girls have to marry, have to be husband and wife, I cannot help that, even I do not like man. If our dear heavenly Father send Mr. Pak here, and make me his wife, I will be his wife. If God send me anywhere I will go. I do not care about rich or poor, or high or low. You know I will not get married to one who does not like Jesus' word. (Hall 1897, 205; See also Rhie 2007, 62; Lee 2007, 198)

21. This was also the case for Pak Yeoseon, Pak Esther's husband. Both Esther and Yeoseon worked for Rosetta Hall and her husband, the missionary doctor James Hall, but they had never met before wedding and shared the thought that they could get married without love (Chung 2009, 44).

22. In Korean, *seobseob-i* means "disappointment or regret," which in this case was for Cha not being a son.

She was married at 17 and lost her husband in less than three years at age 19. She was baptized by William B. Scranton in Sangdong Church and undertook social work until she decided to study abroad at age 23, which was considered relatively late in those days.<sup>23</sup> She went to Shanghai to study in 1901 and moved in 1905 to the United States, where she spent the next eight years studying and actively participating in educational campaigns, social movements, and national liberation movements. When she returned, she devoted her life in educating ignorant and poor old women of the colony encompassing “girls with braids, ladies with parted hair, deserted wives, and women preparing for marriage” (Choi [1957] 2003, 140-42; Han 2008, 91n84; 99; 155).

As mentioned above, Cha Mellisa also lived a life dedicated to her nation. Her devotion to educating the Korean people is well reflected in her career path and her activities in America.<sup>24</sup> She taught at Baehwa Women’s College for nine years, and then left the school in 1920 to establish the Joseon Women’s Educational Association (Joseon yeoja gyoyukhoe), and also founded a women’s night school. As we can also see from the criticism on the Western education provided by the Western missionaries, which became an issue throughout the colonial period (Kim 2004, 322-25), the fact that she left Baehwa Women’s College and began her own activities separate from the Western missionaries indicates her strong belief in self-sufficient education for Koreans.

Like other nationalist women, Cha Mellisa found the purpose and goal of women’s education in equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women. She mentioned that activities of the Joseon Women’s Educational Association should not be confined to providing schooling and that women wanted to break out of their small domestic sphere and learn about the wider world

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23. The return of Pak Esther, the first Korean female doctor, which received much attention, provided the final push for Cha Mellisa to pursue her dream for modern school education, on top of her awareness around the issues of women’s social status and gender equality, as well as her yearning for modern civilization (Bipadongjuin 1931, 69; Han 2008, 46).

24. According to “Submission for Publicaiton: Believing in God and Serving the Nation” (*Giseo: Sangje-reul mitgo nara-reul wihal-il*) (1907), she worked with the Daedong Education Association and other organization while staying in the West Coast of the United States. In this article of *Daedong gongbo*, she wrote that “death for patriotic causes to protect the nation by blood” is the “most useful death.” In other words, there is no difference between men and women in “sacrificing oneself to save our compatriots and restoring the country’s lost sovereignty” (November 14).

and global affairs. She also claimed that Korean women should also enjoy the social status and equal opportunities enjoyed by American women. However, there was a condition to this vision: this education must preserve Koreans' traditional humility and purity.<sup>25</sup> This emphasis on traditional humility and purity was consistent with her idea that "sewing had traditionally been a women's job" apart from rice milling and tobacco manufacturing (Kim 1922, 30). We discover liberalist tendencies in her demands for women's education and equal opportunities for social activities, but her project also faces charges of conservatism in her emphasis on femininity.

Unlike the three other women discussed in this paper who died or lived in exile by the 1920s when the New Women began to appear, Cha Mellisa shared some years with this new generation. Therefore, she had to respond in some way to the 1920s New Women's ideas about sexuality and love as private affairs, as well as women's emancipation. She argued that "[w]e do not use the words emancipation, equality, and freedom in vain." This comment reflects her discontent and criticism towards the New Women of the 1920s. She believed that the purpose of women's education was to raise their capability "to win emancipation and independence on her own by achieving her own individuality" instead of passively accepting liberation and freedom handed to them by men. This is ultimately linked to the realization of the "serious responsibility of being a mother" (Kim 1922, 30) or, in other words, of a woman's role as a wise-mother-and-good-wife.<sup>26</sup> She suggested another motivation as the purpose of women's education: "Family disputes so frequent and abundant these days—with mentions of such things as divorce and so on—is a phenomenon that indicates a serious need for women's education."<sup>27</sup> Here

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25. Similar thoughts are reflected in the titles "Equality of Sexes from Scientific Perspective" (*Gwahak-ui ipjang-eseo boneun seong-ui dongdeungseong*) and "Equality of Education between Boy and Girl" (*Sonyeon sonyeo gan-ui gyoyuk pyeongdeung*) in the index of *Yeoja siron*, included in the newsletter published by Joseon Women's Education Association (Kim 1920, 208).

26. In her works written in the late 1930s, she continued to argue that being a "proper wife and sincere mother" was more meaningful for women than marriage. In other words, she urged women to be "wise women" in the sense of wise-mother-and-good-wife (Kim 1936, 231).

27. Cha Mellisa thought that divorces happened due to the conflicts caused by the fact that women had less knowledge/education than men. In other words, she wrote, "there are many reasons for divorce but it usually happens because women are more ignorant than men." See "Call of a New Woman: To Give a New Life to Thousands of Women" (*Sinjin yeoryu-ui giyeom: Ilcheonman-ui yeoja-ege saesaengmyeong-eul jugoja hanora*), the *Donga Ilbo* article on February

too we see her criticism of the 1920s New Women's practice of free divorce.<sup>28</sup>

Cha Mellisa thus considered women's realization of self, economic independence and their role as wise mothers and good wives more important than free love, free marriage, and right to divorce. Therefore she was critical of the 1920s New Women who set free love and free marriage as the main agendas of women's emancipation. Cha Mellisa maintained a liberalist attitude towards women's self-consciousness and economic independence but was more inclined towards conservatism regarding sexuality and love. She describes the traditional ideals of femininity as elegance and chastity, emphasizing the importance of chastity and innocence. For example, she wrote that "chastity is a woman's crown" and supported the traditional view of chastity. She claimed that Korean women's virtue of chastity was "incomparable to any others' around the world" and that Korean women "had cherished her chastity more than her life or wealth" so "we must preserve this as a source of pride and never bring shame to ourselves in the eyes of others" (Kim 1935, 36-37).<sup>29</sup>

### *Yun Jung-won* 尹貞媛 (1883-?)

Finally, Yun Jung-won was born in 1883 in Changsin-dong, Seoul, to Unjeong 雲庭 Yun Hyojeong 尹孝定 and his wife, Lady Hwang, from Changwon. Unlike the three women discussed above, Yun Jung-won was born to the family of a wealthy government official and received a modern education in Japan for ten years between 1898 and 1907. She was the first female Korean student to study in Japan and became the first female professor in 1909 at Hansung Girls' High School, the first state-established public institute for women's education. She consistently emphasized the importance of women's education for achieving self-awakening and restoring national independence, and strove to put her ideas into practice. After the forced annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, Yun Jung-

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21, 1921.

28. See "Principles, Claims, and Exclusions of Famous Figures" (*Jemyongsa-ui sinjo-wa jujang-gwa baecheok*) on page 98 in the June issue of *Gaebyeok in 1921* and Han 2008, 20; 204.

29. With such belief, she explained in an interview with the Joseon Women's Education Association, she did not accept "the two kinds of women"—concubines and courtesans (*gisaeng*)—even though she said it was for "weak women with troubled pasts and in need of help" (Kim 1920, 207).

won sought asylum in China, devoting her efforts to the national liberation movement. There, she supported the Provisional Government of Korea in association with An Chang-ho and others, as well as the National United Party Movement.

Perhaps reflecting the constraints of the time, Yun Jung-won's idea of women was a hybrid of modern and traditional elements, and showed tendencies of a transitional period. In differentiating men and women, she (1906b) argued that men "are the ones who invent and study with all of ones' heart and strength" whereas "women are the ones who put ideas into action with ones' bodies." Therefore, she argued, while men were saints, scholars, philosophers, artists, moralists, and religionists, the women's realm covered charity, education, nursing, missionary, hygiene, and assiduity. She wrote that women are the "ones who know and stay in their rightful place" and that they, "by nature, possess such placid disposition without ever having to try" (46-47). Here we see the influence of traditional education she had received in childhood, based on *Elementary Learning* (*Sohak* 小學), and "The Pattern of the Family" (*Neize* 內則) in *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) (Hong 1907, 59).

Yun Jung-won's idea of women, however, was also influenced by modern thoughts. She wrote: "A woman is the people's mother, flower of society, and the sun of the humanity." This metaphor of "the sun" was used not only at the beginning of Western feminism but also in Japan and colonial Korea. In the opening address of *Bluestocking* (*Seitō* 青踏), the first women's magazine in Japan, launched in September 1911, Hirasuka Raichō 平塚らいてう declared that "since the beginning of time, women were the sun, and truly humans."<sup>30</sup> In colonial Korea, Yohan described the New Women as "daughters of the sun" in his "New Women's Song" (*Sinyeojasong*), published in the August issues of the magazine *Sinyeoseong* (Kim 2004, 46-47). By using the metaphor of "the sun," women announced their individuality and independence in the beginning of modern feminism. Thus, Yun Jung-won was a part of modern feminist thought,

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30. Sievers (1983) commented that the women who contributed to *Seitō* made meaningful demands for recognition of self and female sexuality along with the demands for political expression, social reform, economic independence, and educational opportunity, which were claimed by the women of the early Meiji period (163-65). By focusing on continuity rather than women's isolation, it reflects the argument that the *Seitō* magazine must be seen as the symbol of a new stage, if not a second wave, of Japanese feminism.

but she diverged in a significant aspect from the New Women who were soon to make their appearances in the 1920s. As we can see from her assertion that “a housewife who is the centre of her household must maintain peace and order in her family with a face as bright as the sun” (Yun 1906a, 39), what she called the sun of the humanity belonged to the domestic realm. Here also, we see an intersection of the traditional and the modern.

Furthermore, Yun Jung-won (1906c) divided citizen’s virtues into those of men and women. Although she explains that in principle, the women’s virtues “also applies to men and are not exclusive to women,” she emphasized that spirit of modesty (*gonggyeom* 恭謙) are the virtues women “must inevitably attain.” She claimed that “modesty and fidelity are not exclusively women’s virtues but these two virtues are more important to women than to men” (36-38). This call for gender equality within citizen virtue followed the same line of logic as her earlier statement on women’s rightful place, in that it ascribed uniquely and exclusively gendered values to women .

As mentioned above, Yun Jung-won enumerated charity, education, nursing, and missionary activities as endeavors connatural to women based on her own understanding of womanness . In fact, the women discussed in this paper did not deviate from these areas of activity and Yun Jung-won too placed particular emphasis on the importance of education. She argued that women had more than half of the power to make households happy, brighten up the society, and make the nation prosperous. Like Hahr Nansa, Yun Jung-won (1906a) resented the common beliefs among the ordinary women who treated “washing and pounding laundry as [their] innate duty” and insisted that “education is the only way” to awaken women of their crucial duty (40).<sup>31</sup> For Yun (1906b), women’s education is about “teaching [women] to follow the path” that is “the most suitable and steady path” to the “realization and preservation” of women’s rightful place (47). A room for a vision that would go beyond the horizon of the liberalist modern ideas of women had not yet been

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31. Even if this was the case, her opinion towards women’s education remained reserved and limited. Yun Jung-won (1906a) criticized the moral corruption of women caused by excessive women’s education in Japan and the West, and wrote that “this is a question for educators to investigate and not for Korean women’s society in desperate and urgent need of education” (41). This is along the same lines as an opinion that there was “no proper place for a great teacher” like Yun Jung-won (Hong 1907, 60) because women’s education was still in its primitive stage.

prepared in her thoughts on women's education.

Yun's ideas of motherhood also reflect this limitation. Yun Jung-won (1907) wrote that "a woman who mothers a child sacrifices her entire life for nurturing this child," and pointed to "a mother's blood-and-heart-devotion" which makes her "overcome a thousand-sufferings-and-hundred-hardships and live solely for her child" (62). Note that motherhood, along with the question of women's education, was not only a major issue in the Western and Japanese feminist discourses but also something that was also emphasized by Korean male-dominated society of the time. Discussions that emphasized the women's role as mothers appeared frequently especially in the press published during the so-called Patriotic Enlightenment period which came after 1905, as well as in Yu Giljun's *Seoyugyeonmun* (1889) and *The Independent* (*Dongnip Sinmun*) (Kim 2004, 39-40).

Motherhood emphasized in the male-dominated mainstream society had nothing to do with recognizing a woman as an independent individual and accepting her self-consciousness. Motherhood, as defined within the framework of patriarchic wise-mother-and-good-wife ideology, tended to be formulated and accepted as an emblematic figure of nation-state. We can understand how Yun Jung-won's life and thoughts were dominated by the nationalist and patriotic agendas in this context. Yun Jung-won (1907) saw her era as representing a critical condition in which "if we are off guard even for a second we might face difficulty preserving both home and social foundations." Therefore, in order to save "the whole country [from] imminent danger" we must "even surrender private and personal affair" and have devotion towards our nation and people instead (65). She tried to live by this principle while studying abroad or teaching students in Korea, as well as during her exile in China following the colonization of Korea.

Women's self-consciousness and individuality may also be included in this "private and personal affair" that must be sacrificed for the sake of the grand narrative of nation and people. Along with the emphasis on education and motherhood, Yun Jung-won shared with the male ruling elites devotion for the great cause of nation and the people. At least regarding these issues, she did not show awareness of women's self-consciousness as individual beings.

## Conclusion

During the Patriotic Enlightenment period, the imperial forces controlled a turbulent East Asia that experienced the collapse of traditional society. Korean women grew up at the margin, characterized by the ironies of tradition and modernity. In a society founded on patriarchic order and dominated by men, each of these women, with the exception of Yun Jung-won, had been oppressed: either she was a daughter of a poor family from the discriminated-against northwest region sold as a female entertainer-courtesan (*gisaeng*) who later became a concubine; or she came from a lower-class family hired by an American missionary; or she was treated as a disappointment by her parents and left alone as a young widow. Except for Yun Jung-won, who had the support of her prestigious family and wealth to study in Japan, the other three women, who occupied the lower ranks in terms of gender, region, social status, and class, chose to go and study in the unknown land of America with the assistance of Christian missionaries. The modern knowledge and modes of new civilization these women acquired, while struggling against loneliness, homesickness, economic poverty, dejection, and racial discrimination, were incorporated in visions for achieving the nation's liberation on its own, as well as women's individuality and equality.

The idea of nation and state was the major issue that dominated this period. Perhaps it was only natural that these women prioritized nationalist and patriotic devotion above all as the most important value and ideology when the very survival of the nation and the state was at stake. Although they built a foundation for women's self-awakening and emancipation by devoting their lives to the causes of the nation, they unfortunately left no room for a vision that would surpass the limits of nationalism and patriotism due to the crisis of national survival. It was indeed difficult to find a vision or an alternative for women's awakening and emancipation separate from such an ideological framework while facing the task of restoring and preserving national sovereignty.

Hence, patriotism and nationalism became the central themes of these women's lives, and this ultimately was accepted as a part of the male hegemonic project of building a modern nation. In addition to the limits imposed by the historical circumstances, their commitment to the nation and the state influenced their ideas of women. It was along with modern thoughts and culture that they adopted modern feminism during their studies abroad.

Influenced by the still-persisting customs of the old era, the women's adaptation of feminism tended to be quite selective and syncretic. Although the women took a liberal stance concerning the issues of women's individuality and independence, expansion of education and equal opportunity, and women's participation in social and professional activities, they maintained a conservative attitude regarding sexuality and love as we can see from their emphasis on chastity and the idea of wise-mother-and-good-wife.

For such conservatism, these women were different from the New Women who entered the scene a generation later. A radical interpretation and a vision of gender equality and women's emancipation required time for one more generation to emerge. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, these women made a significant contribution to the formation of modern feminism and women's emancipation. If we could measure the extent of women's emancipation and gender equality, we can say that these women built the steps at the threshold that would help later generations to cross over it. In realizing their ideas, these women strove to live their lives accordingly and put their ideas into practice instead of merely making declarations and claims. As a result, they lived a committed life for oppressed women at the bottom of a transitional society.

Translated by  
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## Abstract

The Korean educated women of the 1900s (the latter part of the Enlightenment period in modern Korean history) shared some similarities with the New Women of the 1920s but also had distinctive traits that differentiated them. This paper attempts to define the concept of New Women through exploring the following aspects in these women's lives: (1) modern knowledge and education; (2) modern body and consumption practices; and (3) feminist consciousness, values, ideas, and practices. Although the women of both periods shared certain traits of (1) and (2) in common, they showed significant differences regarding feminist consciousness, ideas, and practices. These women during the Enlightenment period were different from traditional women in that they demanded equal opportunity for education, economic independence, and women's involvement in social and professional activities. They were also differentiated from the New Women of the 1920s who brought the idea of free love and other questions of women's emancipation to public discourses. The women of the 1900s were influenced by modern feminist ideals and accepted modern ideas and practices through studying abroad. The pressure imposed by the remaining traditions mediated the colonial Korean adaptation of these ideas and practices to take a selective and hybrid form. Patriotism and nationalism, which were major themes of the period, and the inherent limitations imposed by the historical circumstances deeply influenced the formation of feminist ideas among these women. These women were modern liberal feminists regarding their emphasis on women's consciousness and independence, expansion of education and equal opportunity for women, and women's participation in social activities and freedom of profession. However, they maintained a conservative attitude towards the issues of sexuality and love and promoted the ideas of chastity and wise-mother-and-good-daughter. In this respect, they were different from the New Women of the next generation. A lapse of two more decades was needed for the appearance of a radical feminist vision and interpretation.

**Keywords:** nationalism, feminism, modern education, women's education, studying abroad, New Women