

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Living as a Colonial Girl: The *Sonyŏ* (少女) Discourse of School Curriculum and Newspapers in 1930s Korea

Kyung-Sook Shin and Helen J. S. Lee*

Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea

*Corresponding authors. Email: kssk@yonsei.ac.kr; helenlee@yonsei.ac.kr

(Received 4 May 2020; accepted 12 May 2020)

Abstract

This essay explores how the term ‘girl,’ or *sonyŏ* (少女), in 1930s colonial Korean society simultaneously created and resisted homogeneity. We analyze the different contexts and cultural forces that shaped the term ‘girl’ in colonial Korea in order to illustrate some phases of the relationships that historical girls of colonial Korea had with their nation and state, the nation, that is, to which they thought they belonged at births and the state for which they were mobilized while they were systematically otherized. In our examination, we scrutinize the ways in which the subjectivities of colonial girls were ideologically forged through educational and institutional interventions and cultural interpellation. The first section discusses the concept of the girl in colonial Korea. The second part analyzes the various ideological functions that school textbooks played in gender-specific inculcation of colonial state ideals. We then read the ways *The Chosŏn Ilbo* (*Chosŏn Daily*) used the term the ‘girl’ in the 1930s, the period when the conceptual distinction between children and adults was further solidified, and the call on children was gender-specific in public. We finally elucidate the colonial processes of which girls of colonial Korea became part, albeit unknowingly.

Keywords: colonial Korea; education; gender; imperial Japan; childhood

The Questions Concerning the Colonial Girl

On February 1, 1935, one of the news articles in *The Chosŏn Ilbo* was a “grotesque” story about a seventeen-year-old girl named Kim Pogŏm, who ran away from a school for training traditional courtesans (*kwŏnbŏn*). Pogŏm had graduated with excellent scores from a common school in Wŏnsan area, the northern part of the Korean peninsula, four years before, but could not continue to study due to the severe poverty of her family. She was still determined to learn and entered *Sŏnggyŏng* School the following year.¹ However, her shaman-grandmother forced her to enter the courtesan school and support the family. While training to become a courtesan there, Pogŏm disappeared, leaving behind seven *won*² and a letter to her grandmother:

I leave because I cannot spend my life as a courtesan (*kisaeng*) selling my songs and smiles. I will never forget home and family, nevertheless. Please do not search for me, nor blame my parents. Please do not think about living on selling your granddaughter’s ‘flesh’ (*kogi* in Korean, meaning the body); please do not think about sending my younger sisters to the courtesan school.³

This research was supported by the Amore Pacific Foundation of Korea in 2016.

¹The school was founded by missionaries in 1922 to provide education in English and machine sewing for overage girls.

²For comparison, the average daily wage for a Korean factory laborer was 1.84 *won* in 1942. I quote the statistics from Kim and Park 2011, p. 388.

³*The Chosŏn Ilbo*, February 1, 1935.

Nobody knows what happened afterwards to this girl who tried to seek her own destiny rather than settle with the one imposed on her.

One can only guess the reason for the anonymous reporter's use of the word, "grotesque" in describing this case of a missing girl.⁴ The word "grotesque" reminds the twenty-first-century reader of the characteristics of modern Japanese culture, which Miriam Silverberg associated with "the social inequities and ensuing social practices of those living within a consumer culture defined by the economic hardships of the depression."⁵ Although Korean newspapers of the period reported numerous cases of missing girls, this case was remarkable enough to be covered in a moderately lengthy report perhaps because the girl disappeared, leaving behind a letter to her grandmother that declared that her life course should be determined by her own will and that her grandmother should give up trafficking in her and her sisters. To the twenty-first-century reader, it may be somewhat bizarre that the girl in question was forced into a traditional female-entertainment service by her own grandmother; to the contemporary newspaper reader, the report might stimulate the grotesquely erotic fantasy of those who were seeped into the exchanges between courtesans and their clients – the culture of girl-trafficking, which was further worsened by economic adversity. She even audaciously advised her grandmother not to exploit her younger sisters. The news showcases a girl who was caught in traditional family hierarchy, burdened by poverty, sold to a female entertainment service, and (yet) strongly motivated to follow her desire to learn and improve herself. Whether or not the reporter recognized it, she was an embodiment and articulation of complexly charged conditions of life of many a young girl living the period. The girl's protestation, which subtly hides her accusation about her grandmother, exemplifies her effort to escape poverty and servitude, to claim her agency in life, and above all else, to dismantle the view on the girls as the exploitable body.

This essay explores how the term 'girl,' or 少女 (*sonyō*), in 1930s colonial Korean society simultaneously created and resisted homogeneity. We analyze the different contexts and cultural forces that shaped the girl in colonial Korea in order to illustrate some phases of the relationships that historical girls of colonial Korea had with their nation and state, the nation, that is, to which they thought they belonged at births and the state for which they were mobilized while they were systematically otherized. Our questions are twofold: how did the colonial state ideology produce a gendered youth subject through institutional inculcation of the idea of the girl at the historical juncture of colonial modernization? And how did the colonial society of Korea identify, classify, and address the girl in a way that contributed to the formation of a gendered modern subject trapped in complicated colonial conditions? In answering these questions, we scrutinize the ways in which the subjectivities of colonial girls were ideologically forged through educational and institutional interventions and cultural interpellation. In what follows, we will show why it is significant first to discuss the concept of the girl as an absent signifier whose central property was porous in colonial Korea; second, to delineate the ideological functions that the school textbooks played through their gender-specific inculcation of the colonial state ideals; and third, to interpret the ways notable newspapers of colonial Korea addressed the girls. For our purposes we focus on the 1930s, as this was the period when the conceptual distinction between children and adults was further solidified and gendered children came to be understood as subjects instead of being simply the objects of national enlightenment. It was also a period when the gender-based readership of print media was made visible as the foundation and circulation of a children's literature magazine like *Sonyōn* (*The Boy*, 1937)⁶ exemplify. By doing so, we elucidate colonial processes of which girls of colonial Korea became part, albeit unknowingly.

⁴The newspaper reporter uses the English word "grotesque" by inscribing it in the Korean alphabet without translation.

⁵Silverberg 2006, p. 30.

⁶This was a children's literature magazine, published by Yun Sök-Jung. It was an entirely different one from the magazine of the same title that was published in 1908.

The Concept of the Girl (*Sonyō*) in Colonial Korea

The appearance of the girl in cultural sphere was one of many modern phenomena. In colonized non-European regions such as Asia, the girl remained a neglected figure until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Western-style modernization took place and schooling was extended to accommodate female children of varying ages who had very limited access to traditional education. Defining girlhood was even more problematic in colonial Korea due to the prevalent practice of what we now call child marriage.⁷ The Government-General of Korea (GGK) defined an early marriage as those married before age fifteen in the case of females, and seventeen for males. If we remember that the average life expectancy of females in Korea during the 1930s was 38.5 years, whereas in England it was 62.9, we may legitimately question the idea of a protracted girlhood in early twentieth-century colonial Korea.⁸ Should we call a female who was, say, fifteen years old in 1938 a ‘girl’ or a ‘woman’? If girlhood needed to be understood as a separate period of life from that of a grown woman, where it fell was by no means clear. Such a conundrum suggests that the ‘girl’ did not so much physically refer to a child/woman of a certain age as to the modern cultural identity that society began to assign to and associate with her.

Distinguished from both adulthood and boyhood, girlhood is still associated simultaneously with self-evidently conflicting characteristics. It is associated with a lack of sexuality and with sexuality of a sort – immature yet alluring – as the girl is frequently infantilized and feminized at the same time. Girlhood in colonial Korea was fraught with many contradictions – presence and absence, tradition and modernity, asexuality and premature sexualization, a consuming subject of the modern Western culture and a helpless victim of male aggression, adult violence, and human trafficking, to name but a few. Because many of these contradictions have to do with coloniality, where gender, ethnic hierarchy, social class, radical disparity in socioeconomic resources, power, and other forms of capital are intricately connected, examining the colonial girl is to shift her from the margins of colonial studies to the center, to provide us with a specific site from which to rethink the multiple relationships between gendered colonial subjects and the conditions of colonial modernity, and thus to rewrite the history of coloniality and modernity in Korea.

The concept of ‘the girl’ in colonial Korea was constantly in the making; partly as a “promise of modernity” and largely in accordance with, and in response to, the imperialization of Japan and colonization of Korea.⁹ Her relation to traditional hierarchy, her position within the changing social structure, her access to and privilege of material resources and educational opportunity, and the conscious exercise of her own agency (or lack thereof) under the colonial regime all determined the ways she perceived and imagined herself within the world around her. Apart from the girl as an ideological entity and the normativity of girlhood, girls who lived their day-to-day realities conditioned by the colonial modernity had experiences widely different from one another, and their daily experiences were often “enveloped in the global history of modernization.”¹⁰ Especially within colonial Korea, the confusion and fluidity of territorial borders, the mobility and migration induced by colonization and Japanese imperial expansion, along with far-reaching changes in the economic and cultural spheres, combined to pose disturbing cognitive challenges to the everyday lives of ordinary people. These challenges were often deeply gendered and age-specific, pivoting around and demanding a way to conceptualize and define the girl’s body in a new cultural environment. Colonial modernity thus inevitably rendered the concept of the girl in colonial Korea unstable, expansive, and complicated.

⁷According to the statistics provided by the Government-General in 1937, 7.7 percent of women who were married were under the age of fifteen. See Kim Kyōng Il 2007, p. 369.

⁸See Kim Kyung Il 2007, p. 367. As for the life expectancy of British women, we referred to the data provided by the Office for National Statistics, England.

⁹Kumar 2010, p. 76.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

Compared with the ‘New Woman’ or ‘the boy’ as a new modern subject, not much has been written about girls in colonial Korea.¹¹ Ever since Ch’oe Nam-Sŏn began in 1908 to publish *The Boy* (*Sonyŏn*), the first general magazine in colonial Korea, for instance, youth in Korea were represented as young men or boys. If young women captured the attention of the public then (and now) under the name of the ‘New Woman’ or the ‘Modern Girl,’ unspecified girls were scarcely considered then as significant colonial subjects unless they were grouped as ‘school girls’ (*yŏhaksaeŋ*). The popular imagination of ‘girls’ from the colonial period tends to be colored by the descriptions about ‘Modern Girls,’ or weighed by the images of and discussion about girls who were forced into military sex slavery during World War II. Whether it was that of a flirtatious self-asserting Modern Girl, or an exploited girl in a military brothel, images of the colonial girl were circulated either as capricious modern subjects or helpless war victims of sexual and imperial violence. These two highly gendered and overly sexualized groups characterize modernity and coloniality in Korea, and yet they do not adequately represent girls of various classes whose subjectivities had yet to be formed through their responses to, and participation in, structural changes that the colonized nation underwent.

Analyzing the figures of the ‘New Woman’ and the ‘Modern Girl’ in China, Sarah E. Stevens argues that the two figurations reveal the self-contradictory understanding of modernity exhibited by the Chinese in the early twentieth century. Whereas the figure of the ‘New Woman’ expressed the quest for modernization and the desire to build a modern nation, the figure of the ‘Modern Girl’ reveals the anxiety and fear of modernity – particularly its drawbacks and “male disillusionment of modernity.”¹² If the term ‘Modern Girl’ embodies cultural fear of the newly emerging subjectivities of girls, what does the figure of a ‘girl’ within this term stand for? The semantic property of the word ‘girl’ apparently democratized girls of colonial Korea, not only across different classes but also across the national borders of Korea and Japan, while the semiotic values of the word underwent constant construction. When a new term comes into people’s vocabulary, or a term is used “in a new way,” by “enough people,” not only is its semantic property defined by the way it is used, but it also transforms the object it is meant to designate.¹³ When a boy is called for in a particular way, the particularly desired subject is created. As Jennifer Higginbotham argues in her essay on the birth of the early modern girl, “the cumulative speech acts” of people contributed to shaping “the imaginative possibilities” for what it meant to be a girl.¹⁴

The fact that the ‘Modern Girl’ and the ‘Military Sex Slave’ dominated the popular imagination about colonial girls suggests the extent to which Korean public imagination was fixated on the sexualized body of the colonial girl. This also suggests that our historical imagination of the ‘girl’ is predicated upon the presence of her body. Indeed, cultural understanding, social appropriation, and national exploitation of her body was at the core of the colonial interpellation of the girl, and educational books and print media supplemented such state and national interpellation by addressing girls of varying social classes. The study of the colonial girl is significant because both the colonizing state and the colonized nation struggled to claim her body, and for that reason her body becomes an important figure of coloniality, modernity, and nationality.

The ‘girl’ was born as an absent signifier from its inception. When the first general magazine for young generation, *The Boy* (*Sonyŏn*) was first published by Ch’oe Nam-Sŏn in 1908, one of the leading intellectuals of early twentieth-century Korea, it called for ‘boys’ and made them visible through its very title, *The Boy*. The title of the magazine was itself an interpellation of the ‘boys’ as the future citizens of Korea, and thus, the male children of certain ages were instantaneously grouped together into one universal category of the ‘boy,’ regardless of their classes in traditional society. Calling for a future citizen was thus an act of gendering him. Although it did not sell very well initially, *The Boy* certainly helped the Koreans to imagine the young generation as the subject of social and cultural reformation,

¹¹See the following articles: Kim Min-ji 2014, pp. 7–35; Kim Chuhyŏn 2012, pp. 449–83; Kim Poksun 2008, pp. 203–34.

¹²Stevens 2003, pp. 82–83.

¹³Higginbotham 2011, p. 173.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

as it was one of the earliest efforts to cultivate the young generation in accordance with the then changing political and cultural needs of Korea. The fact that most of the writers who actively engaged in publishing literary journals in the 1920s, and thus modernizing Korean literature, grew up reading magazines like *The Boy* or *The Youth* (*Ch'ongch'un*) reveals the extent to which young people seriously accepted the roles assigned to them by enlightened intellectuals. Now in the wake of colonial modernization, boys were asked to be responsible for revitalizing society and to prepare themselves for a new modern nation. If boys were called upon and requested to become aware of their new responsibilities, where were the girls?

Forgotten or dismissed, the girl was paradoxically present through her absence. By gendering future Korean citizens as exclusively boys, the title of the magazine *The Boy* contributed to forming the concept of the girl as well.¹⁵ The modern binary of the boy and the girl became more prominent than ever from the late nineteenth century throughout the twentieth century. Ch'oe's omission of the girl in his title was a weighty, if inadvertent, decision of gendering the citizens of a future Korea: boys should shoulder responsibility for national rebuilding, while girls were to remain invisible.

The asymmetrical interpellations of boys and girls ironically make us question the whereabouts of the girl within the discourse about youth, because in this discourse she is simply absent. Considering that Ch'oe, the publisher and editor of the magazine, studied intermittently in Japan between 1904 and 1907, we find that his title is by no means fortuitous. The first decade of the twentieth century in Japan saw a mushrooming of girls' magazines (*shōjo zasshi*) including *Girls' Sphere* (*Shōjo kai*, 少女界) (1903), *Girls' World*, (*Shōjo Sekai*, 少女世界) (1906), and *Girls' Friend* (*Shōjo no tomo*, 少女の友) (1908). The appearance of 'the girl' (*shōjo*) in the cultural sphere was one of many modern phenomena, as the word did not so much physically refer to a girl of a certain age as the modern cultural identity that society began to assign to and associate with her.¹⁶ It was likely that Ch'oe was well aware of the modern gender-specific reference to young people, and he was certainly addressing the boy, not the girl, through the title of his magazine.

What then was it like to perceive certain groups of females as 'girls' during the colonial period? Did they recognize their conspicuousness-as-absence forged by, say, such cultural interpellation as *The Boy*? About two decades later, the word 'girls' was used and gained currency in official, social, and cultural media, for instance, through the appearance of such magazine titles as *The Girl's Generation* (*Sonyō sidae*, 1928), *The Girl's World* (*Sonyōgye*, 1927–1928), *The Rose* (*Changmi*, 1927), and *The Forget-Me-Nots* (*Pongsōnhwa*, 1930),¹⁷ perhaps with certain ideological functions. When these females were able to get easier access to primary education and thus attended schools and learned various subjects there, the institution also turned them into gendered subjects of the colonized nation through their various ways of teaching. Then, what were their self-perceptions in their school environment and their day-to-day lives? What did they have to do to be recognized as a visible (colonial) subject? In answering these questions, the following section will explore how the state makes a call on the 'girl' by visually incorporating her into the school textbooks and curriculum and how the girl students negotiated with institutional teaching.

The Imperial Call on *Sonyō*: *Shūshin* (修身) Textbooks and *Kokugo* (國語) Essays

While the girl's position as a discernible social category in the Korean-language print media ascended, the GJK also became increasingly interested in wooing her into the classroom, determined to bring her on board with the imperial agenda. One of the most organized and effective means of deploying this state interest was through the *shūshin* (修身), the moral education curriculum which aimed to

¹⁵We agree with Han Jihee in that when the 'boy' was born, the 'girl' was also born as a "supplementary signifier." See Han 2013, p. 124.

¹⁶About two decades later, between from 1925 and 1940, there was a staggering growth in the publication of boys' and girls' magazines in Japan. See Honda 2010, p. 24.

¹⁷Among those listed, the last two were also designated as specifically girls' magazines.

inculcate in children the state's sanctioned virtues, ideals, norms, and desires. It was a pedagogic vehicle to mold and align children's conduct, behavior, actions, and even thought with state goals. The colonial girl, previously absent, was now "brought out" into public view; she suddenly stood at the center of intersecting and sometimes conflicting calls, shaped by gendered ideals, modern virtues, nationalistic impetus and imperial ambitions. She was at once cast as an equal partner with the boy, a beneficiary of modern education; her actual potential, however, was confined to "home and family," in the most repressive patriarchal sense of the term. The colonized nation called upon her to share the vision of the new modern woman, but the empire used the same rhetoric to subordinate her by demanding loyalty to the imperial causes. The fate of the colonial girl by gender and ethnicity was wedded to the need for an extra hoop to pass through in order to gain recognition, and she was to remain in the perennial status of a compensatory existence in which she could never fully become master of her own fate. While the imperial (or national) call upon boys opened new possibilities for them by shouldering the future and seeking self-validation within the empire, albeit in a colonized status, the same call upon girls ended up exposing the impossibility of ever realizing full membership, either within their colonial heritage or in the imperial state. When the girl was riding the crest of the wave of public interest and pedagogic attention in the 1930s, the more "visible" she became in the textbooks and print media, the more invisible her subjectivity and personhood became.

Japan's late nineteenth-century modern schools, as elsewhere, were designed to cater to the boys. The girl was a late addition to the classroom, and the gender imbalance in compulsory education remained a common feature across rural and urban schools in colonial Korea, with a more aggravated gap in the former.¹⁸ From 1910 to the early 1930s, Korean enrollment numbers in the Common School (普通学校) stalled;¹⁹ however, the 1930s gave rise to an overall increase in the number of boys and girls, with greater numbers of colonial girls being ushered into the *shūshin* classroom. According to statistics, the sheer number of girls matriculating jumped from 2,091 in 1917 to 31,268 in 1932; perhaps more important was the improved girls' graduation rate that went from 21.8 percent in 1917 to 63.3 percent in 1932, and up to 73.7 percent in 1937, a rate higher than the graduation rate for boys, 72.7 percent, in the same year.²⁰ As the 1930s saw a rise in the enrollment rate of the colonial girl in common schools, it meant that she had to negotiate the two contending realms marked not only by language and audience, but more importantly by ideological calling. Meanwhile, in the colonial classroom, her cognitive world would be anchored to the Japanese language and moral education. In the *shūshin* curriculum, the colonial girl's existence was defined by an auxiliary function she was to fulfill. From the first grade, *shūshin* textbooks taught her the virtues of living for others and not for herself, in accordance with the well-known aphorism of Meiji Japan (1868–1912), the "Good Wife, Wise Mother" discourse. The socially sanctioned roles designated for her were wife, daughter-in-law, and mother – caretaker and home maker. Where colonial boys dreamed of rising in the world, she dreamed of aiding in her male counterpart's pursuit of his ambitions, his fighting for the empire, or producing a son to continue his family line. The history of *shūshin* parallels the history of modern Japan. Meiji Japan had invested in the moral education of its youth from the very beginning; an earlier form of *shūshin* instruction dates back to 1872, when it was called *Gyogi no satoishi* (修身口授), a storytelling pedagogy targeting first- and second-year primary school students.²¹ The prominence of *shūshin* in primary education continued in the early decades of the Meiji era, instituting such Confucian values as order, respect, filial piety and courtesy. With the promulgation of the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education, the *shūshin* curriculum came directly under government supervision, its core values centering on national Shintoism and emperor-worship.²² That is to say, the Imperial Rescript on Education anchored children within the emperor's realm and defined

¹⁸Yamada 2010, pp. 244–45.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Chang 2008, p. 31.

²¹Murata 2006, p. 28.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 29.

the relations between the emperor and his subjects in terms of loyalty, intimacy, and bloodline. The *shūshin* maintained the status quo at the turn of the century, along with the core curriculum of history, geography, and Japanese, continuously heightening public attention and debate. The first government-authorized *shūshin* textbook (国定教科書) was published in 1903. The following year, Meiji Japan implemented a national curriculum of *shūshin* in primary schools, fostering basic moral education and the values of good citizenship. Under this nationalized universal curriculum, textbook content, including the use of figures and illustrations, were subject to scrutiny and revision. This task intensified as modern Japan was simultaneously on guard against Western hegemony whilst in the process of dominating its Asian neighbors. In comparison to the first edition which readily used foreign figures such as Nightingale, Lincoln, Washington and Columbus, the 1910 second edition featured fewer Western figures and even fewer females.²³ When transplanted into colonial Korea, the *shūshin* textbook was tasked with the additional strategic maneuvering of co-opting the colonized subjects and putting them in “their place” within the expanding empire. That is, it was not so much the blatant erasure of Korean identity that the colonial state aimed for, but more importantly, the *shūshin* was to produce a “distinctive subaltern ethnic identity” of Koreans within a multi-ethnic empire.²⁴ What was the colonial girl’s place in this praxis of ideological forces? One of the marked changes in *shūshin* textbooks from the third edition (1928–1937) to the fourth edition (1938–1941) is the inclusion of the colonial girl in full-page illustrations as equal to the boys. Didactic illustrations were especially effective on noticeably younger students who presumably had little competency in the Japanese language. Previously, in the third edition textbooks, the colonial girl had been attired in Korean traditional attire and long, braided hair, while the boy had a short haircut and was dressed in either a Western-style jacket with shorts or an outer coat. This suggests not only a temporal gap – marked by her pre-modern attire and hairstyle – between the two genders, it also reveals the colonial girl as a secondary member, as she is not acknowledged visually as a contemporaneous participant in society.²⁵ In the fourth edition, the colonial girl undergoes a drastic sartorial and tonsorial revision in which she sports bobbed hair and Western dress, a type of ‘Modern Girl.’ Previously placed in domestic settings engaged in chores ranging from doing laundry to sewing, in the fourth edition she makes her debut in the official realm of the empire, standing shoulder to shoulder with boys on her way to school, in the classroom, and during playtime.²⁶ In an illustration depicting worship at a shrine, she is shown alongside the boys while bowing.²⁷ Beyond the full-page illustrations used mostly for younger primary school students, for the upperclassmen, the *shūshin* textbooks are organized in vignettes that include smaller illustrations, with each short entry intended to convey an exemplary virtue in tune with emperor-centered and Confucian ideals. Throughout all levels of the textbooks females appear in but a scant few entries, narrowly typecast as caretakers of the home and family – essentially reduced to the trope of ‘mother.’²⁸ Males were depicted as sons, husbands, and fathers, whereas females, in the limited entries in which they do appear, were rewarded for fulfilling their virtuous motherly roles, ranging from nursing and rearing children to maintaining the home.

Charity and Nurturing as Female Virtues

Of all female icons, Florence Nightingale survived through multiple rounds of revisions, while other Western figures were discarded in the process. In fact, Nightingale is a timeless heroine, symbolic of philanthropy, or *hakuai* (博愛), who taught selfless service for the sake of larger humanitarian causes.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁴Yuh 2010, p. 123.

²⁵Kim 2006, p. 305.

²⁶For example, the second edition textbooks feature an illustration of an award at school where pupils are lined up. In it, the recipient of the award is a boy, and of the six rows of students, boys take up the center while the girls only comprise a few in numbers, placed at the margin. See Kim 2006, p. 170.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 31. In this scene, girls outnumber boys where they have occupied four rows while boys make up only two rows.

²⁸For example, the fourth edition includes fifty-seven male figures with only four females.

Nightingale's entry is almost identical in the fourth edition,²⁹ but the GKG's version has an added paragraph that emphasizes how the imperial army, wherever they advanced during the Manchurian Incident, exhibited the virtue of philanthropy; the war hostages were delighted with the surprisingly decent treatment they received from the imperial army.³⁰ The timeless value of Nightingale in *shūshin* lies in her voluntary willingness to serve her nation at a time of crisis. She is portrayed as having overcome the constraints of her gender by going to the battlefield in her capacity as nurse. It did not mean, however, that spatially-bound gender roles were to be disrupted. An entry in the same edition for sixth-graders prescribes gender-specific roles under the heading, "Men's Duties and Women's Duties."

Women should be at home, tidying up the house, tending to the elderly and raising children. These are, by nature, suitable work for a kind woman. Working outdoors with livestock such as cows or horses, working with machinery or conducting research are appropriate for men who are born with physical might. If women take care of the home, men can go out to work feeling secure. When men fulfill their duties they are doing service for society and the nation, which also translates to servicing the home. During a national crisis men will arm themselves and go to the battlefield, while women will stay behind to protect the home. These are appropriate duties for men and women.³¹

The entry above lays out spatially-demarcated gender roles, defining the home as the girl's domain of responsibility. If a girl's highest achievement was motherhood, then the ideal mother was one who willingly sacrificed her son for the good of the nation. The entry "Japanese Warrior's Mother" depicts how Yasu Yamauchi responded to the news of her son Tatsuo's death in Manchuria, and her noble act of accepting Tatsuo's death as honorable service to the Emperor is glorified.³² What makes her more heroic is that she does not dwell on mourning; she instead offers her son's death to reify and support the war propaganda by writing a letter of encouragement to Naval Headquarters. In the letter she expresses how she was proud of her son's service. It was these patriotic acts, demonstrated by Nightingale and Yamauchi, which prioritized the nation over the personal, that were to be valorized and drummed into the girl's consciousness.

At the height of the war, the GKG's 1942 edition *shūshin* textbook states, "The Japanese mother raises a healthy and [morally] correct child and wishes to offer her child to the nation."³³ Yasu Yamauchi reappears; but this time, it not only applauds her for the noble act of sacrificing her son, but also proclaims that the Japanese mother ought to devote herself to raising a son in order to sacrifice him for the nation.³⁴ In the same volume, Uryu Iwako is noted for her selfless role in looking after the poor and abandoned children. A woman from the transitional era of the Boshin War (1869), she sought work befitting a woman – nursing and feeding the injured.³⁵ The virtues celebrated and taught by such female icons as Nightingale, Yasu Yamauchi, and Uryu Iwako contain the colonial girl, setting the boundaries of the girl's dreams within the realm of charity and nurturing. This feminine property of nurturing would be extended to wartime campaigns, as the colonial girl was mobilized to the forefront by encouraging, sending off, and consoling soldiers. With the backdrop of escalating military tensions, the colonial girl was to take on increasingly active military combat-related roles within the empire, inspired by Nightingale's example.³⁶

²⁹The fourth edition of *shūshin* textbooks in Japan is from 1934 to 1940, while the Korean version published by the GKG comes a few years later, spanning the years from 1938 to 1941.

³⁰Kim 2007, p. 228.

³¹Kim 2006, p. 298.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 302.

³³Kim 2006, p. 290.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 212–13.

³⁶For research on gender and *shūshin* education, please see Chang 2008. Also, I have discussed colonial girls' regret at their being born female in an article. Please see Lee 2014, pp. 93–113.

The Colonial Girl's Kokugo (国語) Essays

If the *shūshin* curriculum targeted character-building, the writing component of the *kokugo* instruction was instrumental in its capacity as a means of reinforcement and a mechanism of surveillance. Compositions allow us to explore the ways in which the colonial girl maneuvered herself in the nexus of injunctions drummed in by the *shūshin* curriculum as she complied with *kokugo* writing. In the surviving archival collections of *kokugo* compositions, colonial girl's voices are scant and opaque. Under these constraints, however, her gender can be identified by such criterion as enrollment in girls' schools, gender-specific names, and essay content. Given that the *kokugo* composition was a mandatory curricular activity under pedagogic supervision, we need to read them with caution and avoid committing the error of falsely equating them as "honest" or "truthful" recordings of her thoughts; rather, the essays ought to reveal what was permitted or desired in the writing curriculum, and what the colonial girl thought appropriate to write.

The colonial girl's writings from the early 1930s that debuted in print media echoed the qualities in tune with feminine virtues of charity, kindness, and care. Included in a 1934 collection of *kokugo* compositions entitled *Bunshū*,³⁷ the colonial girl's most rewarding and perhaps most frequently invoked topics are associated with *kawaii* (cute) and *kawaisō* (pitiful), two adjectives amplifying the tamed nature in the girl; *kawaii* exemplifies the affectionate engagement with the external world, while *kawaisō* demonstrates the ability to sympathize. An example from the collection is an entry by Kwōn Kwiye, a third-grader at Jōnju Girl's School, expressing her affection toward her one-year old nephew.

My nephew is one year old this year. He has black eyes and a big nose. With his pretty hand, he says "motsu (grab)" to everything. He is irresistibly cute. (*kawairashikute tamarimasen*)

This young girl's adoration of the baby is delivered in a markedly maternal tone, and she goes on to describe how the thought of her nephew makes her smile.³⁸ We then have another example from a third-grade girl, Yu Insun, who extends her caring warmth to a baby sparrow. When she comes across an immobilized baby sparrow, she does her best to care for it by feeding and keeping it company. Insun writes, "I could not bear the sight of its (the bird's) pitiful state. (*kawaisōde tamaranakunari-mashitakara*)." Only after the baby sparrow is reunited with the mother sparrow does Insun let out a sign of reprieve by writing, "I felt relieved, indeed (*hontō ni anshin shimashita*)."³⁹ In the teacher's section, the commentaries applaud delicate sensibilities and expressions of kindness in essay writing.⁴⁰

Compared with these third-graders' innocuous accounts, Yōm Suok, a fifth-grade girl, describes a rather stifling situation. Titled "The Day of My Absence," she writes about a morning when she did not have a clean *eri* (collar)⁴¹ for her *tsurumaki*, the outer garment, and hurriedly asked her mother to attach a new one. As Yōm Suok waits, time passes and her tardiness for class seems most certain. Her parents scold her for her unpreparedness, upon which she begins to cry. But her crying angers her father, who tells her not to cry over such a trivial matter. The situation escalates to an emotional eruption, but Yōm Suok does not display any hint of resentment or disobedience toward her parents. Instead, she writes in contrition how she should have not fussed over a collar, and just gone to school. "I felt bad that I had upset my mother and father." At the close of her essay she regrets even more about having missed school on the festive National Foundation Day, February 11th.⁴² Although her absence on that commemorative day may not have been excusable, her absence could have been compensated by her perfectly disciplined composure in handling her mishap, further complemented by her ability to self-correct and repent for her misjudgment. Compared to the younger girls' exhibition

³⁷For a study of Korean children's *kokugo* compositions, please see Lee 2019, pp. 1-32.

³⁸*Bunshū* 1934, p. 105.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴¹By *eri*, is meant a detachable collar.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.

of ideal girlhood in the use of *kawaii* and *kawaisō*, the fifth-grader's writing takes it to a higher ground by showcasing the mature and tamed sensibilities of self-reflection and obedience.

As the years of total mobilization wore on and the war intensified, celebration of feminine qualities such as kindness was replaced by the soliciting of more direct involvement in the war effort. Essays in the 1944 volume *Heitai no oniisann e* ("To My Soldier Brother") speak to the escalating moment in which the girls' essays sound more determined and emotive, mostly in terms of envy and regret about the impossibility of joining the imperial army, but nonetheless duty-bound and willing to protect the home front, the *jūgo*.⁴³ The colonial boy's entry into the legitimate realm of empire seemed imminent with mandatory conscription, which in turn generated a sense of deficiency within the girl. He was on the way to becoming a future star, the protagonist, and the most valuable player. As the war escalated, the colonial girl's envy and "deficiency" also ballooned. In response to the pressing war propaganda, the essays of the colonial girls – who had adopted Japanese names in compliance with *sōshi kaimei*, the name-change policy – largely rebuke and deny her gender. A fifth-grader, Kaneshiro Mitsuko, professes, "*Kuyashii* (frustrating), I, too, could have become a splendid soldier had I been born a boy."⁴⁴ Seiyama Keiko, a sixth-grader, writes in her essay, "Mother, I cannot stand but feel it is such a shame (*zan'nen*) that I was born a girl."⁴⁵ Kaneda Masako, a sixth-grader, hears the news of the draft in Korea and expresses her envy toward her three little brothers who would become eligible to serve in the military. "How I envy you (my little brothers) that you are born a boy. Why was I born a girl?"⁴⁶ Hirajima Keiko, a fifth-grader, describes a conversation with her older brother and father who speak fervently of their support for mandatory conscription in Korea. Realizing that she cannot share their excitement she admits, "Because I am a girl I could not say anything."⁴⁷ Hirajima does not stop at this, however, and goes on to write, "I might be a girl, but I will grow and strengthen my body and work on the home front, in the same way as a soldier would on the battlefield!"⁴⁸

Ideologically, Hirajima's and other girls' highest duties on the home front could only be fulfilled through motherhood. That is, the gendering of the girl meant guiding her dreams to compensate for her deficiencies by becoming an imperial mother, like Yasu Yamauchi. A fifth-grader, Sekiguchi Masako echoes Seiyama Keiko's frustration by writing, "I cannot help but feel it is a shame that I was born a girl." But Sekiguchi recognizes an important duty for women, which was to "become a mother for Japan and raise soldiers who will shoulder the future of Japan."⁴⁹ While the girl was in the preparatory phase of developing her body in order to become an imperial mother, her feminine tenderness and maternal warmth would instead be extended to the military. In the 1944 volume, the colonial girl affectionately consoled soldiers by addressing them, *oniisan*, and expressing her admiration.⁵⁰ Beyond writing, her gendered service would figure prominently in send-off ceremonies, comfort letters and packages, the consolation of soldiers and morale-boosting by projecting them as her heroes.

The colonial girl's *kokugo* writings in the two surviving archival sources indicate how she negotiates with the moral injunctions and behavioral expectations that fell on her shoulders. If the 1934 publication delineated the tamed, disciplined nature of girlhood, the 1944 collection demonstrates how those feminine qualities found a functional purpose in the war effort. Although she was to suffer an ineffable sense of deficiency in the face of mandatory conscription, her redemption could be achieved by becoming an imperial mother who gives birth to a son, a future imperial soldier.

⁴³For a study on propaganda writings by children during wartime Japan, please see Lee 2014, pp. 93–113. Lee discusses the girls' frustration as bystanders in the militaristic mission.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁵*Heitai no oniisann e* ("To My Soldier Brother") 1944, p. 171.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁵⁰Lee 2014, pp. 107–8.

“Girls” in Newspapers in 1930s Korea

If the girls within schools negotiated with the imperial dictates, many of the girls outside schools had to negotiate with, or directly face “precarity” (to borrow Judith Butler’s term) of life,⁵¹ or to be more precise, of “probable death.”⁵² Unlike the home islands of Japan, “girl culture” never became prevalent throughout the colonial period in Korea. The reasons for the absence of girl culture require further research beyond this essay; but in spite of, or perhaps because of, such an absence, it is important to examine the ways in which the print media of colonial Korea addressed girls, and to find out what kind of space – imaginary or actual – colonial girls forged in the reading public during the time.

As Adrian Bingham points out, newspapers, with their wider circulation than that of books, were “perhaps the most important channel of information about contemporary life.”⁵³ We argue that the representational category of ‘the girl’ (*sonyō*), was more widely addressed at the time when newspapers and magazines were mushrooming. The purpose of our investigation is to illustrate the ways in which the term, the ‘girl,’ was used in the newspapers, and how its use informed the reader of the public presence of ‘girls.’ Although the space of this essay may circumscribe in-depth analyses of the various types of lives of the girls, the restriction does not obviate the need for such illustrations. *The Chosŏn Ilbo*, a Korean-language newspaper founded on March 5, 1920, exemplifies how the naming of a particular demographic group was done in mass print media. Headlines often contained the word 少女 (‘the girl’ or ‘girls’). During the decade of the 1930s, a total of 904 news headlines ran containing the term.⁵⁴ Compared with 648 entries during the 1920s, the increased number suggests that girls and their lives came more fully in the purview of the public and were considered to be newsworthy. The entries for ‘girls’ outnumbered those for ‘schoolgirl’ (女學生), which appeared 172 times.⁵⁵ During the same decade, there were 2,681 entries which contained ‘boys’ or ‘boy’ and 563 entries which contained ‘married women’ (*punyō*). In the previous decade, there were 3,917 entries for ‘boys,’ while entries for ‘married women’ appeared only 633 times. Entries for ‘schoolgirls’ appeared 306 times in the 1920s. The term ‘*sonyō*’ was alternately used along with such other words as *kyejibae* (or *kyejib aie*, meaning ‘girl child’) and *ch’ōnyō* (an unmarried young woman, literally meaning a virgin) in the newspapers. The term *sonyō* (‘the girl’) broadly applied to girls of a wide range of ages, from three to eighteen or nineteen. Most of these entries reveal that girls fell prey to different kinds of accident and exploitation in the rapidly changing society, but they also help us read them as social subjects with their own sense of agency – the ones who could shape their lives in accordance with their encounters with the conditions of their lives during the decade.

As expected, most of the news was about various misfortunes that befell Korean girls. As shown in the anecdote with which we began this essay, many girls were being trafficked in and out of their homes and hometowns for a meager amount of money (ranging from three to twenty *won*).⁵⁶ Apparently girls were sold at very young ages, as revealed by the notorious murder case of a five-year-old girl, Lee Oksun, in the backyard of a Chinese restaurant, *Yōlbinnu* (in Tonūi-dong), Seoul. A thirty-three-year-old Chinese man named Wu Binhae (also known as Wu Binji) murdered his alleged foster daughter, whom he said he had “bought” for three *won* from a poor family in order to profit from prostituting her in the future. He and his wife, Ma Sinae, who traded opium, “bought” young Korean girls, according to the newspaper. They had been living with four other

⁵¹Butler 2009, p. 1.

⁵²Driscoll 2010, pp. 14–15.

⁵³Bingham 2004, p. 3.

⁵⁴The number of appearances of the word ‘the girl’ (*sonyō*) in *The Dong-A Ilbo* is much higher than in its counterpart, *The Chosŏn Ilbo*, but the relationship among the frequencies of ‘the girl’ (*sonyō*), ‘the boy’ (*sonyōn*), and ‘the married woman’ (*punyō*, 婦女) in the headlines in *The Dong-A* is similar. We limit our analysis in this essay mostly to the articles in *The Chosŏn Ilbo*, as it had a larger number of subscriptions.

⁵⁵Interestingly, the appearance of the term ‘schoolboy’ was much lower than that of the ‘schoolgirl,’ and amounts to only eight times.

⁵⁶It is not easy to assess the value of 10 KRW, but according to the statistics, an average monthly pay of employees was around 10KRW, while school teachers were paid between thirty and fifty *won* in the 1930s.

girls who were suspected to be Korean, although these girls would not speak Korean in the police station. Apparently, Wu was the “evil” guardian of the murdered girl, and his crimes of kidnapping, girl trafficking, and murder turned out to have had a longer history and with more victims than the murder of the five-year-old girl revealed. He and his wife, along with other Korean accomplices, had been kidnapping children and seducing young women under the pretext of connecting them to rich families, in order to sell them to local dining places or brothels in China. One of the accomplices, Park Chunch’öl, even sold his own five-year-old niece, who was later murdered by Wu.⁵⁷ The news shocked the public, and newspapers intensely and intently reported the trial results of these cases.⁵⁸

The kidnapping of girls was frequently reported in the newspapers, and often involved residents in the Chinatowns of Sösomun and T’aep’yöng-dong. According to the newspaper articles, girls were kidnapped and forced into prostitution in Chinatown, or sold and sent off to Shandong or Shanghai, China. Newspapers often stated that the police were going to raid the Chinatowns to search for the girls who had been rumored to work there as prostitutes and opium addicts. It is also evident that people were aware of rumors about Chinatowns, and obliquely associated cases of missing girls with the hitherto unidentified organized human traffickers involving the ethnic Chinese in Korea and their Korean accomplices. Inhabited by a different ethnic group, Chinatown was at the center of both well-grounded and unfounded rumors about poverty, atrocity, and lawlessness.⁵⁹ Eventually, *The Chosön Ilbo* one day concluded that uncovering the crimes of the Chinatown-based girl- (child-) trafficking would be difficult because most of those girls had been kidnapped at a very young age and would not remember their parents nor speak the Korean language.

Aside from the girls kidnapped by the Chinese and sold to buyers in both Korean Chinatowns and mainland China, there were girls who were abused by “bad” foster parents; girls who were living in domestic servitude were often physically and sexually abused. Many of the girls reported about in the newspapers fell out of familial or parental protection due to poverty, to their parent’s ignorance, or to the presence of organized human traffickers (*inyuksijang*, meaning the market for human ‘flesh,’ the term actually used in the newspaper).

Girls were not always victims, however. We do not mean to suggest that all colonial Korean girls were victims of patriarchy, of industrialization and modernization, of male aggression and human trafficking, or of colonial violence. Although newspapers ran a greater number of articles about unfortunate girls who were victimized, girls also sometimes rebelled and sought ways to shape their own lives. Girls in the factories, for instance, organized workers’ strikes and sabotage. On August 21, 1929, thirteen- and fourteen-year-old girl factory workers at a silk mill in Ch’öngju, Ch’ungch’öng-do, organized a strike. The following year about thirty young girls also organized a strike at a mill in Ch’unch’ön, Kangwön-do, on February 13, 1930, protesting against low wages – wages that wouldn’t even cover half the cost of their meals, according to the newspaper.⁶⁰ There were also girls who registered themselves in special classes for the illiterate. Among the three classes for literacy provision (*munja poküp*) that *The Chosön Ilbo* offered to girls, boys, and women respectively,⁶¹ the class for girls showed the highest enrollment, with ninety-one students, the boys with fifty-five, while the married women’s class had only twenty-five. The lower enrollment rate for boys and women may be explained by the fact that boys had better access to official schools and that married women had less free time than girls. The higher enrollment rate for the girls, however, attests to the enthusiasm with which girls acquired *Hangül* literacy. Literacy provision classes were offered with memorable slogans such as “Knowledge Is Power” (*anün kösi him ida*) or “we can’t survive without learning” (*paewö ya sanda*). The slogans underscored limited literacy, not only as an essential survival skill in a

⁵⁷*The Chosön Ilbo*, July 6, 1934.

⁵⁸*The Chosön Ilbo*, July 6, 1934.

⁵⁹*The Chosön Ilbo*, June 24, 1934.

⁶⁰*The Chosön Ilbo*, August 21, 1929; December 3, 1930.

⁶¹*The Chosön Ilbo*, July 29, 1930. It was part of the media-sponsored literacy campaign. For a detailed discussion of literacy campaign, see Lee 2007.

modernizing society, but also as an important element of citizenship even in a colonized nation.⁶² The presence of girls enrolled in “literacy education” that took place outside formal schools indicates their desire to participate in knowing the world around them through their own ways of reading it.

While the above-mentioned cases suggest that some girls resisted their confined agencies as epistemic and political subjects, or as individuals, newspapers of the 1930s expressed concerns about the increasing number of crimes committed by girls and women. Some notable examples include: girl swindlers, arsonists who set fire to their husbands’ or in-laws’ houses in order to escape the marital shackles, girls fleeing from their family who forced them into unwanted wedlock, or the girls identified as “juvenile delinquents.”⁶³ Especially in response to the “juvenile delinquents,” the GGK was, according to the newspaper, intending to survey the rate of juvenile delinquency throughout the Korean peninsula.⁶⁴ Perhaps in order to figuratively sanitize the streets of Seoul of potentially delinquent girls, the GGK interrogated girl hawkers selling caramel candies and chewing gum. These girls of “twelve or thirteen years old wore heavy makeup like waitresses of cafes and bars.” The newspaper called them “secret night flowers” who were manipulated by evil young men or women behind them.⁶⁵

A story about a girl communist leader once appeared in the newspaper. Kwak Söngsu, a sixteen-year-old Chosön Communist Party member, was arrested by the Japanese for anti-colonist resistance activities in Manchuria.⁶⁶ The news article calls her a “Red Jeanne d’Arc” (Joan of Arc), and this analogy with the royalist symbol of “integral nationalism” is intriguing.⁶⁷ The writer of the essay might not have been all that familiar with the context within which the detailed political semiotics of Joan of Arc had been employed, and yet the figure of a patriotic heroine would itself have been quite well known in colonial Korea.⁶⁸

The news articles about girls evidently increased the visibility of girls. The consequences of increased visibility, however, seemed rather ironic. At the very moment that these girls came within the cognition of the reading public, many of their lives were defined as lying outside ‘normative girlhood’; threats, dangers, and severely unhealthy conditions were the rules rather than exceptions of their way of living during the period. At the very least, the girls who were reported, delineated, or represented through the news media seemed to be denied the status of ‘girls’ even though, in fact, they were officially addressed as such. Girls without girlhood found that to exist outside ‘normative girlhood’ meant being perceived as the ones who had to sacrifice their ‘flesh,’ that is, their bodies. The news media bore witness to the fact that the bodies of these girls – the group of female youth that they named as ‘girls’ – were easily accessed by adults, often exploited for economic gain, or sacrificed for perverted adult pleasures and commerce parasitizing on such deviant pursuits. Theirs were the bodies held hostage to precarity of life.

Remembering again that the average life expectancy of Korean women in the 1930s was approximately half that of their British counterparts, a twenty-first-century reader of the ‘girls’ of the period may face conceptual challenges. One of these challenges takes us back to the questions with which we

⁶²The literacy provision class offered by *The Chosön Ilbo* included in its textbook fundamental arithmetic as well. See Heo 2017, p. 153.

⁶³Statistics by the GGK, for instance, showed that the number of juvenile delinquents of both sexes in the P’yonnamm-do area alone amounted to 1,500 as of November 1935. A news article in the October 1, 1933 issue attributes the increase in the number of juvenile delinquents to modernity (“the chronic disease of modern civilization”) – with the appearance of the department store and the allure of the entertainment business.

⁶⁴*The Chosön Ilbo*, October 1, 1935.

⁶⁵*The Chosön Ilbo*, August 17, 1938.

⁶⁶*The Chosön Ilbo*, December 26, 1934.

⁶⁷Hanna 1985, p. 217. The news articles liberally used the analogy of Joan of Arc in order to describe a female leader of a resistance movement. Explaining, for instance, a photograph of a girl leading a group of socialist activists who were arrested for having been involved in an Austrian miners’ strike in Spain, the article uses an expression, “A Spanish Joan of Arc.” See *The Chosön Ilbo*, November 30, 1934. Joan of Arc was often introduced to young readers of colonial Korea. There was a story about the “five-hundredth anniversaries of [Joan of Arc’s] liberation of Orleans, in 1929, and of her death, in 1931” in *The Chosön Ilbo Supplement*, May 29, 1938, a section intended for young readers.

⁶⁸Students at Ewha Girls School staged George Bernard Shaw’s 1923 play, *Saint Joan* on December 9, 1927.

began this essay, and which may be succinctly summarized by one ultimate question: was there girlhood in colonial Korea? The ‘girl,’ or *sonyō*, was a term appropriate for filling the lacuna between the appellation of *kyejibae* (‘female children’) and *punyō* (‘married women’). The lacuna that should be filled both conceptually and practically as a transition in modernizing society from a young female child to a married woman required sufficient time. The state- and social interpellations of the girls through educational apparatuses and print media unwittingly made visible the conceptual hiatus between the two simple stages of the female life cycle – childhood and womanhood, while filling it with the modern term of *sonyō* (the ‘girl’). In colonial Korea, the concept of the ‘girl’ emerged paradoxically through its absence and through a new representational category imported from the modernized West. Born as an absent signifier, the ‘girl’ became porous and capacious, and yet, it failed to suture the ruptures of the meaning of the ‘girl’ in the public imagination of the period.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, girls were living their daily lives by whatever term they were addressed. Undoubtedly, in the 1930s girls gathered at schools and learned the school subjects shaped by imperial edicts. Undoubtedly, people talked about and imagined girlhood, and often not without a discussion of deviant girls. One of the earliest occasions on which ‘girl’ was used in the news in *The Chosŏn Ilbo* was to do with the increase in the number of “deviant boys and girls.”⁶⁹ Undoubtedly, every now and then, pictures of girls were printed in the newspapers, and this created a space in which the reader’s ideas about the ‘girl’ were made to correspond to what the visual representations suggested. Undoubtedly, cultural phenomena of the ‘Modern Girl’ stirred responses that were as rife with emotions such as anxiety, fear, and fascination as they were in Japan or other parts of the world.

The ‘girl’ evidently was a useful concept to designate those young female members of society whose adolescence was protracted by changes such as industrialization and modern schooling. Within the colonized Korean society, defining the ‘girl’ was not only practically but also ideologically necessary, as she was a significant resource to be used to accomplish the Japanese imperial mission. If the woman’s body became a guarantor of the imperial succession through bearing the lines of “imperial sons,” the girl’s body was another guarantor for meanings: her body signified the possibility of maintaining the ideological and practical missions of the empire; hence, the need to put the girl under educational management and discipline.

If the girl was officially required to learn the ways to self-discipline her mind and body at official educational institutes, she also found a way to negotiate her desire and ambition. Education under the colonial regime required that she become not simply a “good wife and wise mother,” but also the empire’s mother who should dedicate herself to the (re)production of imperial heroes. Her body, along with her mind, was an object of state mobilization, and thus an object of disciplining and surveillance. Such a state appellation evidently made girls feel as though they were themselves subjects who could fulfill highly gendered, if always secondary, imperial missions, as the students’ compositions testify.

The girls’ school compositions illustrate the ways in which they imagined themselves as “proper” imperial subjects – albeit ever inferior in terms of gender (as opposed to boys), ethnic belonging (as opposed to the Japanese girls), and age (as opposed to women). The fact that Japan did not officially emphasize the difference in phenotypes of the Japanese and the Korean probably facilitated such imaginary (and imaginative) negotiation(s). Even during the high point of their colonial domination, Japanese colonial discourse of assimilation “applied to [the] more ethnically similar East Asian colonial subjects in Korea and Taiwan” than people in other regions.⁷⁰

Imperial and national interpellations created a democratic group of Korean girls to which any female child or young woman could ideologically belong, as the declaration of six million boys and

⁶⁹The total number of entries in 1920, the first year of the foundation of *The Chosŏn Ilbo*, in which the term *sonyō* (‘the girl’) was used was four.

⁷⁰Fraleigh 2012, p. 202. In her work on the Japanese territorial colonization of Manchuria, Park Hyon Ok also argues that the “fictive unity supplied Japan with the language of sameness.” See Park 2000, p. 201.

girls on Children's Day (5 May) in 1934 suggests.⁷¹ This group of "girls" was itself a group only imaginarily sutured together, however, as their lives were widely varied in accordance with differences in access to material and immaterial resources and with the prevailing ideas about modern life. Girls were told that they were also the pillars of Korea's future, but at the same time, many of them were placed in profoundly complicated conditions. They were both inside and outside the empire. Claiming their hearts, minds, and bodies was at the core of imperial and colonial education, but they often found their actual lives relegated to the margins of colonial governance. Their bodies came to have different significations as they crossed the boundaries of class and ethnic, geopolitical, and national borders which were constantly in flux due to Japan's imperial expansion and rapid social changes in East Asia. The public recognition of girlhood came with a self-contradictory understanding of the girl's body.

In the very hiatus that was discursively produced came confusion and contradiction. Girls in colonial Korea had to find and acknowledge that their bodies were frequently located at the cusp of the private and the public, tradition and modernity, of nation and empire, and of national (ethnic) borders of Korean, Japanese, and Chinese; many girls found themselves vulnerable to changes, transitions, and transits. Colonial girls in the news media pointed to the discernible demographic category of the 'girl' and new analytical possibility, but they also evidenced a theoretical impossibility of normalizing girlhood.

References

Official documents

"National Newspaper Archive of Korea." Library of Korea. <https://www.nl.go.kr/newspaper/sub05.do>. Accessed August 1, 2018.

Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/>. Accessed May 20, 2018.

Primary sources

Bunshū, Chōllabukdo kyōiku kai (Northern Chōlla Provincial Education Bureau), 1934.

The Chosōn Ilbo (The Chosōn Central Daily).

The Dong-A Ilbo (The Dong-A Daily).

Heitai no oniisan e, Ryokki renmei (The Green Flag Association), 1944.

The Maeil Shinbo (The Daily News).

Secondary sources

Bingham Adrian (2004). *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.

Butler Judith (2009). "Performativity, Precarity, and Sexual Politics." *AIBR* 4, pp. 1–13.

Chang Miyoung (2008). "Kūndae hanil yōsōng kyoyuk kwa sosōl yōngu," *Ph.D. dissertation*. Chōnnam taehakkyo, 2008.

Driscoll Mark (2010). *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895–1945*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Fraleigh Matthew (2012). "Transplanting the Flower of Civilization: The "Peony Girl" and Japan's 1874 Expedition to Taiwan." *International Journal of Asian Studies* 9 (2012), pp. 177–209.

Han Jihee (2013). "Choe Namsōn ūi sonyōn ūi kihōek kwa sonyō ūi ingyō" ("Choi Namsōn's Cultural Project of 'Sonyōn' and the Supplementary of 'Sonyō'"). *Chendō wa munhwa (Gender and Culture)* 6:1, pp. 124–48.

Hanna Martha (1985). "Iconology and Ideology: Images of Joan of Arc in the Idiom of the Action Française, 1908–1931." *French Historical Studies* 14, pp. 215–39.

Heo Jaeyoung (2017). "Ilje kangjōnggi hangūil undong kwa munmaeng t'och'e'i (munja pogūp) undong yōngu" ("The Study of Hangeul Movement and the Eradication Movement of Illiteracy during the Colonial Periods"). *Toksō yōngu (Journal of Reading Research)* 44, pp. 127–61.

Higginbotham Jennifer (2011). "Fair Maids and Golden Girls: The Vocabulary of Female Youth in Early Modern English." *Modern Philology* 109:1, pp. 171–96.

⁷¹*The Chosōn Ilbo*, May 5, 1934.

- Honda Masuko** (2010). "The Genealogy of *hirahira*: Liminality and the Girl." In *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, eds. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley, Tr. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kim Bok-soon** (2008). "Sonyö üi t'ansaeng kwa pangongjuüi sösa üi kyebo: Ch'oe Chönghui üi 'Noksaek üi mun'" ("The Discovery of Girls and Genealogy of Anti-Communist Narratives – focused on Choi Jung Hee's 'Green Door'"). *Hanguk kündae hak yöngu (Journal of Modern Korean Literature)* 18, pp. 203–34.
- Kim Chuhyön** (2008). "Puru sonyödül üi kach'ul kwa wölyöng – 1930 nyön sonyö kongch'ul chönhusa." *Yösöng munhak yöngu* 28, pp. 449–83.
- Kim Jy-hyon** (2012). "Puru sonyö üi kach'ul kwa wölyöng – 1930 nyöndae sonyö kongch'ul chönhusa" ("Runaway and Crossing the Border of Disadvantaged Girls – History before and after 'Forced Supply of Young Girls' in the 1930s"). *Yösöng munhak yöngu (Feminism and Korean Literature)* 28, pp. 449–83.
- Kim Kyong-il** (2007). "A Study on the Question of Early Marriage in Colonial Korea." *Hankukak Nonjip (Essays in Korean Studies)* 41, pp. 363–95.
- Kim Min-Ji** (2014). "Sikminji chosön üi sonyö tokcha wa kündae taejung munhak üi tongsidaesöng – Ilbon munhak kwa ilbonö chapchi toksö kyönggyang üi chungsim üro" ("Girl Readers and Contemporaneity of Popular Literature in the Colonial Era: Focusing on Reading Trend of Japanese Literary Works and Popular Magazines"). *Taejung sösa yöngu (Journal of Popular Narrative)* 20, pp. 7–35.
- Kim Poksun** (2008). "Sonyö üi t'ansaeng kwa pangongjuüi sösa üi kyebo: Ch'oe Chönghui üi 'noksaek üi mun'." *Hanguk kündae munhak yöngu* 18, pp. 203–34.
- Kim Puja** (2008). "Sikminji sigi Chosön pot'ong hakkyo ch'wihak tondgi wa ilbonö: 1930 nyöndae rül chungsim üro" ("Purposes of Enrolling in Common School and Japanese Language in Colonial Korea"). *Sahoe wa yöksa* 77, pp. 39–55.
- Kim Sunjön oe** (2006). Chosön ch'ongdokpu ch'odünghakkyo susinsö wönmun sanggwön 朝鮮總督府初等學校修身書原文(上). Chei aen ssi. Kim Sunjön oe. Chosön ch'ongdokpu ch'odünghakkyo susinsö wönmun haggwön 朝鮮總督府初等學校修身書原文(下). Chei aen ssi.
- Kim Nakyeon and Park Ki-Joo** (2011). "Sikminjiki Chosön üi imgüm sujun kwa imgüm kyökcha—kongjang imgüm üi chungsim üro" ("Level and Differentials of Wages in Colonial Korea: Focusing on Factory Wages"). *Taedong munwha yöngu* 74, pp. 379–411.
- Kumar Krishna** (2010). "Culture, State, and Girls: An Educational Perspective." *Economic and Political Weekly* 45:17, pp. 75–84.
- Lee Helen J. S.** (2014). "Negotiating Imagined Imperial Kinship: Affects and Comfort Letters of Korean Children." *Review of Korean Studies* 17:1, pp. 93–113.
- Lee Helen J. S.** (2019). "Cultural Assimilation in the *Kokugo* (国語) Classroom: Colonial Korean Children's *Tsuzurikata* (綴り方) Compositions from the Early 1930s." *Japanese Literature and Language* 53:1, pp. 1–32.
- Lee Hye-ryoung** (2007). "Newspaper, Narod, Novel: Hierarchy of Literacy and Its Representation." *Hanguk kündae munhak yöngu (Journal of Modern Korean Literature)* 15:4, pp. 165–96.
- Murata Noboru** (村田昇) (2006). "Shushin kyokash: Mieji kara Showasenzeki no hennyö 第1部 修身教科書「明治期から昭和戦前期の変遷」." *Kindai nihon no kyokasho no ayumi: Meiji kara gendai made『近代日本の教科書の歩み：明治期から現代まで』*, pp. 15–21.
- Park Hyun Ok** (2000). "Korean Manchuria: The Racial Politics of Territorial Osmosis." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, pp. 193–215.
- Silverberg Miriam** (2006). *Erotic, Grotesque, and Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stevens Sarah E.** (2003). "Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China." *NWSA* 15:3, pp. 82–83.
- Yamada Kanto** (2010). "Sikiminji Chosön esö üi kündae hwa wa ilbonö kyoyuk" ("Modernization and Japanese-language Education in Colonial Korea"). *Hanil Yöksa Kongdong Bogosö* 4. Seoul: Hanil Yöksa Kongdong Yöngu Uiwonhoe, pp. 237–64.
- Yuh Leighanne** (2010). "Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education." *International Journal of Korean History* 15:1, pp. 121–50.