

5. *A Doll's House* and Interventions into Women's Spectatorship

The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself.
*Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own*¹

This chapter analyzes the discourse of colonial Korean women's reception of Henrik Ibsen's 1879 drama *A Doll's House* in the 1920s and the 1930s.² *A Doll's House* tells the story of Nora, who leaves her husband and three children after a marriage crisis. Upon leaving, Nora declares that she was raised as a doll by her father and handed over to her husband Helmer, yet she is a human before she is a mother and wife. Through Nora, Ibsen showed how women were born into the patriarchal power structure, and that family lives were intrinsically a part of this oppressive system for women.³ Leaving her home behind, Nora became *the* symbol of the women's liberation movement worldwide, giving rise to debates over women's rights and cultural productions dealing with women who questioned conventional gender norms.⁴

From the early 1920s onwards, colonial Koreans took part in the "global phenomenon of *A Doll's House*."⁵ The epicenter of the reception and discussions of *A Doll's House* in colonial Korea was not theaters but print media, such as daily newspapers, popular maga-

1 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Orlando: A Harvest Book, [1929]1989), 55.

2 For this chapter I use William Archer's 1889 English translation and two Korean translations by Yang Könsik and Yi Sangsu. See Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House: Play in Three Acts*, trans. William Archer (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889); Ibsen, *Nora*, trans. Yang Könsik (Seoul: Yöngch'ang Sögwon, 1922); Ibsen, *Inhyöng üi Ka [A Doll's House]*, trans. Yi Sangsu (Seoul: Hansöng Tosö Chusik Hoesa, 1922). To avoid confusion, this chapter uses translators' names in the footnotes in addition to the author's name.

3 The drama's impact on feminist discourse is discussed in chapter 5.1.

4 The global scope of the reception of *A Doll's House* is discussed in chapter 5.1.

5 Julie Holledge, "Addressing the Global Phenomenon of *A Doll's House*: An Intercultural Intervention," *Ibsen Studies* 8, no.1 (2009), 13–28.

zines, and books.⁶ With two translations appearing in 1922 and numerous texts drawing upon them, *A Doll's House* became a critical and contentious work in colonial Korea.⁷ As the historian Hyaewol Choi put it, “some viewed the character [Nora] as an iconic embodiment of the modern self, while others considered her to be a classic example of the perfidious influence of Western ideals, especially feminism, in destabilizing the family.”⁸

Previous research has thoroughly investigated the Korean reception of *A Doll's House* from various perspectives. Literary historians found that this drama was understood as a means of introducing Western realism to Korean literature and disseminating the idea of individualism.⁹ Contemporaries saw unique value in Ibsen's drama because it dealt with social problems, which was rare in Korean literary tradition.¹⁰ As the theater scholar Yi Sünghŭi points out, praising Nora as the symbol of individualism was an expression of the zeal for Western-oriented modernization and an alternative way to imagine and reinforce the idea of Korean emancipation from Imperial Japan.¹¹ Recent comparative studies have placed the Korean reception of *A Doll's House* in the context of the broader East Asian reception of Ibsen's works and found close relations between translations and literary adaptations of the famous play in colonial Korea, China, and Japan.¹²

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- 6 Despite its prominence, there were only four stage productions of *A Doll's House* during the colonial era. For an overview of the four productions see chapter 5.1.
 - 7 Yang Könsik and Pak Kyegang's translation, serialized in *Maeil Shinbo*, was published as a book under the title *Nora* in June 1922. Only five months later, another Korean translation by Yi Sangsu appeared under the title *A Doll's House*. See Pak Chinyöng, “Ipsen kwa Segye Munhak ūi Shing-minji: Yang Könsik ūi Inhyöng ūi Chip Pönyök kwa Sarang ūi Kaksöng [Ibsen and Colony of World Literature: Yang Könsik's Translation of *A Doll's House* and *The Awakening of Love*],” *Minjok Munhaksa Yöngu* 58 (2015), 9–35; see 18. For a comparative analysis of the Yang and Pak's translation and Yi's translation of *A Doll's House*, see Kim Chaesök, “1920-nyöndae Inhyöng ūi Chip Pönyök e taehan Yöngu [A Study on the Translation of *A Doll's House* in the 1920s],” *Han'guk Kük Yesul Yöngu* 36 (2012), 11–36.
 - 8 Hyaewol Choi, “Debating the Korean New Woman: Imagining Henrik Ibsen's ‘Nora’ in Colonial Era Korea,” *Asian Studies Review* 36, no. 1 (2012), 59–77; refer to 60.
 - 9 The interest in individualism among Korean intellectuals in the context of *A Doll's House* is discussed in chapter 5.2.
 - 10 For instance, see the preface of *Nora* written by the literature critic Kim Chöngjin: “Looking back on the past of our literary scenes, what values has our literary art taught us for our lives and what did it imply for our academic circle? They [the poets] sat all day long alone in their quiet houses and wrote, ‘Flowers are blooming, birds are singing, and the moon is bright.’ The questions of life that agonize us and evoke a yearning in us the most, such as what our lives were and what kind of enlightenment we should acquire in the future so as to lead a truthful life, were completely irrelevant [to the old literature].” Kim Chöngjin, “Sö [Preface],” in Ibsen and Yang, *Nora*, 1–3; refer to 1.
 - 11 See Yi Sünghŭi, “Ipsen ūi Pönyök kwa Söng Chöngch'ihak [The Translation of Ibsen and Gender Politics],” *Yösöng Munhak Yöngu* 12 (2004), 37–68.
 - 12 See Su Shan Shan, “Inhyöng ūi Chip ūl Naon Yönyu wa Puinnon ūi Kwallyöŋ Yangsang Yöngu [A Study on the Connection between *The Reason of Getting Out of the Doll's House* and *Die Frau und Der Sozialismus*],” *Hyöndae Munhak Iron Yöngu* 56 (2014), 347–75; Pak, “Ibsen and Colony,” 9–35; Deng Qian, “Yöŋ Sangsöŋ Ch'ogijak e Nat'anan Ipsen Suyong Yangsang Yöngu: *Chisangson ūl Wihayö wa Cheya rül Chungsim ūro* [The Acceptance of Ibsen in Yeom Sang-Seop's Early Works: A Study Focused on *For the Supreme Good and New Year's Eve*],” *Kukje Ömun* 68 (2016), 7–37.

Meanwhile, feminist scholars focused on the question of how the drama initiated debates over women's liberation in the public discourse. Their studies found that Nora was debated in close relation to the new concept of the Korean New Women (*shin yŏsŏng*) of the time. Furthermore, they confirmed that numerous Korean male writers of that time explored modern womanhood by adapting the motif of leaving home.¹³ Hyaewol Choi's 2012 study, which encompasses editorials, literary adaptations, and public scandals surrounding New Women and *A Doll's House*, proffers so far the most extensive insight into the Korean reception of the drama in the English-speaking scholarship with attention to feminism.¹⁴

As a symbolic work of realist drama and women's liberation, *A Doll's House* was discussed throughout the 1920s and 1930s in Korea not by women, who remained mostly silent, but primarily by male intellectuals.¹⁵ Of the more than one hundred texts mentioning Ibsen or Nora which I consulted for this study, only five of them were written by women: Kim Wŏnju, Na Hyesŏk, Kang Ch'ŭlsŏng, Kim Ryŏsun, and Kang P'yŏngguk. Concurrently, treatises, newspaper columns, and literary adaptations related to *A Doll's House* often addressed Korean women as passive readers.¹⁶ Korean literary scholar Ryu Chinhŭi summarizes the gendered communication of the play as a process that reestablished women as the Other during the colonial era in Korea.¹⁷

Chapter 5 expands on the feminist criticisms of the public discourse surrounding colonial Korean women's reception of *A Doll's House*. My approach distinguishes itself from prior studies by bringing literary adaptations of *A Doll's House* closer to non-fictional texts on the drama, such as columns and newspaper articles. I analyze them together using the Foucauldian concept of the commentary to explore how these texts contributed to the formation and limitation of Korean women's readership and spectatorship.¹⁸ Foucault counts commentaries as one of the procedures that "ward off its [a discourse's] powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance every event, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality."¹⁹ Foucault explains that such procedures emerged because discourse is not only an expression of desire but also a desired object that evokes power struggles:

There is nothing surprising about that, since, as psychoanalysis has shown, discourse is not simply that which manifests or hides desire—it is also the object of desire; and since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates

13 See Yi, "Translation of Ibsen"; Ryu Chinhŭi, "Han'guk ŭi Ipsen Suyong kwa Noraijŭm ŭi Yŏk'ak [The Reception of Ibsen and Significance of 'Noraism' in 1920, 30's Korea]," *Na Hyesŏk Yŏn'gu* 2 (2013), 192–222.

14 Choi, "Debating Korean New Women."

15 Ryu, "Reception of Ibsen," 206.

16 Yi, "Translation of Ibsen," 59–60.

17 Ryu, "Reception of Ibsen," 217.

18 I would like to express my gratitude to Stephan Packard for introducing me to this concept.

19 Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," trans. Ian McLeod, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1970]1981), 51–78; see 52.

struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.²⁰

Foucault insists that commentaries neither endlessly create new discourses about the primary text nor selflessly recite the primary text, although they might seem to do so. Instead, commentaries manifest their interpretations and even things that “never [have] been said” by “tirelessly repeat[ing]” them while wrongfully claiming that these things were “silently articulated ‘beyond’” the written words of the primary text.²¹ As a result, commentaries construct seemingly new discourse but concurrently restrict what can be said about the primary text. Foucault wrote:

Commentary exercises the chance element of discourse by giving it its due; it allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on condition that it is this text itself which is said, and in a sense completed. The open multiplicity, the element of chance, are transferred, by the principle of commentary, from what might risk being said, on to the number, the form, the mask, and the circumstances of the repetition. The new thing here lies not in what is said but in the event of its return.²²

Public discussions of *A Doll's House* and literary creations inspired by this piece in colonial Korea included interpretations of the play and even instructions on how particularly Korean women should understand the drama. By reading these texts as commentaries in the Foucauldian sense, I demonstrate the formative process of the discourse about women's emancipation and spectatorship in Korea during the 1920s and 1930s which encompasses various genres of texts. Through a series of analyses, chapter 5 aims to understand how the cultural discourse possibly preconditioned women's understanding of *A Doll's House* in the 1920s and 1930s. Through the case of *A Doll's House*, this chapter elaborates on the ways in which female audiences and readers in colonial Korea experienced cultural creations closely related to their own lives was interceded by male voices, and how they were marginalized in social discussions related to this play. In addition, by introducing rare cases of women who expressed their own opinion on the play, this chapter pays closer attention to the traces of women's knowledge and political movements that are not captured in the mainstream public discourse. Through this analysis, chapter 5 will show that male intellectuals attempted to determine the position of women in the cultural discourse and that women evaded from such an attempt.

20 Foucault, “Order of Discourse,” 52–53.

21 Ibid., 57–58.

22 Ibid., 58.

5.1 *A Doll's House* in Colonial Korea

A Brief Trajectory of *A Doll's House*

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* premiered on December 21, 1879, at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, Denmark.²³ Shortly after the world premiere, the drama was translated and played in other countries and caused further debates. Particularly, Nora's departure at the end of the drama caused unease among contemporaries worldwide because Nora's decision to leave her house radically challenged the notion of motherhood of the time. Halvdan Koht, a contemporary witness, noted that "*A Doll's House* [...] exploded like a bomb into contemporary life [...] ending not in reconciliation, but in inexorable calamity, it pronounced a death sentence on accepted social ethics."²⁴

Conflicts surrounding *A Doll's House* paradoxically testify that patriarchy, which allocates women to the domestic realm as wives and mothers, had supra-regional power. The controversy surrounding Nora's decision went so far that the drama was only performed with a different ending in Germany 1880. The Flensburger Stadttheater presented the play as early as February 6, 1880, with two alterations that curtailed the scenes of the protagonist's controversial decision. Following the name of the main character, the play's title was changed to *Nora*; furthermore, the ending was changed due to the public outcry concerning Nora's separation from Helmer.²⁵ Particularly, the actress Hedwig Niemann-Raabe, who played Nora, refused to follow the original ending, arguing that she would never leave her children.²⁶ Eventually, Ibsen had to provide the theater company with another ending "in which Nora does not leave the house but is forced by Helmer to the doorway of the children's bedroom; here a few lines are exchanged, Nora sinks down by the floor and the curtain falls."²⁷ Ibsen called the alteration "barbaric outrage."²⁸ In this altered version, Nora's last words symbolically showed women's struggle between the individualistic pursuit of self and the normative expectations of motherhood: "Oh, this is a sin against myself, but I cannot leave them!"²⁹ Likewise, the 1883 American premiere concluded with a *happy ending*, while a similar alteration to the Australian premiere could

23 Julie Holledge, Jonathan Bollen, Frode Helland, and Joanne Tompkins, *A Global Doll's House: Ibsen and Distant Visions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.

24 Halvdan Koht, *The Life of Ibsen, Volume 2* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), 152, as cited in Michael Meyer, "An Introduction to *A Doll's House*" in Henrik Ibsen, *Ibsen Plays: Two*, trans. Meyer (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 11–21; see 16–17.

25 Wilhelm Friese, "Einleitung," in *Ibsen auf der deutschen Bühne: Texte zur Rezeption. Ausgewählt*, ed. Friese (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1976), VII–XXIV; see XIII.

26 Meyer, "Introduction," 18.

27 Ibid. The public of Munich could watch the original ending on March 3, 1880, at Münchener Hoftheater. See *ibid.*, 19.

28 Ibid., 18.

29 Carolyn Joy Lenske, "An Ibsen Timeline," in *Words on Play: Insights into the Play, the Playwright, and the Production, A Doll's House* (San Francisco: American Conservatory Theater, 2004), 22–27; refer to 25.

only be hindered by the actress Janet Achurch, who toured the world playing Nora and refused the alternative ending.³⁰

Nora and other mother figures in Ibsen's dramas "had loud echoes in British novels of the period, with New Womanish heroines [...] all experiencing motherhood as a fraught and finally unrewarding phase of their lives,"³¹ which broke with the conventional depiction of motherhood and questioned the myth of the maternal instinct. Even before poststructuralist feminist language was developed, the drama "sparked discussions on women's rights in public and private circles, coffee shops, and bourgeois salons" as it was a "powerful intervention in the existing social order."³² In the U.S., the critics and advocates of Nora exchanged heated arguments through newspapers and magazines. The *New York Dramatic Mirror* defamed Nora as a "freak," and the *Chicago Times* denounced the drama as "morbid, forced, repulsive" as the authentic script was played in the 1889–90 season.³³ Meanwhile, Annie Nathan Meyer (1867–1951), who founded the first women's college named Barnard College in New York City, espoused the drama. According to her, Ibsen's drama was "a clarion call to women to throw off the yoke of the Past, to arise, to put aside their worn[-]out ideals and to boldly assume the duties of the Present Age."³⁴

Unni Langås's 2006 poststructuralist feminist study of *A Doll's House* offers a critical analysis of the backlash against Nora's decision. Langås suggests that the drama is "an analysis of how gender and gender subordination is produced."³⁵ Adopting Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, Langås demonstrates that Nora "puts her own ideas, hopes, and illusions in conflict with the surrounding sanctions and restrictions"³⁶ by doing allegedly *unwomanly* things, such as taking a loan instead of her father and her husband and leaving her husband and three children behind. Her action invites spectators to consider gender identity "as one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, a hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures."³⁷ Concur-

30 See Marvin Carlson, "Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in America," in *Global Ibsen*, ed. Fischer-Lichte, Barbara Gronau, and Christel Weiler (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 39–52; see 39–40; Jacqueline Martin, "A Doll's House in the Antipodes," in *Global Ibsen*, 53–64; see 53–54.

31 Sally Ledger, "Ibsen, the New Woman and the Actress," in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-De-Siècle Feminisms*, eds. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 79–93; see 84.

32 Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Introduction," in *Global Ibsen*, 1–16; see 1–2.

33 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, January 18, 1890; *Chicago Times*, March 6, 1890, as cited in Carlson, "Ibsen's *Doll's House*," 40.

34 "Ibsen's Attitude Toward Women," *The Critic* 16 (1890), 132, as cited in Carlson, "Ibsen's *Doll's House*," 40.

35 Unni Langås, "What Did Nora Do? Thinking Gender with *A Doll's House*," *Ibsen Studies* 5, no. 2 (2006), 148–71; see 148.

36 Langås, "What Did Nora Do?" 157. Judith Butler summarizes gender performativity as follows: "In the first instance, then, the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration." "Preface (1999)," in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), vii–xxvi; see xiv–xv.

37 Butler, "Preface (1999), xv.

rently, Langås observes that Nora “blurs any distinction between a supposed player and an authentic self”³⁸ as sometimes she seems to *believe* in the roles she plays. According to Langås, sensing that gender identity can be performed through verbal and corporeal acts is one possible reason behind viewers’ feelings of unease because it unsettles the belief that the gender binary and heteronormative roles might be *natural*. Langås summarizes: “Consequently, the performative aesthetics of *A Doll's House* may be read as a highly developed deconstruction of the distinction between natural and artificial behavior, between a gendered essence and a way of playing.”³⁹

With over 1,000 productions worldwide between the world premiere in 1879 and 1946, *A Doll's House* emerged as a momentous drama, embodying budding feminism around the globe.⁴⁰ East Asia witnessed the scandalous last scene of the play as well: the Ibsenian play premiered in 1911 in Japan, in 1914 in China, and in 1925 in colonial Korea.⁴¹ As the original text of an influential Japanese translation, William Archer's 1889 English translation played a crucial part in the East Asian reception of the drama. In Japan, Shimamura Hōgetsu (1871–1918), who studied Western drama, literature, and aesthetics at Oxford and Berlin, translated the drama based on Archer's version and directed the Japanese premiere in 1911.⁴²

The boom that the Japanese production created motivated Chinese and Korean students in Japan, including Lu Jingrou and Hyōn Ch'öl, to direct *A Doll's House* in China (1914) and Korea (1925).⁴³ In both countries, the drama was received as a text of social reform. In China, Nora was considered “as an archetype for new women [] and new people” and “became closely aligned with New Culture enlightenment”⁴⁴ during the 1919 May Fourth period. Similarly, the Korean reception of the drama was situated in the reform discourse after the 1919 March First Movement.⁴⁵

Recasting Gender: *A Doll's House* and the Japanese New Theater

A Doll's House was introduced to Japan first through a partial translation in 1893. Takayasu Gekkō translated excerpts from the drama and *An Enemy of the People*, published under

38 Langås, “What Did Nora Do?” 164.

39 Ibid.

40 For the keyword search see IbsenStage, <https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/search>.

41 Ozasa Yoshio, *Ilbon Hyōndae Yōngūksa: Myōngch'i, Taejōng P'yōn* [History of the Modern Theater in Japan: Meiji and Taishō Era], trans. Myōng Chinsuk, Yi Hyejōng, and Pak T'aegyū (Seoul: Yōngūk kwa In'gan, [1985]2012), 58; Chengzhou He, “Interculturalism in the Theatre and Chinese Performances of Ibsen,” *Ibsen Studies* 8, no. 2 (2009), 118–35; see 118. See also Pak, “Ibsen and Colony,” 19.

42 Mitsuya Mori, “Women's Issues and a New Art of Acting: *A Doll's House* in Japan,” in *Global Ibsen*, 75–88; see 79.

43 Deng Qian, “Nora ūi Homyōng kwa Kach'ul ūi Pyōnjūngbōp: Han'guk kwa Chungguk esō ūi Inhyōng ūi Chip Pōnyōk kwa Chōngjōnhwa [The Interpellation of Nora, the Dialectic of Running Away: A Comparative Study on the Translations of *A Doll's House* in Korea and China],” *Minjok Munhaksa Yōngu* 58 (2015), 43.

44 Chi Limin, *Modern Selfhood in Translation: A Study of Progressive Translation Practices in China (1890s-1920s)* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018), 139.

45 The Korean reception of the drama is discussed in detail in chapter 5.2, 5.4, and 5.5.

the title *Ibsen's Social Plays* (*Ibsen Saku Shakai Geki*) without drawing much attention.⁴⁶ In 1901, both dramas were translated again by Takayasu and republished, this time in full length.⁴⁷ His translation of *A Doll's House* was based on an English version.⁴⁸ However, the drama did not cause a sensation until the Literary Society played it on September 22, 1911, under the direction of Shimamura Hōgetsu.⁴⁹ Shimamura was one of the Western-oriented intellectuals in Japan who gathered around Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), an influential Japanese thinker. Under his guidance, the Literary Society endeavored to establish a new form of theater called *shingeki*, literally “New Theater.” Theater scholar Ayako Kano summarizes the aims of *shingeki* as follows:

New Theater involved new ideas and practices such as faithful adherence to the playwright's intentions, well-trained interpreters shunning commercial success and placing themselves at the service of the play, and spectators regarding the performance as a serious text to be read and appreciated without sexual involvement with the performers.⁵⁰

A Doll's House premiered at a minor stage installed in Tsubouchi's garden between September 22 and 24, 1911, and debuted on the professional stage of the Imperial Theater in November 1911.⁵¹ Kano argues that the premiere of *A Doll's House* “marked a decisive step for New Theater itself”⁵² concerning three aspects: its successful performance proved Japanese theater's ability to adopt European modern theaters; it presented the first actress trained in European acting techniques; furthermore, it had a lasting impact on the feminist movement in Japan.⁵³ In particular, Matsui Sumako (1886–1919), the actress who played Nora, embodied the theatrical and social innovation theater reformers wanted to achieve as the first actress trained in the European acting style in Japan.⁵⁴ Until the Metropolitan Police Office allowed mixed-gender plays in August 1891, the 1629 ban on women's acting in plays still had a hold on the Japanese stage.⁵⁵ In *kabuki* and *shimpa* plays, female roles were principally played by *onnagatas*, female impersonators.⁵⁶ However, ever since Toyama Masakazu (1848–1900) and Suematsu Kenchō (1855–1920) separately called for the abolition of *onnagata* in 1886 to establish a Western-oriented modern theater, the appearance of an actress was considered to be a significant step to

46 Reiko Abe Auestad, “Ibsen's Individualism in Japan: John Gabriel Borkman and Ōgai Mori's *Seinen* (Youth, 1910),” *Ibsen Studies* 6, no. 1 (2006), 44–67; see 45 and 63.

47 Auestad, “Ibsen's Individualism,” 45.

48 Jens-Morten Hanssen, *Ibsen on the German Stage 1876–1918: A Quantative Study* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2018) 138 (see note 186).

49 Mori, “Women's issues,” 79.

50 Ayako Kano, *Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan: Theater, Gender, and Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 13.

51 See Mori, “Women's Issues,” 79.

52 Kano, *Acting Like Woman*, 184.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 63.

55 According to Ozasa, there were a few female actors in *kabuki* despite the ban, such as Ichikawa Kumehachi. See Ozasa, *Modern Theater: Meiji and Taishō*, 37–38.

56 See Mori, “Women's Issues,” 77–78.

improving Japanese theater.⁵⁷ In the years that followed, Japanese audiences witnessed the emergence of actresses such as Chitose Beiha in *shimpa* plays.⁵⁸ They were (former) *geisha* women trained in traditional music and dance.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Matsui Sumako was neither *geisha* nor trained by *kabuki* experts but a married woman and homemaker. She decided to learn realistic acting through the Literary Society's two-year acting course, which encompassed textual expositions of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in English. Eventually, her choice to become an actress led to the end of her marriage, as she could not fulfill the conventional expectations as a wife.⁶⁰ In this sense, Matsui's biography overlapped with Nora's.

People who used to watch *kabuki* and *shimpa* were deeply impressed by *shingeki*'s realistic acting style. An episode shared by a theater critic captured the moment where the realistic acting style, unfamiliar to most audiences of the time, became an element for the educated population to distinguish themselves, mainly because of its alienness. The critic's coachman asked him:

"But that wasn't like theater. As if we were watching people in real life. When they played the scene where the woman would depart, they did it as if they were really parting. You enjoyed it?"

"I did."

"Do you intellectuals want to see that kind of theater, paying so much money?"

"Yes, I do, I must."

"I don't understand why that was good."

"It was good to see actors as if they were living persons."

"I see. Then, I will say nothing more."⁶¹

This conversation reveals that some intellectuals began to embrace this new way of acting and to distinguish their taste from people whose notion of theater was closely tied to *kabuki* or *shimpa* acting styles. Notably, advocates of *shingeki* rejected *kabuki* theater. *Shimpa* (new school), which also aimed to overcome *kabuki* before *shingeki*, was nevertheless deeply influenced by *kabuki*.⁶² However, establishing different theater aesthetics from *kabuki* was a difficult task due to a matter of convenience: *kabuki* was already well-established with a rich repertoire and a pool of actors to draw from. Thus, young theater-makers were often dependent on the human networks of the *kabuki* world. Some *shimpa* and *shingeki* makers could not help but cast *kabuki* actors or train the aspiring actors under the guidance of *kabuki* experts. However, with Matsui, the Literary Society drew a

57 See Sugai Yukio, *Kündae Ilbon Yōn'gūk Nonjaengsa* [*The History of Modern Japanese Theater Controversies*], trans. Sō Yōnho and Pak Yōngsan (Seoul: Yōn'gūk kwa In'gan, [1979]2003), 9–17.

58 Ozasa, *Modern Theater: Meiji and Taishō*, 38.

59 Mori, "Women's Issues," 78.

60 Ibid.; Ozasa, *Modern Theater: Meiji and Taishō*, 54–55.

61 Kawamura Hanabishi, "Shienjo to Ningyo-no-le [The Private Stage and *A Doll's House*]," *Kabuki* (November 1911), 39–40, as trans. and cited in Mori, "Women's Issues," 83.

62 The description of *shingeki* in this paragraph is based on Ozasa, *Modern Theater: Meiji and Taishō*, 38–39.

clear line between its understanding of realistic drama and the styles prevalent in previous Japanese theaters.

After Matsui's impressive debut, intellectuals began connecting the realistic aesthetic of *shingeki* and actresses' assigned biological sex, and "acting like a woman" [became] contested territory."⁶³ The female writer Tamura Toshiko (1884–1945) commented:

No matter how much these ancient *onnagata* suffered for the sake of their art, it's not like they left us any special artistic techniques to portray women on stage. Just by wearing female wigs they were made into beautiful women, roughly imitated simple expressions of women's grief, anger, joy, and left us these as *patterns*. That's all.⁶⁴

In the beginning, audiences accepted both *onnagata* and actresses as female characters while allocating them to different acting styles. As a theater magazine asked twelve renowned writers about their opinion on who was better at playing a female part, ten of them stated that "they had no preference for one over the other; *onnagatas* were better for *kabuki*, an actress better for a modern play."⁶⁵ However, as Kano's study found, "the rise of the actress, then, brought with it a marginalization of the *onnagata*" while actresses could claim the New Theater stages for their own.⁶⁶ In this sense, Kano concludes that "the emergence of the actress and the marginalization of *onnagata* in modern Japan was both a liberating and repressive phenomenon."⁶⁷

It is notable that in Japan, the casting of actresses for female roles and realistic theater aesthetics landed with the premiere of *A Doll's House*, which challenged the very notion of naturalness of gender identity, whose performativity was already epitomized by *onnagata*. A possible explanation is that the actress herself on stage, mostly unforeseen, signified the emergence of new societal roles for women. Tamura asserted that actors trained in *kabuki* would not have access to the mentality of New Women, strengthening her claim that the role of a New Woman must be played by an actress who enjoyed a Western education: "The role of an awakened woman [*jigaku shita onna*], or a woman with a modern education and a scientifically developed brain, would not be comprehensible to male actors raised in the Japanese *kabuki* theater."⁶⁸

Based on Sugita Hisajo (1890–1946)'s 1922 haiku, Japanese theater scholar Mitsuya Mori underlines that since the premiere, Nora became a referential figure for Japanese women to reflect on their own social status and to speak out about their understanding of women's roles:

63 Kano, *Acting Like Woman*, 18.

64 Tamura Toshiko, "Ne Hanashi ["Ne" Story]," *Engei Gahō* (January 1912), 144, as trans. and cited in Kano, *Acting Like Woman*, 18. It should be noted that Tamura's understanding of *onnagata* is based on gender binary, sidelining the possibility that some *onnagata* actors did not identify themselves as men.

65 Mori, "Women's Issues," 81.

66 Kano, *Acting Like Woman*, 8.

67 Ibid.

68 Tamura, "'Ne' Story," 144. Here, too, Tamura assumed that all *onnagata* were cisgender men.

Darning a pair of socks
 As a teacher's wife
 I have no courage to be a Nora.⁶⁹

The premiere of *A Doll's House* functioned as a vehicle for the feminist movement in Japan. The women's group Seitōsha (The Bluestockings) initiated the feminist discussion by consistently discussing the drama in their magazine *Seitō*.⁷⁰ As Kano sums up, "the label 'New Women' was given to the group soon after the journals' founding [in 1911], when tabloid journalists gleefully reported that these women engaged in strikingly unfeminine behavior,"⁷¹ such as visiting brothels and drinking alcohol. Otake Kōkichi, a painter who "dressed like a man,"⁷² contributed to the group's reputation as a New Women (*atarashi onna*)'s gathering, too. After watching the Literary Society's *A Doll's House* twice and even interviewing Matsui in Osaka, she praised Nora and the actress in her contribution to *Seitō*'s May 1912 issue. Otake wrote:

Here is a woman who uses her being a woman as a climbing rope, who grounds her art in the strength of being a woman, and attempts thence to build up the richness of her artistry and the natural skill that overflows from the essence of being a woman [...]. I cannot help but be impressed that a woman would start from her own sex [*jiko no sei*] and venture on this journey.⁷³

However, other women of Seitōsha showed ambivalent or critical reactions towards Nora and Matsui's performance. For instance, Ueno Yōko blamed Nora for her selfishness as she might have believed "that she can sacrifice everyone else in order to attain her own individual goal,"⁷⁴ although she was in favor of Nora's pursuit of individual awareness as such. Hiratsuka Raichō, the group's leader, disapproved of Nora's choice and Matsui's acting with a harsher tone. Leaning towards the Buddhist ideal of "nullifying oneself and achieving religious enlightenment,"⁷⁵ she criticized Nora for misunderstanding emancipation and self-centeredness. She concluded her letter addressed to Nora as follows: "A woman's life should be a high, beautiful music of religion, a piece of poem expressing truth. Mrs. Nora, if you don't come to realize this, if you don't come to grasp this miracle, take a pistol or poison. Good-bye."⁷⁶ Disagreeing with Nora, Hiratsuka found "nothing to touch the heart"⁷⁷ in Matsui's performance either. Despite the diverse receptions, Matsui

69 As cited in Mori, "Women's Issues," 82–83.

70 Kano, *Acting Like Woman*, 194. The text analyses of *Seitō* draw upon Kano's extensive investigations and translations of the texts from Japanese to English. See Kano, *Acting Like Woman*, 194–99.

71 Ibid., 127.

72 Ibid.

73 Otake Kōkichi, "Akai Tobira no Ie yori [From the house of red doors]," *Seitō* 2, no. 5 (May 1912), 32–53; the quote is from 40, as trans. and cited in Kano, *Acting Like Woman*, 199.

74 Kano, *Acting Like Woman*, 197.

75 Mori, "Women's Issues," 80.

76 Hiratsuka Raichō, "Nora San he [To Mrs. Nora]," *Seitō* 2, 133–41; quote from page 141, as cited in Mori, "Women's Issues," 80.

77 Hiratsuka Raichō, *Genshi Josei wa Taiyō de Atta 2 [In ancient times woman was the sun 2]* (Tokyo: Ōtsuki Shoten, 1971), 350, as cited in: Kano, *Acting Like Woman*, 198.

and her debut role, Nora, marked an aesthetic innovation in the Japanese theater scene, challenging established gender roles by venturing into a territory that had long been restricted for women.

The Korean Reception of *A Doll's House*

Characteristic to the Korean discourse of *A Doll's House* during the colonial era is its rather loose connection to the theatrical sphere since Nora and the play were more widely known via texts in the 1920s and 1930s than performances. As discussed later in chapter 5.3, *A Doll's House* and Nora were popular tropes that sparked heated discussions on women's liberation and gave rise to further literary productions. Before analyzing the discourse that evolved around the drama, a brief overview of stage productions in colonial Korea will help elucidate the tension lying beneath Korean texts on the play's explosive potential and commentaries aiming to form women's spectatorship.

Figure 13: An announcement of the serialization of *A Doll's House*.



Source: *Maeil Shinbo*, January 22, 1921, 1. Courtesy of the National Library of Korea.

The first Korean translation of *A Doll's House* was undertaken by Kim Wŏnju (1896–1971), the feminist activist, and Yang Kŏnsik, a scholar of Chinese literature.⁷⁸ While studying in Tokyo between 1915 and 1918, Kim became aware of the Japanese feminist group Seitō.⁷⁹ Upon her return to Korea, she founded a women's organization and named it Chŏngr'ap (Bluestocking), inspired by Seitō.⁸⁰ In cooperation with Korean New Women such as Na Hyesŏk, Kim Hwalran, and male intellectuals including Yang and Yi Noik, she published the Korean women's magazine *Shin Yŏja* (*New Women*) in 1920.⁸¹ Kim Wŏnju initially commissioned Yang to translate the drama into the Korean language for her magazine.⁸² Furthermore, she planned to produce the play for Korean audiences and play Nora's part herself.⁸³ However, her plan was canceled as the colonial censorship banned *Shin Yŏja* due to a short story that Kim wrote for the magazine in June 1920.⁸⁴ The colonial censors problematized Kim's short fiction *The Life of a Young Widow* (*Chŏngsang ŭi Saenghwal*) for presenting a woman who defied the idealized image of a Wise Mother and Good Wife.⁸⁵ It told the story of a young woman who feels attracted to her dead husband's distant relative.⁸⁶

For this reason, the first Korean translation of *A Doll's House* was serially published in the daily newspaper *Maeil Shinbo* between January 25, 1921, and April 3, 1921, as a co-translation by Yang and Pak Kyegang under the Korean title *Inhyŏng ŭi Ka* (*A Doll's House*).⁸⁷ Notably, the colonial government allowed the publication of the drama although it had already caused controversies in Japan.⁸⁸ The newspaper even introduced *A Doll's House* as “the bible of the ‘woman question (*puin munje*)’ in the world,”⁸⁹ placing the drama in the context of women's emancipatory movements in other countries of the time. The fact that the daily newspaper printed *A Doll's House* on the front page indicates that the publication of the drama itself was newsworthy to contemporaries.⁹⁰ As discussed in the rest of chapter 5, the drama, which appeared in at least two different translations during the colonial era, initiated lively discussions through newspapers and magazines.

78 Sŏ Chŏngja, “Iryŏp Kim Wŏnju Shin Yŏja Kŭ ŭi Sasang Tashi Ikki [Re-reading Kim Wŏnju's *Shin Yŏja* and Her Thoughts],” *Na Hyesŏk Yŏngu* 2 (2013), 33–73; refer to 51.

79 Sŏ, “Re-reading Kim Wŏnju,” 41.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 “Doll's House,” MS, January 22, 1921, 1.

83 Choi, “Debating Korean New Woman,” 64.

84 Sŏ, “Re-reading Kim Wŏnju,” 43–44.

85 Ibid., 44.

86 Ibid.

87 Choi, “Debating Korean New Woman,” 61. Yang's translation was published under the title *Nora* by Yŏngch'ang Sŏgwan in 1922.

88 For the Japanese debates related to *A Doll's House* see Dina Lowy, “Nora and the ‘New Woman’: Visions of Gender and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 26 (2004), 75–97.

89 MS, January 22 and 23, 1921, 1.

90 See Pak, “Ibsen and Colony,” 17.

Table 4: Korean productions of *A Doll's House* during the colonial era.

Date	Venue	Group	Notes
Sept. 1925	Ch'öndogyo Hall, Seoul	Chosön Actors' School (Chosön Paeu Hakkyo)	Korean premiere of the drama
Oct. 21, 1926	YMCA, Seoul	Chosön Christian College (Yön-hŭi Chönmun Hakkyo)	Celebration of the third anniversary of the college's student council
May 11–12, 1929	Ch'öndogyo Hall, Seoul	—	Presented by the publishing company Chungšöngsa
April 18–19, 1934	Public Hall, Seoul	Dramatic Arts Research Group (Kük Yesul Yönguho)	The last official production of <i>A Doll's House</i> in Colonial Korea

Source: Pak, "Ibsen and Colony", 19; *Maeil Shinbo*, *Dong-A Ilbo*, and *Chosön Ilbo*.

Meanwhile, *A Doll's House* did not leave a notable trace as a stage production during the colonial era, which poses a striking contrast to the often-heated debate over its protagonist and the drama's contribution to the development of Korean theater.⁹¹ The newspapers, popular magazines, and literary texts leave the impression that the stage performances received little attention from the public, or that the reviews fell afoul of the colonial censors—none of these hypotheses is verifiable. Thereby, performing *A Doll's House* in colonial Korea was entangled with efforts to reform Korean theater, including influences of *shinpa*, while contending with the challenges posed by colonial censorship.

So far, four stage productions of *A Doll's House* are known to have been realized by Korean groups during the colonial era (see table 4). The premiere by students of Chosön Actors' School (Chosön Paeu Hakkyo) in September 1925 at Ch'öndogyo Hall in Seoul represents an endeavor to establish a Korean version of New Theater (*shin'gük*).⁹² Chosön Actors' School was the first educational institute in Korea dedicated to the realization of a new form of performance art.⁹³ Hyön Ch'öl, the founder of this school, was trained in

91 Except for the 1934 production by the Dramatic Arts Research Group (Kük Yesul Yönguho), there is hardly any trace of these performances. Consequently, the possibility of undocumented performances of *A Doll's House* cannot be ruled out. For instance, the novelist Shim Hun mentions having attended a performance of the play in Korea only once in the 1920s, featuring female students as actors ("Problem Drama of Ibsen 1," 2). Until now, however, no additional documentation of this production has emerged beyond his statement.

92 Yi, "Translation of Ibsen," 43. The film historian Yi Yöng'il's archive included a picture of the cast of *A Doll's House*, including Pok Hyesuk, which was posthumously published by the movie magazine *Cine 21* in 2001, http://m.cine21.com/news/view/?mag_id=2912. The same photograph, with a higher resolution, can be found in the *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, serviced by the Academy of Korean Studies. See <https://mono.aks.ac.kr/s/media/dc/dc541b8a-ba79-45db-8067-81a61c3f0413.jpg?preset=orig>.

93 See Sung Meung-hyen, "Hyön Ch'öl ūi Yöng'gük Iryök kwa Chosön Paeu Hakkyo (1924–26) Koch'al: P'osüt'ü K'olloniöl Pip'yöng'jök Kwanjöm esö [Thoughts on Hyön Ch'öl's Career in Theater and

shingeki as Shimamura's student and was an actor in his theater company between 1913 and 1917.⁹⁴ He decided to train Korean women as actresses and cast them for female parts in the drama, echoing Shimamura's call for realistic plays. Pok Hyesuk, a former girl student who ran away from home to pursue an acting career, played the role of Nora in the Korean premiere of *A Doll's House*.⁹⁵ While her educational background and her rebellious decision to leave her parents' home behind bore certain similarities to Nora's character, potentially sparking public interest, no sensation happened after the premiere. In fact, there were already women who acted on stage in Korea. When Pok entered the actors' school in 1925, she already had been acting on Korean stages since 1921, too, so the audience was not surprised to see her again on the stage.⁹⁶

The second performance of *A Doll's House* by students of Chosŏn Christian College (Yŏnhŭi Chŏnmun Hakkyo), a renowned boys' school, on October 21, 1926, is an intriguing case that demonstrates the lasting impact of *shinp'a* theater, or determination of Korean students to perform this piece against all odds. Because there is a strong likelihood that the role of Nora was played by a male student. The play was a part of the third-anniversary celebration of the Chosŏn Christian College's student council on October 21, 1926.⁹⁷ This specific occasion suggests that the event was in line with students' theater (*haksaeŋg kŭk*) movement of the time, which had a political and cultural mission of edu-

'Chosŏn Actors' School (1924–26)': From the Perspective of Postcolonial Criticism," *Han'guk Yesul Yŏn'gu* 13 (2016), 245. The school provided a two-year program for theater- and film acting. Students took 14 courses in the first year, including "Overview of Art, Script Reading, History of Eastern Drama, History of Western Drama, History of Motion Picture, Overview of Fiction, Overview of Screenwriting, Overview of Stage Drama, Overview of Film Drama, Overview of Musical Drama, Facial Expression Gymnastics, Stage Drama Practice, Film Drama Practice, Lecture on Dramaturgy," and 23 courses in the second year, including "Introduction to Art, Stage Theater Acting, Film Theater Acting, Screenplay Studies, Facial Expression Psychology, Psychology of Mass, Stage Aesthetics, Film Aesthetics, Stage Drama Watching, Film Drama Watching, Introduction to Modern Drama, Script Reading, Facial Expression Gymnastics, Musical Drama, Korean Musical Drama, Korean Instrumental Music, Western Instrumental Music, Korean Dance, Western Dance, Makeup, Stage Drama Practice, Film Drama Practice, and Opera Practice" (see 262–63). However, Pok Hyesuk testified that she "didn't actually learn any skills" and that the school was disrupted by conflicts between the school's administrators. Pok left the school just over nine months after enrollment. See Pok Hyesuk. "Paeu Pok Hyesuk [The Actress Pok Hyesuk]." An Interview on April 7, 1967, in *Taadam, Han'guk Yŏn'gŭk Imyŏnsa: Kong'yŏn Yesul Che 1-Tae ūi Yesurindŭl* [The Conversation: Behind the Scenes of Korean Theater. The First-Generation Performing Artists], ed. National Research Institute of Cultural Properties (Taejŏn: Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, 2006), 55–62.

94 See Sung, "Thoughts on Hyŏn Ch'ŏl," 245.

95 Yi, "Translation of Ibsen," 43 and Pok Hyesuk, "Pok Hyesuk [An Interview in 1976]," in Yi Yŏng'il ūi Han'guk Yŏnghwasa rūl wihan Chŭngŏnnok: Kim Sŏngch'un, Pok Hyesuk, Yi Kuyŏng P'yŏn [Testimonies for the Korean Cinema History Collected by Yi Yŏng'il: Kim Sŏngch'un, Pok Hyesuk, and Yi Kuyŏng] (Seoul: Sodo, 2003), 61–174; see 109.

96 Pok Hyesuk began her career as an actress in a theater group in 1921, before entering the Chosŏn Actors' School. See Pok, "Interview 1976," 110–16.

97 "Yŏnhŭi Haksaeŋghoe Samju Ch'anglip Kinyŏm [Celebrating the Third Anniversary of Chosŏn Christian College's Student Council]," *DI*, October 21, 1926, 3.

cating the public and establishing an alternative theater culture.⁹⁸ While advancing their enlightenment-oriented agenda, these amateur groups did not always fully adhere to the requirements of the New Theater, as male students played women's parts as well.⁹⁹

Meanwhile, the ban on a planned performance of *A Doll's House* in November 1926 reveals that the colonial government began considering the drama a potential problem for the regime. In aid of Kūnhwa Women's School, a three-day fundraising event was organized for November 19, 23, and 24, 1926, at the YMCA.¹⁰⁰ An advertisement in the daily newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* informed its readers that the show would present several plays, including *A Doll's House*, featuring popular actress Yi Wōlhwa in the leading role.¹⁰¹ However, the event was postponed because the colonial censors banned *A Doll's House* on short notice.¹⁰² Eventually, the event took place on December 1 and 2 with an alternative program.¹⁰³ The colonial government's ban on *A Doll's House* was closely related to the fear that educated young women would be inspired by Nora's choice and would revolt against the patriarchal family system and colonial rule. As a journalist who attended another charity event for Kūnhwa Women's School noted, female students literally "rushed to"¹⁰⁴ these events and took a large part of the audience. In an introductory essay on Ibsen, the novelist Shim Hun briefly mentioned in 1928 that the drama "is now forbidden by the authorities because it allegedly encourages the spirit of treason among women."¹⁰⁵ In other words, the colonial power understood Korean women's emancipation in close relation to Korea's liberation from Japanese rule. It is also possible that the colonial authority began questioning the performance of *A Doll's House* in this enlightenment-oriented setting, given that the Chosōn Christian School presented the play only about a month ago.

After a long hiatus, the third known production of the drama took place on May 11 and 12, 1929, to celebrate the launch of the monthly magazine *Chungsōng* (*The Voice of the Mass*).¹⁰⁶ A newspaper article indicates that organizers went through a long period of negotiation with the colonial authorities. The magazine had planned to stage the play in

98 Woo Sujin, *Han'guk Kūndaegŭk ūi Tong'yōkhak: Shingminjiki Yōngŭk kwa Sahoe, kŭrigo Munhwa ūi Kyosōp* [The Dynamics of Korean Modern Drama: Negotiations of Theater, Society, and Culture in Colonial Korea] (Seoul: Somyōng Ch'ulp'an, 2020), 256–57.

99 For instance, Tong'uhoe, a students' group that toured through the Korean peninsula in the early 1920s, assigned male students to play female characters. See Ma Haesong, "Sōul ro Tora Kashin Hwanghyōng ege: Kwangju eso [To Brother Hwang Who Returned to Seoul, From Kwangju]," *DI*, July 29, 1921, 4.

100 "Kūnhwa Yōhakkyo ūi Ŭmak kwa Yōngŭk Taehoe [A Concert and Theater Plays of Kūnhwa Women's School]," *CI*, November 17, 1926, 3.

101 "Concert and Theater Plays," *CI*, November 17, 1926, 3.

102 "Kūnhwagyo Yōngŭkhoe [Theater Play of Kūnhwa Women's School]," *CI*, November 24, 1926, 2.

103 "Kūnhwa Huwōn Yōngŭk Sōnghwang [Great Success of Theater Plays in the Aid of Kūnhwa Women's School]," *DI*, December 3, 1926, 2.

104 Pongmyōn Kija, "Kūnhwa Yōhakkyo Huwōnhoe Chuch'oe Yōngŭk Taehoe Pip'an'gi [Critiques on the Kūnhwa Women's School Concert Presented by the Supporters' Association]," *Shin Yōsōng* (July 1926), 84.

105 Shim Hun, "Ipsen ūi Munjegŭk 1 [The Problem Drama of Ibsen 1]," *CI*, March 20, 1928, 2.

106 "Inhyōng ūi Ka Sangyōn: Chungsōngsa Tokcha Wian [The Play *A Doll's House*: Presented by Chungsōng Publishing Company for the Readers]," *DI*, May 3, 1929, 3.

January 1929, as the first issue was published, yet “it has been delayed due to various formalities and the day before yesterday, the censor granted the permission.”¹⁰⁷ Behind this production was Hyŏn Ch'öl, who had directed the Korean premiere of 1925 and had initiated the new magazine.¹⁰⁸ Notably, the *Chosun Ilbo* introduced the drama as “a world masterpiece that calls for women's liberation” and cited a publisher who claimed that “this play will become extremely popular with the general public because it is a drama of social problems.”¹⁰⁹ While further reports or reviews are missing, it is likely that the political aspect of the play appealed to Korean audiences.

The Dramatic Arts Research Group's 1934 performance in Seoul was the fourth known and last production of *A Doll's House* during the colonial era. Nora's part was played by Kim Pokchin, a nursery teacher, author of children's literature, and actress of the group.¹¹⁰ The performance left some traces, including an LP record of the last dialogue between Nora and Helmer, two photographs of the performance, and a few reviews.¹¹¹ The performance was initially scheduled for April 12 and 13, but the Government-General postponed it due to concerns about its impact on society.¹¹² To avoid the ban, the company had to limit the number of spectators by making them pre-register as so-called “viewer members” and agree with the authorities that the drama would never be played again in Korea.¹¹³ Literary scholar Yi Sünghŭi explains that from the viewpoint of Japanese colonial politics, which sought to consolidate patriarchal fascist authority, individualist or liberal plays like *A Doll's House* had to be strictly controlled just like socialist works.¹¹⁴ Concurrently, the fact that the colonial authorities allowed the performance instead of banning it altogether exemplifies the arbitrariness of colonial rule that creates exceptions, which empower the colonial ruler's arbitrariness further.¹¹⁵

While Hyŏn Ch'öl, trained at the Literary Society, apparently followed Shimamura's example and attempted to introduce realist drama in Korea, colonial Korean discourses

107 “*Doll's House* by *Chungsŏng*,” *DI*, May 3, 1929, 3.

108 “*Chungsŏng Palgan Chunbi* [Preparation for *Chungsŏng*],” *DI*, December 1, 1928, 2.

109 “*Chungsŏgsa Chuch'oe Nora Kŭk Sang'yŏn* [*Chungsŏng's Publishing Company Presents the Nora Drama*],” *CI*, May 4, 1929, 3.

110 Chŏng Insŏb, *Kim Pokchin, Kiŏk ŭi Pokkak* [Reinstating the Memories of Kim Pokchin] (Seoul: Kyŏng'in Munhwasa, 2014), 44–45. I became aware of Kim Pokchin, who has been forgotten in the Korean theater historiography, through Professor Kim Pokgi, who introduced me to her grandson and the author of her biography. My gratitude to both scholars who shared their time and stories with me in Seoul 2018.

111 The Dramatic Arts Research Group, “Inhyŏng ŭi Ka [*A Doll's House*],” 1934, track 3 on *K'olŏmbia Yusŏnggi Wŏnban* (13) *Kŭk Yesul Yŏn'guhoe: 1934-nyŏn Kŭ Hae I Ttang ŭi Yŏn'gŭk* [Gramophone Record by Columbia (13) The Dramatic Arts Research Group: The Korean Drama of 1934], LGM, 1996. For a picture of the Dramatic Arts Research Group's production of *A Doll's House* see “*Kŭk Yesul Yŏn'guhoe*,” *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture* (<https://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Article/E0007366>). On April 19, 1934, the *Dong-A Ilbo* reported on this production, featuring a picture of the stage as viewed from the audience. See figure 17.

112 “*Nora ŭi Chosŏn Sang'yŏn ŭn Ibŏn i Ch'oe-hu Mudae* [This Is the Last Performance of *Nora* in Korea],” *DI*, April 12, 1934, 3.

113 “Last Performance of *Nora*,” *DI*, April 12, 1934, 3.

114 Yi, “Translation of Ibsen,” 49.

115 Stoler and McGranahan, “Introduction,” 8.

and practices related to *A Doll's House* had specific aspects that these cannot simply be reduced to the transplantation and repetition of the culture of *advanced* societies.¹¹⁶ Regarding the Nora-phenomenon of colonial Korea as merely a delayed repetition or imitation of the controversy in the West and Japan poses the risk of reproducing the historicism that serves colonialism, as Chakrabarty pointed out. Chakrabarty argues that assuming a specific social phenomenon might have occurred “first in Europe, then elsewhere” posited “historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that is assumed to exist between the West and the non-West,” and that it “legitimated the idea of civilization.”¹¹⁷

Furthermore, it should be noted that while Hyŏn, too, sought to remove *shinpa* elements from the Korean stage as his teacher tried to take distance from *shimpa* in Japan, his venture was a critical engagement with the colonial cultural politics supported by the Government-General during the 1910s. In this sense, the Korean reception of *A Doll's House* can be better understood as a case of transculturation, “whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture.”¹¹⁸ Because, as Korean commentaries on the Norwegian drama will demonstrate later in this chapter, colonial Korean tried to “determine to varying extents what gets absorbed into their own and what it gets used for.”¹¹⁹ Also in this regard, the Korean reception and discourse of *A Doll's House* warrant a nuanced reading particularly in relation to colonial politics—even if, or precisely because, colonized Koreans of that time internalized the colonial and imperial narrative of modernization to a certain degree.

5.2 Affirmative Commentaries: *A Doll's House* as a Pedagogical Play

Individualism for National Independence

Korean literary scholar Kim Miji explains that during the colonial era, individualism (*kaein chuui*) was often considered more relevant than feminism in the Korean reception of *A Doll's House* during the 1920s.¹²⁰ In fact, most affirmative commentators of *A Doll's House* kept silent or even rejected Nora's decision to leave her husband and children. Even the liberal and favorable commentaries of the drama sidelined criticisms of marriage as an oppressive system for women and eventually made it difficult for women to actively express their agreement with Nora's choice. Meanwhile, many commentators chose to focus on Nora's individualist declaration that she was above all a human being. What

116 Sung, “Thoughts on Hyŏn Ch'ŏl,” 245.

117 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7.

118 Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991), 36.

119 Pratt, “Arts of Contact Zone,” 36.

120 Kim Miji, “Inhyŏng ūi Chip Nora ūi Suyong Pangsik kwa Sosŏljŏk Pyŏnju Yangsang: 1920–30-nyŏndae Sosŏl kwa Pyŏngmun e Wŏnyong toen Nora ūi Ŭimi rŭl Chungsim ŭro [Introduction and Variation of Nora from *A Doll's House*: Focusing on Nora's Meaning in Korean Literary Works of the 1920–30s],” *Han'guk Hyŏndae Munhak Yŏngu* 14 (2003), 173–97; refer to 177–79.

precisely did the Korean intellectuals understand by “individualism,” and how was it related to other readings of *A Doll's House*, particularly the feminist one?

Until the early 1920s, individualism was rarely discussed in the Korean media. If it did appear, it was assessed negatively. For instance, an anonymous author explained in a 1908 treatise about the modern government system that individualism hindered the functioning of the modern state by prioritizing personal needs over the state's right to intervene in people's lives.¹²¹ Another author, a Korean student in Japan, depicted individualism as a kind of decadence that would deprive younger generations—who should contribute to the nation's development into a competitive state—of their zeal for self-improvement. Therefore, he urged other students abroad to avoid becoming individualists.¹²² In both examples, individualism was seen as contradicting the concept of the state and the nation.

Individualism emerged as an essential idea in the social reform discourse in colonial Korea in the early 1920s. The historical sociologist Shin Gi-wook explained:

Many Korean leaders, especially those engaged in the early Patriotic Enlightenment movement, were fascinated with the concept of the individual in sharp contrast to the traditional conception of the individual seen only as a member of a collective. They identified the strong collective orientation of traditional Korean society as a source of stagnation and criticized the Confucian emphasis on filial piety, social harmony, the family system, and formalism for its role in repressing individual talent and initiative.¹²³

In the context of colonial Korea during the 1920s, Korean intellectuals saw the necessity to curb individualism for the sake of the nation's emancipatory endeavor. In this effort, the monthly magazine *Kaebŏk* played a significant role in disseminating an idea that might be called (albeit not without contradiction) nationalist individualism among Koreans. The magazine aimed to spread “the innovative energy of world reform”¹²⁴ to colonial Korea and give voice to the people after the 1919 March First Movement. *Kaebŏk* grew quickly as the centerpiece of the critical discourse with record sales of up to 10,000 copies in its heyday, mainly thanks to its fearless criticisms of Japanese colonial power.¹²⁵

121 See “Kukka ūi Kaenyŏm (sok) [The Concept of the State (continued)],” *Sŏu* (May 1908), 15.

122 See Ch'oe Hosŏn, “Isangjŏk Inkyŏk” [The Ideal Personality], *Taehaen Hŭnghakpo* (February 1910), 21.

123 Shin Gi-wook, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 147. Original in English.

124 “Ch'anggansa [On the Occasion of the Magazine's Establishment],” *KB* (June 1920), 2.

125 Han Kihyŏng, “Kaebŏk ūi Chonggyojŏk Isang Chuŭi wa Kŭndae Munhak ūi Sasanghwa [The Religious Idealism of the Beginning of the *World* and Ideologization of Modern Literature],” *Sanghŏ Hakpo* 17 (2006), 43. In his 2005 study, Han Kihyŏng demonstrated that *Kaebŏk* challenged the so-called Cultural Rule of the Government-General by criticizing its intensifying censorship. See “Munhwa Chŏngch'igi Kŏmyŏl Ch'ieje wa Shingminji Midiŏ [The Censorship System and Colonial Media in Korea during the Cultural Rule Era of Japanese Imperialism],” *Taedong Munhwa Yŏngu* 51 (2005), 69–105. Ch'oe Suil's 2006 study found that the Censorship Office confiscated *Kaebŏk* 40 times, imposed a fine once, and suspended it once until it shut down the magazine in August 1926 after the publication of the 72nd issue. He counted more than 148 articles that were erased from the magazine. See “Kŭndae Munhak ūi Chaeasaengsan Hoero wa Kŏmyŏl: Kaebŏk ūl Chungsim

Instead of rejecting individualism as sheer egocentrism or decadence, this reform-oriented magazine published a series of articles advocating individualism's potential to fuel the country's development. For instance, Oh T'aehwan's article "The Collision of New and Old Thoughts in Drastic Changes," which appeared in the first issue of *Kaeb'yŏk*, explained individualism as the key to the positive changes to colonial Korean society brought about by the young generation of the early 1920s.¹²⁶ He pointed out that individualism questioned the Confucian notion of human relations, particularly the filial piety of children, which had been the fundament of the social order during the Chosŏn Dynasty.¹²⁷ According to him, although Confucian ethics was aimed at social integration, at its core lay the younger generation's unconditional obedience to the existing order.¹²⁸ He declared it as an untimely mode of life because such obedience hindered the progress of Korean society amid the international competition:

The world has entered the era of competition where Western culture affects the East, and Eastern affairs become the problem of the West. The world created an atmosphere that encouraged each individual's free development. Thus, each society felt the necessity to develop individual genius, foster their ability to achieve something better than their ancestors. Today, it has become an age of progress, not an era of conservatism.¹²⁹

Additionally, he insisted that in a world where every country encouraged the younger generation to develop to its full potential, it was "self-evident" that "the [parents'] duty towards the offspring becomes more important than the [offspring's] duty towards the ancestor."¹³⁰

Despite this bold claim, Oh did not claim individual well-being as the highest priority, over the interests of the society or state. An individualist in the nationalist reform discourse did not refer to someone who advocated personal freedom in opposition to the state or other political unit, but a person separated from the family and subscribed to the state. In another article entitled "A Brief Explanation of Individualism," *Kaeb'yŏk* highlighted individualism as the driving force of Western civilization.¹³¹ The article argued that, as the French Revolution and American Independence—"the peak of individualism and the height of the liberal movement"—exemplified, individualism could pave the way to freedom of thought, will, press, religion, association, and profession as it had in the nineteenth century West.¹³²

ŭro [Reproduction Circuit of Modern Literature and Censorship: Focused on the Magazine *Kaeb'yŏk*], *Taedong Munhwa Yŏn'gu* 53 (2006), 77–120; refer to 83–85.

126 Oh T'aehwan, "Kŭppyŏn haya Kanŭn Shin Ku Sasang ŭi Ch'ungdol [The Collision of New and Old Thoughts in Drastic Changes]," *KB* (June 1920), 81–82.

127 Oh, "New and Old," 81–82.

128 *Ibid.*, 83.

129 *Ibid.*, 83–84.

130 *Ibid.*, 84.

131 See Kojŏp, "Kaein Chuŭi ŭi Yagŭi [A Brief Explanation of Individualism]," *KB* (July 1920), 91–97. The author's identity is unclear. Kojŏp (孤蝶) is the Korean transcription of Baba Kochō (孤蝶) 's name.

132 Kojŏp, "Brief Explanation of Individualism," 92–93.

Kaeb'yŏk changed the negative connotation attached to individualism by highlighting its potential contribution to the nation's reform. Introducing individualism as the philosophical root of liberal movements and progress in the West and urging readers to embrace the idea, *Kaeb'yŏk* indicated that individualism could be a way to achieve independence from Japan.

Nora as a Figure of Anti-Colonial Individualism

Under these circumstances, several Korean treatises on *A Doll's House* foregrounded Nora as the symbol of the individual (*kaein*) or even as "the most appropriate example of individualism."¹³³ To be clear, it was not the unique situation of colonial Korea that *A Doll's House* was received as a drama advocating individualism. Explaining the influences of Ibsen's plays on European societies, Arnold Hauser claimed that the issues of self-realization and individualism particularly appealed to the younger generation.¹³⁴ Likewise, Chinese intellectuals who gathered around the magazine *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth) advocated Nora as the symbol of the so-called "sound individualism," which supported individuals to express and develop their talents fully.¹³⁵ What distinguishes Korean comments on Nora that highlighted her as an individualist from others is how they sidelined the critique of patriarchy and misogyny inherent to Nora's words and actions. Commentaries written by prominent male authors such as Hyŏn Ch'ŏl, Kim Ŏk, and Yi Sangsu underline this tendency, whereas Yŏm Sangsŏp makes a rare case of affirmation by a male intellectual who praised Nora's decision for her pursuit of Self.

Hyŏn Ch'ŏl's treatise "Modern Literature and Ibsen," published in the magazine *Kaeb'yŏk* three weeks before the Korean translation of *A Doll's House*, set the direction of the play's affirmative interpretation.¹³⁶ According to the director, Ibsen's dramas taught readers and audiences to lead a life based on self-awakening (*chagak saenghwal*) and to pursue the improvement of society.¹³⁷ His understanding of self-awakening harbored a political aspect in the colonial context because he emphasized the importance of free will and independence:

133 See Kim, "Variation of Nora"; Yi, "Translation of Ibsen"; Ryu, "Reception of Ibsen." Quote is from Pak Yŏnghŭi, "*Kaeb'yŏk* Ch'anggan 4-chunyŏn Kinyŏmho Purok: Chuyo Surŏ Sajŏn [The Supplement to the Fourth Anniversary of *Kaeb'yŏk*'s Foundation: A Dictionary of Important Words]," *KB* (July 1924), 11.

134 "Ibsen owed his European fame to the social message of his plays, which was reducible, in the final analysis, to a single idea, the duty of the individual towards himself, the task of self-realization, the enforcement of one's own nature against the narrow-minded, stupid and out-of-date conventions of bourgeois society. It was his gospel of individualism, his glorification of the sovereign personality and his apotheosis of the creative life, that is, once again a more or less romantic ideal, that made the deepest impression on the younger generation." See Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art 4: Naturalism, Impressionism, the Film Age, with an Introduction by Jonathan Harris* (London and New York: Routledge 1999), 138.

135 Deng, "Interpellation of Nora," 62.

136 Hyŏn Ch'ŏl, "Kŭndae Munye wa Ipsen [Modern Literature and Ibsen]," *KB* (January 1921), 129–38.

137 Hyŏn, "Modern Literature and Ibsen," 132 and 135.

You can find frequent usage of words such as Self-awakened [*chagakjŏk*] and Independent [*chajujŏk*] in Ibsen's dramas. [These words mean that] One determines not to be dragged down by others and not to subordinate oneself to others, but to deal with everything by one's free will. Ibsen's spirit tells us not to act under the influence of others' force like a machine but to carry out things on our own initiative and from the bottom of our hearts.¹³⁸

Meanwhile, Hyŏn Ch'ŏl claimed that true love (*chinjŏng han yŏnae*) was the foundation of individual happiness and eventually the improvement of society as a whole. Thereby, he echoed the call of marriage reform: "[Through his works, Ibsen tells us that] Unless a man and a woman are united by true love, they cannot help ending their precious lives unhappily. The unhappiness of life! The unhappiness of society! He says that all these result from a shallow and frothy love."¹³⁹ Summing up, Hyŏn brought together self-awakening and true love as a successive process towards social improvement. "In other words, he [Ibsen] asserts that society can enter the path of improvement only if we reach true love based on a self-awakened attitude. Ibsen's view is that this might be the only course of social improvement."¹⁴⁰

Hyŏn Ch'ŏl analyzed Nora's character under the premise of social improvement while refuting the feminist aspect of her actions. He argued that "Ibsen did not instruct [women] to abandon their husbands, children, and home. What he meant was that life as an awakened human being could not be exchanged with anything else."¹⁴¹ He excluded other readings—such as those that recognize Nora's final action as a protest against patriarchal family structure and women's restricted role in it—by saying that "Ibsen put great importance on society."¹⁴² Likewise, he reduced Nora's disillusionment with her marriage to merely failed love due to Nora's lack of self-awakening, which could be recovered because she (and not her husband) reached a new consciousness.¹⁴³ He stated: "How much more misfortune there would have been if Nora had passed the phase without the self-awakening."¹⁴⁴

While making commentaries on Ibsen's dramas, Hyŏn Ch'ŏl did not cite any part of the play, making Koreans utterly dependent on his interpretation of the drama. Meanwhile, other essays that discussed Nora in the context of individualism commonly drew upon the last dialogue between Nora and her husband. For instance, calling Nora "the embodiment of individualism,"¹⁴⁵ the poet Kim Ŏk extensively cited the dialogue for his 1921 essay "Modern Literature":

138 Ibid., 132–33.

139 Ibid., 135.

140 Ibid., 136.

141 Ibid., 134.

142 Ibid., 135.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

145 Kim Ŏk, "Kündae Munye 5 [Modern Literature 5]," *KB* (December 1921), 121–31; refer to 127.

Helmer: To forsake your home, your husband, and your children! You don't consider what the world will say.

Nora: I can pay no heed to that! I only know that I must do it.

Helmer: It's exasperating! Can you forsake your holiest duties in this way?

Nora: What do you call my holiest duties?

Helmer: Do you ask me that? Your duties to your husband and your children.

Nora: I have other duties equally sacred.

Helmer: Impossible! What duties do you mean?

Nora: My duties towards myself.

Helmer: Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

Nora: That I no longer believe. I think that before all else, I am a human being, just as much as you are—or, at least, I will try to become one. I know that most people agree with you, Torvald, and that they say so in books. But henceforth, I can't be satisfied with what most people say and what is in books. I must think things out for myself and try to get clear about them.¹⁴⁶

Unlike Hyön, who sidelined the feminist aspect of the drama, Kim Ōk mentioned that Ibsen's dramas, particularly *A Doll's House*, delved into the so-called "woman question" and introduced Nora's leaving as an attempt to reject women's normative role as the Wise Mother and Good Wife.¹⁴⁷ However, the poet indicated that the feminist movement, which he understood as a branch of individualism, might have exceeded an acceptable degree, and Nora's departure might be an expression of an excessive individualism:

With the growing influence of the self-oriented philosophy, many different problems arose in various areas [of society]. The most powerful and controversial problem was that of men and women. In other words, [the issue of] the "woman question," feminism, or the improvement of women's rights. Respect Men and Despise Women [*namjon yōbi*] was already a thing of the past, and the era of Respect Women and Despise Men [*yōjon nambī*] was just about to arrive.¹⁴⁸

Meanwhile, in the preface for his 1922 translation of *A Doll's House*, Yi Sangsu subtly re-fashioned the drama as a gate to anti-colonial thinking, especially for women.¹⁴⁹ He explained that the Norwegian drama had led to "women's self-awakening to their individu-

146 Kim, "Modern Literature 5," 127. Kim Ōk cited from Yang Könsik and Pak Kyegang's Korean translation, which was based on three different translations from the original text: Takayasu Gekkō's 1893 Japanese translation, Shimamura Hogetsu's 1911 Japanese translation, and Robert Farquharson Sharp's English translation of 1910. Hogetsu's 1911 translation was based on William Archer's 1889 English translation. For the comparative study of Korean and Japanese translations of *A Doll's House*, see Kim Chaesök, "Study on Translation," 11–36. After comparing the quotation in Kim Ōk's text to Archer's and Sharp's English translations, I decided to directly cite from Archer's version instead of translating it back to English or using Sharp's translation because the Korean translation is very close to Archer's translation. See Ibsen and Archer, *Doll's House*, 116–17.

147 Kim, "Modern Literature 5," 126–27.

148 Ibid., 126.

149 Yi Sangsu, "Möritmal [Preface]," in Henrik Ibsen, *Inhyōng ūi Ka* [*A Doll's House*; hereafter Ibsen and Yi, *A Doll's House*] (Seoul: Hansōng Tosō Chusik Hoesa, 1922), trans. Yi Sangsu, 1–4. I express my deep gratitude to Professor Pak Chinyōng of Seonggyunkwan University, who generously provided

ality.”¹⁵⁰ He advised his readers not to consume the drama “from an entertainment standpoint like other novels or plays”¹⁵¹ but to recognize the social problem of discrimination against women prevalent in the drama. Notably, Yi Sangsu grasped that Korean women were suffering from double discrimination as colonized women. His remark that “class, discrimination, and inequality, which are [current] social problems, consist of [multiple] folds”¹⁵² reveals that he saw the intersectionality of discrimination and oppression, where combinations of various elements, such as economic status, ethnic identity, and gender affect each other concurrently. Paying closer attention to colonized women, he put forward that particularly they suffered from multiple layers of oppression. Yi said that discrimination against women was a universal phenomenon commonly seen in “civilized countries” such as Norway as well as in a society “deprived by persecution by strong conquerors.”¹⁵³ Nevertheless, he urged readers to be aware of how Korean men, suppressed by Japanese colonial power, “glare at their wives and yell at them at home.”¹⁵⁴

Discussing double discrimination of Korean women under misogyny and colonialism, and mainly focusing on the gender issue, Yi Sangsu subtly reminded readers of the other discrimination—colonial rule. In other words, he appropriated *A Doll's House* as a vehicle to reinforce Korean women's sense of political injustice through their awakening as individuals, which would eventually nurture their critical mindset against the Japanese colonizer. Indeed, Yi constantly urged readers to be critical of women's and other social issues. He explained that *A Doll's House* handled various social problems such as the “social improvement problem, women's problem, family problem, marriage problem, love problem, personality problem.”¹⁵⁵ He repeatedly highlighted that *A Doll's House* dealt with “not only women's problem but also life problems” and advised readers “to study the problems together.”¹⁵⁶ Considering that he defined the “maximum enjoyment of equality and liberty” as his and his readers’ “greatest desire,” as well as “obtaining freedom from restriction” and “seeking liberation from bondage” as “the cry of the times and the [core] problem of social remodeling,”¹⁵⁷ one cannot help but think about the ultimate yet unspeakable problem of the time: Japan's colonial rule over Korea.

Yi Sangsu's biography supports the hypothesis that he introduced *A Doll's House* as an anti-colonial text for women, too. He was closely connected to anti-Japanese student groups in Tokyo,¹⁵⁸ and the colonial police surveilled him as “a person with a strong conviction against Japan, who always propagates that cultivating competence is a way for

me with copies of both versions of Korean translations by Yi Sangsu and Yang Könsik with me upon my visit to Seoul in 2018.

150 Yi, “Preface,” 2.

151 Ibid., 4.

152 Ibid., 1.

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid., 3.

156 Ibid., 3–4.

157 Ibid., 1.

158 “Yi Sangsu” in *Waejŏng Shidae Inmul Charyo* [Data of People During the Japanese Rule], http://db.history.go.kr/id/im_108_02873.

Chosŏn to escape the rule of Japan.”¹⁵⁹ Thereby, women's education seemed to have been a fundamental part of his anti-colonial activism. As he settled down in Korea, he founded Silch'ŏn Women's School in Seoul.¹⁶⁰ Considering these circumstances, his commentary seems to invite readers to see Nora's escape from Helmer as an allegory of Korea's escape from Japan's colonial rule.

While focusing on the idea of politically awakened individuals' contribution to the Korean nation, the novelist Yŏm Sangsŏp spoke in favor of Nora's leaving, which, at that time, was very rare in the Korean discourse of *A Doll's House*.¹⁶¹ Through his 1922 essay “For the Supreme Good,” Yŏm declared that the handed-down morality in the present society was based on inequality in personal relationships between women and men, parents and children, the political system of feudalism, and religious belief which coerced people to prioritize someone else other than themselves.¹⁶² Notably, he severely criticized the family system for comprising “remnants of despotism” and asserted that the supremacy of family was “not an unchanging truth with an absolute meaning for a new human being, who seeks a new life.”¹⁶³ From this perspective, Yŏm asserted that Nora achieved “the supreme good” by uncompromisingly and radically breaking with a system that coerced her to deny her Self as a human being—or, by the “revolution of the Self.”¹⁶⁴ Concurrently, Yŏm also noted that “a nation's prosperity and the whole of mankind's happiness can be pursued”¹⁶⁵ based on egoism.

Some reform-oriented Korean intellectuals of the 1920s welcomed Nora from *A Doll's House* as an example of an individualist who freshly gained an emancipatory spirit. While affirming Nora's self-awakening and individualism, their commentaries often downplayed her egress and criticisms of patriarchy. With few exceptions, the affirmative commentaries situated the drama primarily in the colonial context and suggested Korean women wake up like Nora and contribute to the Korean nation.

5.3 Rejective Commentaries: Nora of Chosŏn and the Question of *True Awakening*

“To Nora”: Annuling Emancipatory Messages

The Korean translation by Yang Kŏnsik of *A Doll's House* appeared as a book in June 1922 under the new title *Nora*. Regarding its commentaries, *Nora* was a fascinating case

159 “Yi Sangsu” in *Data of People*. For more on Yi Sangsu's political activities, see Pak Chinyŏng, “Munhak Ch'ŏngnyŏn ūrosŏ ūi Yi Sangsu wa Pŏnyŏkka ūi Unmyŏng [Yi Sangsu, the Literary Youth and the Destiny of a Translator],” *Tonam Ŭmunhak* 24 (2011), 59–88.

160 “Yi Sangsu” in *Data of People*.

161 See Yi, “Translation of Ibsen,” 56–57.

162 See Yŏm Sangsŏp “Chisang Sŏn ūl Wihayŏ [For the Supreme Good],” in *Yŏm Sangsŏp Munjang Chŏn-jip 1: 1918–1928 [Complete Works of Yŏm Sangsŏp, Vol. 1: 1918–1928]*, Han Kihyŏng and Yi Hyeryŏng (eds.) (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch'ulp'an, 2013), 200–24; refer to 209–15.

163 Yŏm, “For Supreme Good,” 208–09.

164 *Ibid.*, 205.

165 *Ibid.*, 223.

because it was published with six different prefaces and one postscript, all written by renowned Korean writers and artists. These included: a short episodic piece on Empress Consort Wu from the Chinese Tang Dynasty as an epigraph, lyrics of the song “Nora” written by female artist Na Hyesök, sheet music for the song “Nora” by Paek Uyong, literary critic Kim Chöngjin’s preface, the novelist Yi Kwangsu’s preface entitled “Noraya (To Nora)”, the translator Yang Könsik’s introduction, and the female publisher Kim Wönju’s postscript. Notably, the unusually high number of texts attached to the play corresponded to the broad spectrum of opinions on Ibsen’s work at the time.¹⁶⁶ The texts also revealed how different interpretations competed to intervene into—mainly female—readers’ reception of the drama.

Except for Yi Kwangsu’s letter entitled “To Nora,” the texts published in *Nora* evaluated the drama positively. Na Hyesök’s lyrics, which took Nora as the lyric subject, conveyed the message that Korean women, too, should notice their value as human beings and break the suppression against women.¹⁶⁷ Kim Chöngjin emphasized that the social drama would lead to an aspiration for new kinds of literature in Korea since its main topic for poetry had been the beauty of nature.¹⁶⁸ The translator Yang Könsik introduced the “woman problem” as the core of *A Doll’s House* and suggested concentrating on its message rather than criticizing Nora.¹⁶⁹ Kim Wönju, who ventured into the translation and stage production of *A Doll’s House* already in 1920, expressed her wish for the book to awake more women and men so that they saw the oppression under which Korean women had to live.¹⁷⁰

The relation between the epigraph, which consisted of Empress Consort Wu’s fable, and *A Doll’s House* is not intuitively comprehensible, but for this very reason it opens to broader possibilities of interpretation. Literary historian Pak Chinyöng explains that this epigraph might have called the readers’ attention to the issue of “women’s independent awareness and sovereignty,”¹⁷¹ which the Chinese Empress symbolized. On closer inspection, the epigraph tells the story of the Empress who asked her servant about the identity of the writer of a book she had read; upon hearing that the Duke of Zhou (Zhōugōng) wrote it, she noted, “I knew that it was done by a man’s hand. If a woman of the Zhou Dynasty had written it, she would not have written it that way.”¹⁷² In other words, this epigraph reflects the belief that the author’s gender might be recognizable through the text’s style and content. Applied to the reception of *A Doll’s House* in colonial Korea, this story could have marked the temporal, cultural, and gender differences that particularly female readers might have noticed from a book written by a European male author. Yet, it is unclear who decided to insert this epigraph into the book and for what reason.

166 Pak, “Ibsen and Colony,” 22.

167 Na Hyesök, “Nora,” in Ibsen and Yang, *Nora*. No page number is given to her lyric and note in the original publication. Na Hyesök wrote another version of the lyrics from the viewpoint of Ibsen’s Nora for the *Maeil Shinbo*. I revisit her lyrics and Kim Wönju’s postscript in chapter 5.5.

168 Kim, “Preface,” 1–3.

169 Yang Könsik, “Yökchaön [The Translator’s Note],” in Ibsen and Yang, *Nora*, 8–14.

170 Kim Wönju, “Pal [Postscript],” in Ibsen and Yang, *Nora*, 177–78.

171 Pak, “Ibsen and Colony,” 22.

172 The epigraph is published on an unnumbered page.

Meanwhile, Yi Kwangsu was very outspoken in his antipathy towards the emancipatory message in *A Doll's House*. In "To Nora," written in a mixed style of essay and letter addressed to Nora, Yi Kwangsu boldly urged her to return home. He insisted that in Korea and other countries, numerous women were running away from their homes under the influence of Nora.¹⁷³ His prognosis—"Nora seems to lure all daughters of the world out of home eventually"¹⁷⁴—revealed his anxiety over the possible consequence of Korean women's reception of *A Doll's House*: that they might be inspired by her and refuse to become devoted wives and mothers. Particularly, the last scene entailed defiant arguments that could be seamlessly applied to reject the still-prevailing notion of the inside-outside rule in Korea.

Instead of bluntly criticizing Nora, Yi Kwangsu appropriated the motif of Nora's awakening to annul its potential threat to the patriarchy. He insisted that her awakening as a human being was only the pre-stage of a *true* culmination for Nora:

No! Nora! You must realize one more thing. Your awareness that "I am a human being!" is proud and self-evident enlightenment that even God cannot prevent. It is an excellent service, which history will not forget in 10,000 years that you dragged daughters of the world into the yard of the wide world where *human beings* get together. However, you have to take one step further and become aware that "I am a chick [*kyejip*]!" and "I am a wife!" as well as "I am a mother!" Only then will your individuality be completed.¹⁷⁵

Urging Nora to become aware of herself as a "chick" and to restart her life as wife and mother, Yi Kwangsu tried to restore the gendered division of labor and women's duty of motherhood that Ibsen's drama questioned. Langås draws attention to rich indications that Nora's "various roles and actions investigate the frames of activity that are culturally given and accepted for female behavior."¹⁷⁶ Langås continued:

Ibsen change[d] the focus of the nineteenth-century gender debate and ideology from nature to culture, from being to acting. Nora's experiences do not reveal the female nature, but how the culturally constructed norms of the time produce notions of femaleness and govern her life as a woman.¹⁷⁷

Yi Kwangsu's pursuit of restoring the gendered division of labor and upholding the gender binary becomes more evident when he accuses Nora of wanting to become a man:

Call them out, Nora! Call all the daughters of the world out to the broad yard—but Nora! What are you going to give them? You took the needle, the bowl, and the baby from their hands, so what are you going to give them instead? You gave them suffrage, chalk, streetcars, the steering wheel of the car, and even guns and knives. Nora, is it

173 Yi Kwangsu, "To Nora," in Ibsen and Yang, *Nora*, 4–7; refer to 4.

174 Yi, "To Nora," 5.

175 Ibid., 5–6.

176 Langås, "What Did Nora Do?," 164.

177 Ibid., 166.

your purpose to be a man this way? So, will you sing the song of your victory for having completed the emancipation of your individuality when you cut your hair, wear men's clothes, smoke a cigarette, and stagger down the broad street drunk on alcohol?¹⁷⁸

This wrongful accusation revealed that Yi Kwangsu regarded being a wife and mother essential for a *proper* woman. Thereby, he failed to understand that someone could still identify herself as a woman even if she rejected the conventional gender roles of wife or mother. Furthermore, alleging that emancipatory women might want “to assimilate with men,” the novelist accidentally confessed that he considered civil rights men's privilege.¹⁷⁹ Korean feminist activists of his time had already pointed out that the differences between women's and men's privileges were not naturally given but culturally constructed.¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Yi Kwangsu persistently brought back the gender binary to insist that women could not enjoy equal rights as men because they could not transform themselves into men:

No matter how you cut your hair, you cannot grow a beard; no matter how much you dress as a man, your breasts and hip will not disappear; and no matter how much you prance about on the broad streets, your fat, round, and pretty body will not turn into one with bulging bones and muscles as well as broad shoulders.¹⁸¹

Reclaiming sex as a fate one could not evade, Yi Kwangsu ordered Nora to “come back to your husband and become a well-behaved sweet wife and mother in a new sense.”¹⁸² Although “To Nora” was addressed to the heroine of Ibsen's drama, the recipients he had in mind were Korean women who would read the book, *Nora*. His demand on Nora to “illuminate them as women and make them reenter the inner gate”¹⁸³ after waking them up echoed the aim of women's school education of the time to educate future Wise Mothers and Good Wives, where female students had to leave the school when they got married.

Awakening of Love: The Feared Power of the Theater Performance

As Yi Kwangsu's preface exemplified, the serialization in the daily newspaper and the book were a sufficient reason for many to worry about the drama's influence on Korean women. However, contemporaries expected that Nora's story would have much stronger resonance if it were finally performed on stage. Thus, the writer Cho Ch'un'gwang asserted in 1925 that there should be no theater production of *A Doll's House* in Korea. He asserted:

Because the ignorant people only imitate the external ideas expressed on the surface without seeing the necessity [of specific actions] inside [of drama]. [...] It is very dan-

178 Yi, “To Nora,” 5.

179 Ibid., 7.

180 See chapter 5.5.

181 Yi, “To Nora,” 6.

182 Ibid.

183 Ibid., 7. About the social expectations of women's education and female students see chapter 4.1.

gerous to play famous western dramas for this level of people. *The departure of Nora from A Doll's House is meaningful only because it results from her education and self-awakening*; if a woman from an ignorant society understands the superficial idea [of the play] on the stage and eventually abandons her husband and loving children to leave home, I cannot help but call it terrible bewilderment. It is not the fault of the art that this immoral act happens but the impresario who presents [the play] without paying attention to the educational status of the people (emphasis added).¹⁸⁴

Like his contemporaries, Cho Ch'un'gwang, too, foregrounded Nora's awakening as the essential requirement to justify her elopement. As demonstrated later, male commentators maintained their interpretative dominance over Korean women by claiming that they were entitled to judge whether a woman's actions were legitimate or not based on her epistemic status. In doing so, the male intellectuals turned women's leaving of home into a question of their knowledge and degree of intellectual development while marginalizing other reasons that made women leave their homes.

The fear that *ignorant* Korean women would imitate Nora after watching *A Doll's House* on stage became a motif of literary creation, too. Yang Könsik's 1923 drama *Sarang üi Kaksöng* (*Awakening of Love*) was a satirical comedy about Korean housewives agitated by Nora and her enthusiastic followers.¹⁸⁵ In this drama, the question of gendered conflict, social changes, and the theater's influence on women are amalgamated to the point of absurdity. Like Yi Kwangsu, Yang Könsik appropriated the motif of awakening. *Awakening of Love* can be read as a commentary mainly addressed to female audiences because their allegedly wrong interpretation of Ibsen's drama causes the conflict, and they are reprimanded for it. By doing so, the comedy tries to persuade Korean women not to follow the emancipatory message in *A Doll's House*.

In *Awakening of Love*, two middle-class Korean homemakers named Hyewön and Tongasuk extemporarily decide to leave their husbands following Nora's example. The marriage crisis is caused by a combination of two things: their attendance of the play *A Doll's House* and their acquaintance with a New Woman named Yi Yöngja, who infiltrates these naïve wives with the feminist interpretation of the play. Yi Yöngja, a teacher, wins the trust of the housewives during their husbands' absence, both of whom are navy captains. She lures Hyewön and Tongasuk to attend *A Doll's House* and discusses the play with them.¹⁸⁶ She even reenacts the last scene of *A Doll's House* while explaining the play to Söngsun, Hyewön's sister-in-law. Söngsun remains unimpressed by the teacher's recitation and reenactment, while Hyewön and Tongasuk see the play through the reen-

184 Cho Ch'un'gwang, "Sahoe üi Mulkyöl kwa Yöngük üi Samyöng 1 [The Current Society and the Mission of the Theater 1]," *DI*, January 12, 1925, 6.

185 This study is based on the republication of *Awakening of Love* made public by Pak Chinyöng. Yang, "Sarang üi Kaksöng [Awakening of Love]," *Minjok Munhaksa Yöngu* 58 ([1923]2015), 101–20.

186 In *Awakening of Love*, the performance of *A Doll's House* was organized by Kim Wönju's publishing company Shin Yöja. The literary historian Pak Chinyöng posed the possibility that there might have been a stage performance of *A Doll's House* in the early 1920s in colonial Korea. Pak, "Ibsen and Colony," 28. Until now, however, no evidence has been found that proves the performance took place. About Kim Wönju and her publishing company see chapter 5.1.

actment again and are finally won over. They begin seeing their own marriages from the perspective of Nora as the unmarried teacher invites them to do:

Hyewŏn: After watching Nora, I realized what men are really like, so I will divorce right away.

Tongsuk: I will divorce, too, and become a human being in the first place.

Yi Yŏngja: (towards them) Right. There is a saying that goes, “to know but not to practice is worse than not to know,” so when you know something, you should put it into action. Until when do you have to remain dolls and be treated not as a human being? If you are ever going to do it, keep your head straight and do it right because we have to see the true miracle.¹⁸⁷

Under Yi Yŏngja’s influence, Hyewŏn and Tongsuk strongly identify themselves with Nora and consider their marriage as hollow as Nora’s. This decision appears particularly absurd because it is not based on the reflection of their marriage, and no conflict between them and their husbands is mentioned. This way, their decisions appear baseless, and the housewives remain vulnerable to the Norwegian play’s dangerous influence intensified through the suspicious New Woman, who lacks the experience of marriage. Through the mouth of Hyewŏn’s husband, the playwright warns against *A Doll’s House*:

Captain Son: Hey, are you listening to me? It is common that people forget about themselves and want to become like the character when they watch a play. Hyewŏn, you are deeply affected by Nora. When people watch a drama about a loyal subject, they want to avenge themselves. But I don’t think there are people who want their king to be beaten to death by someone so that they can take revenge. It is not right to harass your husband and children because you want to be Nora.¹⁸⁸

Hyewŏn even shows signs of insanity when she declares to her husband that she is leaving. She claims to have been “greatly awoken” as Nora and insists that “our home is just like a doll’s house,” and Captain Son resembles Helmer simply because Captain Son loves her and cherishes her like “a lark” and “a doll.”¹⁸⁹ Pointing out differences between *A Doll’s House* and their own life, Captain Son tries to persuade her that she is not Nora and there was no such conflict in their marriage like in the Norwegian drama. However, Hyewŏn identifies herself with Nora so strongly that she believes that she was married to Captain Son for eight years like Nora instead of five years and had three instead of two children.¹⁹⁰ She begins speaking and acting “like an actor,” which makes Captain Son say that “she seems to be insane!”¹⁹¹ As he experiences that Tongsuk, too, declares her divorce to his colleague Captain Yu, he sighs that “all Korean women seem to have become Nora while

187 Yang, “Awakening of Love,” 106.

188 Ibid., 110.

189 Ibid., 108.

190 Ibid., 110.

191 Ibid.

[we were] traveling around in the distance.”¹⁹² Through scenes like these, an unrealistic yet powerful male anxiety shimmers through the satirical drama.

Notably, the New Woman's threat to the conventional marriage and gender norms is most keenly sensed and exterminated by Hyewŏn's mother-in-law, Mrs. Pak. She fulfills the conventional role of a mother-in-law who controls the daughters-in-law and protects the interests of her son and, ultimately, the paternal lineage.¹⁹³ From the beginning, Mrs. Pak shows a strong sense of antipathy towards Yi Yŏngja, the New Woman, and characterizes her as someone incomprehensible under the conventional gender norms. To the eyes of Mrs. Pak, Yi Yŏngja is bluntly “the bespectacled one,” which denounces her scholarship, and “a person who seems to be half-man and half-woman,”¹⁹⁴ a characterization which indicates that the New Woman teacher could bring confusion to the conventional gender roles manifested in the gender binary.

Not only Yi Yŏngja's looks but also what she brings to Hyewŏn disquiets the marriage and her family life: before *A Doll's House*, the New Woman teacher had already taught Hyewŏn “mathematics and [Christian] religion,”¹⁹⁵ the symbol of Western science and belief system that confronts traditional knowledge and values. Furthermore, the New Woman introduces Hyewŏn to a dubious medicine “that prevents pregnancy,” telling her that giving birth to a child makes women “quickly get older.”¹⁹⁶ This medicine deters the traditional duty of daughters-in-law in Korea to carry on the paternal genealogy by bearing children, particularly sons.¹⁹⁷ Reiterating these traditional ideas, Captain Son, too, says giving births to children might be “women's job,”¹⁹⁸ equivalent to men's profession outside the home. Although the medicine does not play a significant role in the drama, it does demonstrate the degree of risk that Yi Yŏngja poses to the conventional family model. In combination with *A Doll's House*, which allegedly motivates housewives to leave their married family altogether, the medicine gives women the power to make decisions over their own bodies and, furthermore, shakes gender norms surrounding marriage life from the root.

Eventually, the crisis of marriage is overcome through Mrs. Pak's guile. Ironically, Mrs. Pak uses marriage, which Yŏngja condemns so much, as a lever to change the flow of

192 Ibid., 112.

193 Kim Hyegyŏng's 2006 study on the transformation of Korean families found that severe conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law was one of arguments for Koreans to adopt the nuclear family model in the 1930s. See *Formation of Modern Family*, 295.

194 Yang, “Awakening of Love,” 102.

195 Ibid., 107.

196 Ibid., 102. Linda Gordon's 2007 study found “that birth control technology came to us with modern medicine” is “a prevalent myth.” She underlines that “birth control was not invented by scientists or doctors” but “is a part of folk culture, and women's folklore in particular, in nearly all societies.” She found that there were also “potions or pills” for birth control in “the ancient world and in modern preindustrial societies.” The pills that Yi Yŏngja brings to Hyewŏn and Tongsuk can be considered as a form of such folklore. See Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007). The quotes are from 13–14.

197 The task of producing a male heir was particularly assigned to a family's eldest son and his wife. Yoo, *Politics of Gender*, 22–23.

198 Yang, “Awakening of Love,” 109.

the game. Mrs. Pak suggests that her son, Captain Son, falsely seduce Yi Yŏngja so that the bond between the New Woman and Hyewŏn breaks. Although Captain Son fails at this task, Captain Yu, the husband of Tongsuk, takes inspiration from him and successfully tricks the man-hating teacher. Captain Yu claims that “a truly awakened woman would not change [her mind] after watching a mere play” and flatters Yi Yŏngja, saying that “every woman should choose a husband after an [genuine] awakening”¹⁹⁹ like hers. Fooled by his honeyed words about Western-style marriage life, Yi Yŏngja relinquishes her skepticism of marriage and promises Captain Yu that she will have “the second awakening”²⁰⁰ to become his wife.

Shocked by this turn of events, Tongsuk begs Captain Yu to return home; likewise, Captain Son repeats his proposal to the confused New Woman, which also makes Hyewŏn anxious: the table is turned now, and Hyewŏn criticizes him for forgetting about their marriage and children, while Captain Son insists that “it all belonged to a doll’s house” and he, too, “will undress the doll clothes.”²⁰¹ In this way, the subversive energy that threatened marriage life and the bond between younger generations of women under the influence of *A Doll’s House* backfires as a reactionary force that reinforces hegemonic gender norms, which dictate bearing children as women’s task and home as their place to be. The last sermon of Mrs. Pak and the confessions of the prodigal daughters-in-law restores the hitherto normative marriage life while condemning teachings from *A Doll’s House* as *Western*, thus unfitting for Korean people.

Mrs. Pak: (raises her hand and speaks to them as if she were giving a speech) Well, well, I have to ask you to stop. The married couple is determined by Ch’ŏnhwangssi [a legendary king of ancient China] and does not originate from the West. Thus, what comes down from the old times should be better left to old people like us. Mr. Yu has his wife and Son Sŏngmo his own, so they better go back home. For Koreans, a woman like Nora from the West is useless. One should not accept a woman like Nora into a family in the first place. (Towards Hyewŏn and Tongsuk) If you are jealous, you’d better not divorce, and if you learned that the Western way is not good, then take better care next time. Now, everybody back to the doll’s house!

Tongsuk: Oh, I am awakened for the second time!

Hyewŏn: Oh, I am awakened for the second time, too!

(Each couple, Son Sŏngmo and Hyewŏn as well as Yu Kiwŏn and Tongsuk, go out arm in arm through doors on the left and right side. Also, Mrs. Pak follows them and goes out through the right door).²⁰²

Curiously, Yang Kŏnsik, who translated *A Doll’s House* himself, presents skepticism against the Norwegian drama through this play.²⁰³ Although Western ideas already had

199 Ibid., 116.

200 Ibid., 117.

201 Ibid., 119.

202 Ibid., 119–20.

203 The literary historian Pak Chinyŏng suggested that it is highly likely that the work was not Yang’s own creation but an adaptation of an unknown Japanese drama. Pak, “Ibsen and Colony,” 27. Nevertheless, the radically confrontational views on Nora and the women’s movement in *A Doll’s House* and *Awakening of Love* is still problematic.

a significant impact on East Asia, including colonial Korea, the playwright concludes that Nora's claim to become an individual before a wife or mother cannot be accepted in Korea. Yang seems to be trying to instill fear in female readers and future audiences that they may lose their chances for marriage in pursuit of the modern Self. Considering that Yang Könsik was the translator of *A Doll's House* and closely cooperated with the female publisher Kim Wönju, it is surprising how bluntly *Awakening of Love* defames Nora and Korean women inspired by her. The literary historian Pak Chinyöng points out that Yang undermined "the revolutionary characteristic and emancipatory value"²⁰⁴ of *A Doll's House* by his hand through *Awakening of Love*.

Pak Chinyöng hypothesized that *Awakening of Love* was designed as an advertisement for *A Doll's House*, which the same publisher released under the title *Nora* in June 1922.²⁰⁵ While I agree with this hypothesis, I add that Yang Könsik and the publisher considered the satirical comedy not just as an advertisement but a cautionary tale, especially for women *before* they read or watched Ibsen's drama. There are two indications for this hypothesis: firstly, as discussed here, *Awakening of Love* refutes the content of *A Doll's House* and satirizes Korean women who sympathize with Nora. Secondly, at the end of *Awakening of Love*, an editor's comment declares the Korean parody as a prequel to the Norwegian play, saying, "Please read the world-famous book *Nora*, the sequel of this [book]."²⁰⁶ Considering that *Nora* appeared already a year before *Awakening of Love*, this sentence seems to be an instruction for Korean (female) readers on the *proper* order and way to read *A Doll's House*—first the rejective commentary, then the primary text.

Awakening of Love was an attempt to directly influence contemporary Korean women's reception and understanding of the controversial play. In this regard, *Awakening of Love* shares the arguments and the intention of novelist Yi Kwangsu's text "To Nora."²⁰⁷ Through *Awakening of Love* and "To Nora," the publishing company Yöngch'ang Sögwán tried to influence women's reception of *A Doll's House* even before its premiere, performed by a Korean theater company in 1925.

The Wife of the Incompetent Man: The Fall of Korean Nora

Kim Tong'in's 1930 short novel *Munöngja üi Anhae* (*The Wife of the Incompetent Man*) is a symbolic work that marks the time when Nora's status as a role model for Korean women became increasingly questioned.²⁰⁸ This short story was published in the daily newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* from July 30 to August 8, 1930, and is said to contain the writer's own experience: Kim Tong'in's first wife left him and their son for Tokyo in 1927 with their daughter as he went bankrupt.²⁰⁹

204 Pak, "Ibsen and Colony," 31–32.

205 Ibid., 28.

206 Yang, "Awakening of Love," 120.

207 See Pak, "Ibsen and Colony," 33.

208 This chapter is based on the version that appeared in *Chosun Ilbo* between July 30, 1930, and August 8, 1930. I became aware of this novel through Kim Miji's 2003 article. See "Variation of Nora," 189–92.

209 Kim, "Variation of Nora," 189.

This semi-autobiographical novel illustrates the inner life and allegedly short life cycle of Nora of Chosŏn (*Chosŏn ūi Nora*). Through the example of a runaway homemaker Yŏngsuk, Kim Tong'in depicts in a dry tone how the *delusions* of women, who identify themselves with Nora, lead them to ruin. Thereby, he dismisses the emergence of the Korean Nora as a result of wrong choices informed by the incomplete judgment of each woman while marginalizing the social and personal situations that lead to these women's downfall. Furthermore, juxtaposing Yŏngsuk's desperate actions to realize her ideal and her husband's suffocating inaction in their relationship, whose interaction leads to Yŏngsuk's moral and economic bankruptcy, the novelist inadvertently reveals the discriminatory nature of the conventional gender norms that punish women even without left-behind-men's active participation in the process.

The story begins with Yŏngsuk leaving her home with her daughter, Oksun, when her husband loses all the family fortune. Her husband, a rich heritor, leaves "all family affairs"²¹⁰ such as borrowing money from others, meeting guests on his behalf, visits to government offices, and managing farmers working on their property to her, neglecting his socially expected role as the head of household. Instead, he spends his time "writing and publishing coarse novels and leading a fast life."²¹¹ Although Yŏngsuk was forced to fill his absence in the beginning, she soon becomes "proud" of being "the housewife, the head, and the representative of the household," thanks to her nature, which allegedly "lacked womanly tameness but had manly activeness and competence."²¹² The author, who sticks to the gender binary, describes this marriage as "bizarre."²¹³

Notably, Kim Tong'in explains Yŏngsuk's action always as a reaction to her husband's absolute inaction throughout the novel. She runs away from home because her husband does nothing to rescue the family;²¹⁴ she decides to go to Tokyo because her husband neither chases after her nor writes a letter while she is in Seoul to persuade her.²¹⁵ She stubbornly remains in Tokyo because her husband shows absolutely no reaction to her wish to return.²¹⁶ Even when Yŏngsuk spreads terrible rumors about him after the divorce, he "did nothing but keeping silence."²¹⁷ His inaction and silence have two obvious functions: on the one hand, it causes conflict between him and his wife; on the other hand, Kim Tong'in disapproves of Yŏngsuk's self-motivation by defining her actions primarily as a reaction to her husband's inaction. The less apparent third function of his inaction is a demonstration of power inherent in his position. He does not even *need* to act against his wife because instead of him, the patriarchal apparatus will punish her for trying to break away from it. I will elaborate on this point later in this analysis.

The precariously maintained marriage breaks down as the husband suddenly decides to owe money to all the inherited lands to start a business, only to fail. To make matters worse, the husband "hurriedly runs away to Seoul" after "assigning the wife to liq-

210 Kim Tong'in, "Wife of Incompetent Man 1," *CI*, July 30, 1930, 4.

211 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 1," *CI*, July 30, 1930, 4.

212 Ibid.

213 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 1," *CI*, July 30, 1930, 4.

214 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 2," *CI*, July 31, 1930, 4.

215 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 4," *CI*, August 2, 1930, 4.

216 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 7," *CI*, August 5, 1930, 4.

217 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 9," *CI*, August 7, 1930, 4.

update the family property," leaving Yöngsuk and two children alone in P'yöng'yang for six months. After returning, he idles away his time with fishing for a year and a half. Meanwhile, Yöngsuk gradually begins to think of leaving her home behind. For Yöngsuk, leaving home was "a dream and a belief that is deeply embedded in the head, and at the same time, a fantasy without any reality." However, as she discovers *A Doll's House* on her husband's bookshelf and reads the play, she comes to think of leaving home as a realizable option.²¹⁸

Figure 14: An illustration of Yöngsuk and her daughter leaving her husband.



Source: *Chosun Ilbo*, August 2, 1930, 4. Courtesy of Chosun Ilbo.

Kim Tong'in underlines differences between Yöngsuk and Nora, Yöngsuk's misunderstanding of Nora's motivation, and their shared yearning. Yöngsuk cannot understand why Nora, married to a competent and caring man such as Helmer, decides to leave home. Yöngsuk is depicted as incapable of comprehending the problem of the marriage system handled in the drama either. Instead, she feels that she was connected to Nora because of her wish to leave home. Ironically, Kim Tong'in refashions this empathetic reading of *A Doll's House* as a wrong way to understand the drama:

She did not clearly understand why Nora ran away. Helmer loved her. Helmer was a wise husband. He was not as incompetent and irresponsible as her own husband. Nora respected him. Yöngsuk, a lump of intellect though she was, could not understand why Nora, who felt happy under this circumstance, ran away. Nevertheless, she resonated with the catharsis displayed in the act [of leaving home]. Since then, she kept thinking

218 The quotes are from Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 2," *CI*, July 31, 1930, 4.

about leaving home in one corner of her mind, although she regarded it simply as an impossible thing to do.²¹⁹

As executive officers come and seize the family's property after two years of bankruptcy, Yöngsuk finally decides to escape home. Planning to go to school and become independent, she takes the remaining money of 3,000 wön and her daughter. At the same time, however, she does not completely give up the idea that she might return home as a housewife sooner or later.²²⁰ In other words, she migrates to Tokyo while experiencing internal conflicts between her wish to transform herself into a New Woman and to return to the old life. Interestingly, Kim Tong'in describes how Yöngsuk led a less happy marriage than Nora. However, he does not seem to think that it is thus more probable that Yöngsuk will leave her husband than Nora. Instead, Kim demonstrates that Yöngsuk—unlike her husband or the writer himself—misunderstood *A Doll's House* and repeatedly declares that she is not Nora. In doing so, he argues that Yöngsuk's running away is fundamentally different from Nora's.

To put it simply, she was not Nora. So, she did not leave home because of reveries and vague, abstract notions like Nora did. Leaving home for good, which has always been in one corner of her mind, was merely a dramatic addition to her short journey to soothe the gloom of recent days. Therefore, this episode can be seen as an event planned for a long time, and at the same time, it was nothing more than a play created by reverie.²²¹

On the other hand, Kim does not criticize Nora as harshly as some of his contemporaries. Kim seems to highly appreciate the fact that Nora realized the discrimination against women inherent in marriage *even though* the crisis in her marriage had just been overcome; thus, her change of perception and her departure is treated as more epistemologically or politically profound than Yöngsuk's, who was in the middle of economic bankruptcy and emotional crisis. While presenting Nora as the ideal modern woman, Kim defames the Korean women inspired by the character as imprudent and inferior imitators because they allegedly lacked the awakening.

Similarly, Yöngsuk's transformation into the Korean Nora is depicted merely as a revenge against her husband. After a month of running away, Yöngsuk comes back to P'yöng'yang defeated: her husband chased after their daughter and took her back from Tokyo, while ignoring Yöngsuk's wish to go home. Furthermore, back home, Yöngsuk experiences severe criticisms and exclusion from the local community because of her "ill reputation" as a woman who abandoned her husband and children after his bankruptcy.²²² Her decision to divorce him and to partake in feminist activism in Seoul is explained as a pursuit to reestablish her reputation in an alternative domain:

219 Ibid.

220 See Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 3," *CI*, August 1, 1930, 4.

221 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 3," *CI*, August 1, 1930, 4.

222 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 8," *CI*, August 6, 1930, 4.

To speak of her determination back then, she had to go to Seoul and become a prominent women's liberation movement figure. She must bear greater and brighter fame than her husband won in society as a novelist. When Nora meets Helmer again after leaving his home, she had to obtain a personality and fame that make Helmer bow down. With these aspirations, she decamped from P'yŏng'yang and moved to Seoul.²²³

Kim Tong'in declares that her new identity is nothing but a fake. Abbreviating her activism into mere curses targeting men and squealing between happy wives and husbands, he deprives the feminist movement of social and historical relevance. Instead, he depicts how satisfied Yŏngsuk is with being called Nora of Chosŏn without "any regret or a lingering affection for her children."²²⁴ This depiction echoes earlier accusations that she took her daughter only as bait for her husband.²²⁵ Repeatedly representing her as a woman without the so-called maternal love, a characteristic mistaken as a distinctively female instinct, Kim Tong'in brands feminist activism as something against the allegedly natural order of gender.

Meanwhile, Kim focuses on how Yŏngsuk, now a Nora of Chosŏn, cannot help but seek sexual pleasure and the approval of men, and steps into debauchery. Suffering the most "under the wave of sexual desire that sometimes struck her like a storm," Yŏngsuk tries to hook up on the night street. However, due to her mature appearance, she is insulted as a "grandma," which makes her to pay more attention to wearing cosmetics.²²⁶ She and all of her feminist colleagues are described as leading a radical life for that time: each of them has one or several lovers, whom they also share. Through this depiction, Kim Tong'in inscribes excessive sexual lust and indulgence into Nora of Chosŏn. In doing so, he utilizes the still prevailing taboo of women's active pursuit of sexual desire to denounce them morally.

Leaving home behind, Yŏngsuk enters the market of Free Love where people seek partners based on the physical attractiveness or economic power that compensates for the lack of physical charms. Kim Tong'in depicts exclusion from the love and marriage market as Yŏngsuk's greatest fear. Yŏngsuk enters a second marriage based on Free Love, and ironically, she becomes even more dependent on her new husband. As he, too, knows the rule of the free-love market well, Yŏngsuk fears that he would soon leave her, mainly because he is younger than her. Overwhelmed by the anxiety that "everything will be ruined only if wrinkles appear on her face," she even gives him all her savings from the first marriage. Nevertheless, as the money runs out, he leaves her.²²⁷

Depicting Yŏngsuk's sexual adventures and failures, the author presumably demonstrates how Yŏngsuk was hoisted with her own petard. What is revealed regardless of his intentions is that the sexual freedom of women was under conditions different from men. Notably, the fact that Yŏngsuk's aging influences her relationships with men proves this circumstance. As her youth and money run out, she becomes "a sort of working

223 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 8," *CI*, August 6, 1930, 4.

224 Ibid.

225 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 5," *CI*, August 3, 1930, 4.

226 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 9," *CI*, August 7, 1930, 4.

227 Kim, "Wife of Incompetent Man 10," *CI*, August 8, 1930, 4.

woman who sells her smile on the street to feed herself."²²⁸ The precarity that drives her to sell her sex is not represented as a tragedy of society but as a bleak future that she deserves as a wayward woman.

Notably, this bitter end to Yöngsuk's leaving home is directly juxtaposed with her first husband's comeback as a successful writer with a new happy marriage. The novel shows that the husband does not even need to take any action personally—neither revenge nor reconciliation. Even without his involvement, society itself doles out punishment on wayward wives; because women become powerless as they grow older, they become completely reliant on either men or money, or both. By making the wrong choices, Yöngsuk seems to walk voluntarily onto a path of doom, while her husband does absolutely nothing to her.

Realizing that she is trapped in a patriarchal system that discriminates against women, Yöngsuk asks herself if she was "nothing but a mere victim of her time,"²²⁹ one in which Nora and women's emancipation were applauded. Furtively mixing in his voice with Yöngsuk's, Kim Tong'in assesses the Noras of Chosön as creatures of fad:

Nowadays, newspapers report every day of New Women leaving their homes behind and running away. Like Yöngsuk, all of them break away without any complete self-awareness because of their temporary rebellion, excitement, or being talked into doing so by someone else, with no time to think about their future. And this phenomenon will keep going on. Twenty, thirty, or fifty years later, when this *history* exemplifies what end the pioneers like Yöngsuk came to, it will stop.

Then am I a mere warning example for people to come? Considering this, she trembled all over. Her mind was always full of anxiety for her future.²³⁰

The Wife of the Incompetent Man stands at the inflection point of the sudden change of the time as the expression "Nora of Chosön" became defamatory of women who pursued their desires outside the home.²³¹ This novel is a cynical evaluation of Korean women who regarded Nora as their role model and challenged the existing marriage system. Kim Tong'in indicates that women should overcome themselves instead of discriminations against them. As he foregrounds criticisms of the Korean Nora, the inability of men, which can be considered the cause of running away, is concealed, as Kim Miji pointed out.²³² Instead, Kim Tong'in carries out a kind of revenge on his wife through the short story.²³³

This short story is also a cynical warning to female readers of *A Doll's House*. The author points out that women's empathetic reading leads to an identification with Nora, the fictional character, which could eventually lead to a fatal end. In doing so, *The Wife of the*

228 Ibid.

229 Ibid.

230 Ibid.

231 Pak Induk, a famous New Woman and Christian educator, gained a notoriety as Nora of Chosön as her divorce was made public in 1931. See Choi, *Gender and Mission*, 161.

232 Kim, "Variation of Nora," 192.

233 Ibid.

Incompetent Man blends together the voices of patriarchal intellectual men, who decide to interpret women's emancipatory narratives as an unambiguous warning.

Chakrabarty explains how European colonial powers justified their dominance over "Indians, Africans, and other 'rude' nations"²³⁴ by claiming that these nations were—unlike European and American nations—too immature for self-government, thus allocating them to an imaginary waiting room to wait for the right moment. The rejective commentaries surrounding Korean women's reception of *A Doll's House* is an excellent example of how the colonized male intellectuals tried to relaunch dominance over their female compatriots by creating another "imagined waiting room of history"²³⁵ for women inside the waiting room for the colonized—by telling them that they should not yet fully accept feminism. Enacting "the stagist theory of history on which European ideas of political modernity were based"²³⁶ on Korean women, these Korean male intellectuals revealed that gender was an integral part of colonial publicness as well.

5.4 Affirmative-Critical Commentaries of Korean Socialists

Socialist Views on the Inequality of Korean Women

In the 1920s and 1930s, many commentaries about *A Doll's House* were written from a socialist perspective. Socialism became a relevant ideology in debates on the women's rights movement in colonial Korea in the early 1920s. Mark E. Robinson identified three main reasons why socialism emerged in this period as an alternative political idea for some Koreans. Firstly, they became skeptical about "the future of the West and the wisdom of emulating its political model"²³⁷ after witnessing World War I. Secondly, although the Allied Powers were heralded with slogans such as "internationalism, pan[*h*]umanism, and global cooperation,"²³⁸ colonized Koreans soon learned that these ideas were relevant only to the West and their powerful allies, such as imperial Japan. Meanwhile, Koreans' repeated attempts to find support amongst the Western countries for liberation from Japan failed because the Allies approved Japan's rule over the Korean peninsula. Thus, many Koreans felt left behind and developed "a sense of betrayal"²³⁹ towards Western liberalism. Thirdly, the failure of the 1919 March First Movement raised questions about the validity of "the pacificism and nonviolent tactics of the movement."²⁴⁰ As a result, an increasing number of Korean activists and intellectuals regarded socialism as a means of achieving emancipation from Japanese colonial rule.²⁴¹ Robinson points out

234 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8.

235 Ibid.

236 Ibid., 9.

237 Michael E. Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1988), 107.

238 Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism*, 107.

239 Ibid., 108.

240 Ibid.

241 See *ibid.*

that after the success of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviet Union emerged “as a champion of oppressed peoples,”²⁴² and as its ideological backbone, socialism had a strong appeal to the colonized Koreans.

Socialist ideas circulated among Korean diaspora communities in Russia, Manchuria, and Japan in the closing years of the 1910s, which led to the emergence of Korean socialist and communist organizations in and outside the Korean peninsula.²⁴³ For instance, Yi Tonghwi established the Korean Socialist Party (*Hanin Sahoe Tang*) in Khabarovsk in 1918; in the same year, Nam Manch'un instated the Korean section of the communist party in Irkutsk. Yi Tonghwi, again, founded the Korean Communist Party (*Koryŏ Kongsan Tang*) in Shanghai in 1921.²⁴⁴ On the Korean peninsula, organizations such as the Korean Women's Socialist League (*Chosŏn Yŏsŏng Tong'uhoe*, hereafter KWSL) and Korea Artista Proleta Federacio (KAPF) played a pivotal role in advocating socialist views in Korean public discourse.²⁴⁵

Korean sociologist Kim Kyŏng'il points out the different educational and religious backgrounds of Korean socialist women. While most liberal feminists studied in Japan and United States and had Christian beliefs, socialist women seldom had overseas experiences and kept a distance from the Christian religion.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, socialist feminists distinguished themselves from liberal feminists by critiquing their agenda, including reforming the home and Wise Mother and Good Wives, women's education, and suffrage, which sustained the capitalist system instead of subverting it.²⁴⁷ While the Korean socialist texts analyzed in this chapter focus on middle-class women in urban areas, Korean socialists demanded improvement of female factory workers' working conditions and sought solidarity with women in rural areas, too.²⁴⁸

Korean socialists explained discrimination against women and oppressive marriage custom as byproducts of capitalism.²⁴⁹ For instance, Pak Wŏnhŭi, a founding member of

242 Ibid., 107.

243 See *ibid.*, 109–14.

244 See *ibid.*, 109.

245 KWSL, the first Korean socialist women's organization, was established in May 1924. “They viewed economic transformation as the basis for the true emancipation of women and thus kept a central focus on women laborers as the basis of socio-economic and political transformation. [...] The socialist women were too literal in their interpretation of the foreign ideology of socialism and tried to apply the theory too mechanically to colonial Korea, which was still a feudal agricultural society.” Choi, “Introduction,” in *Sourcebook*, 8–9. KAPF was founded in August 1925 and lasted until May 1935. Literary scholar Kim Yunsik explains that “the KAPF political organization [] was communicating both directly and indirectly with RAPP (Rossiskaia Assotsiatsiia Proletarskikh Pisatelei) of the Soviet Union, as well as with NAPF (Nippona Artista Proletaria Federacio) of Japan,” and was thus “involved with the Comintern.” “KAPF Literature in Modern Korean Literary History,” *Positions* 14, no. 2 (2006), 405–25; refer to 407 and 422 (see note 1).

246 Kim Kyŏng'il, “1920–30-nyŏndae Han'guk ŭi Shin Yŏsŏng kwa Sahoe Chu'ui [The Korean New Women and Socialism during the 1920s and 1930s],” *Han'guk Munhwa* 36 (2005), 249–95; see 251.

247 Kim, “New Women and Socialism,” 260.

248 For female factory workers' living conditions and gender politics see Yoo, *Politics of Gender*, 127–60. Women's magazine *Yŏsŏng chi Woo* (*Women's Friend*, 1920–30) thematized rural women's hardship and urban women's meaningful contribution to rural women's lives in various articles.

249 However, the socialist criticism ignores that the discrimination against women and marriage custom were established already before the capitalist economy took root in the Korean peninsula.

KWSL and Seoul Women's Youth Alliance (*Kyöngsöng Yöja Chöngnyön Hoe*), claimed that women were deprived of "all rights defined by constitutional and civil law" and "treated only as a means to reproduce and bring up children"²⁵⁰ through the gendered segregation of labor, which allocated women to the domestic realm. She recognized the influence of the French women's movement since the late eighteenth century and publications "such as Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Ghost*, Mrs. Ellen Key's theories of love (*yönaeron*), and British women's suffragette movement (*kwangpöpa undong*)"²⁵¹ on Korean women's movements. Nevertheless, Pak Wönhüi evaluated them as only "a partial movement for women's emancipation" because she believed that the capitalist economy was "the fundamental problem."²⁵² In this belief, she claimed that "when we fix the capitalist economic system into a socialist economic system, we will have economic freedom; when we socialize the domestic labor, we will have the freedom of profession [...]"²⁵³ As the first step to women's liberation, Pak suggested "making teachings of the social science [socialism] clear and advocate them widely."²⁵⁴

Pyön Hüiyong's treatise "Historical Thoughts on the Men-Women Conflict," serially published by *Dong-A Ilbo* in 1922, was a salient example of early socialist commentaries on *A Doll's House* in colonial Korea. He understood the drama as a criticism of capitalism and marriage and argued that Nora's marriage depicted how marriage became an exchange of women's sex and men's money under capitalism. He argued:

To men's eyes, women were simply an instrument for [satisfying] libido, and to women's eyes, men were nothing but an easy means of living. How a minor conflict of interest develops into ferocious combat in a marriage based on greed is expressed in great detail in *A Doll's House* [...]. In short, all inequality between two sexes boils down to one problem: women's economic dependency on men.²⁵⁵

Identifying "women's economic dependency on men" as the fundamental source of gender-based inequality, Pyön claimed that "the first step to ending all inequality and all fights among men and women as well as the whole of humankind is to destroy the very roots of the capitalist economic system and realize economic equality."²⁵⁶ Both Pak and Pyön prioritized the spread of socialist worldviews, fought against capitalism, and claimed that women would achieve emancipation once socialist endeavors bore fruit.

However, when it came to how Korean women became economically dependent on men, Korean socialist men were quick to blame women for their own misery. Yang

Other socialist feminists were aware of this problem and focused on overcoming the custom. See Kim, "New Women and Socialism," 264–65. For the influence of Neo-Confucianism on lives of women during the Chosön Dynasty see Haboush, "Confucianization of Korean Society," 84–110, and Martina Deuchler, "Propagating Female Virtues in Chosön Korea."

250 Pak Wönhüi, "Urihoe üi Ch'uiji [Our Organization's Aim]," *DI*, January. 8, 1926, 3.

251 Pak, "Our Organization's Aim," *DI*, January. 8, 1926, 3.

252 Ibid.

253 Ibid.

254 Ibid.

255 Pyön Hüiyong, "Namnyö T'ujaeng üi Sajök Koch'al 3 [Historical Thoughts on the Men-Women Conflict 3]," *DI*, January 27, 1922, 1.

256 Pyön, "Historical Thoughts 3," *DI*, January 27, 1922, 1.

Myōng's 1924 essay revealed that some Korean socialist men considered women's emancipation exclusively a women's problem. Yang insisted that women should not expect any support from men in the socialist feminist movement because it might be as contradictory as "realizing socialism with the support of capitalism."²⁵⁷ Instead of solidarity across the gender boundary, Yang emphasized the importance of change in women's consciousness and took Nora as a positive example:

I am telling you that the women's rights movement fundamentally depends on the question of whether women are self-awakened. Becoming aware of the fact that they are someone's wife, mother, and at the same time individuals like men! Discovering oneself as a woman and concurrently an individual will be the true first step of the women's rights movement.²⁵⁸

As women's magazines exemplified, educated Korean women actively spoke out about their needs regarding social engagement and equality in the family from the 1920s.²⁵⁹ In line with this development, socialists began criticizing educated women for egoistically pursuing their own well-being. Particularly, criticizing Korean women's economic dependency on men and their alleged lack of self-awakening became socialist men's sport during the late 1920s. In his 1926 column "Korean New Women Forget about the Liberation of the Self," the socialist Ok Sunch'öl even argued that women might have "given up the human and individual life and maintained their lives because they subscribed to men's economic superiority and lived on men as a parasite."²⁶⁰ Although he did not clearly refer to Ibsen's drama, he repeatedly compared Korean women to dolls and toys, a metaphor whose emergence coincided with the popularization of *A Doll's House*.²⁶¹ Instead of patriarchy or gendered inequality in the distribution of means of production, he argued that it was women themselves who turned themselves into dolls. Remarkably, he denounced Korean female students for going to school "to become a more splendid accessory of men"²⁶² and insisted that women's school education might be comparable to *kisaeng* women's learning of poems and music. Echoing Ok's view, a male student at a renowned school asserted in his award-winning essay that Korean women likely consider men's financial ability the most crucial condition for marriage and compared their marriages to prostitution.²⁶³

Not only did such views neglect the gendered discrimination that hindered educated women from getting proper jobs after graduating from school, but they also contributed

257 Yang Myōng, "Sugam Tasöt P'yōn [Five Thoughts that Came to My Mind]," KB (May 1924), 63–65.

258 Yang, "Five Thoughts," 64–65.

259 For the English translation of selected articles from Korean women's magazines see Choi, *Sourcebook*.

260 Ok Sunch'öl, "Chagi Haebang ūl Manggak Hanūn Chosŏn ūi Shin Yösŏng 3 [Korean New Women Forget about the Liberation of the Self 3]," *DI*, October 13, 1926, 3.

261 See Ok, "Forgetting Liberation of Self 2," *DI*, October 12, 1926, 3, and "Forgetting Liberation of Self 4," *DI*, October 14, 1926, 3; Ok, "Yangsŏng Munje ro Poa Yōnae Kyōrhon ūl Nonham [On Marriages Based on Yōnae as a Gender Problem]," *Shinmin* (May 1927), 43.

262 Ok, "Forgetting Liberation of Self 4," *DI*, October 14, 1926, 3.

263 Ch'oe Hwal, "Na ūi Honingwan 3 [My View on Marriage 3]," *DI*, January 12, 1927, 5.

to the tendency to blame women for their own discrimination. Socialist men often saw themselves as the evaluators and instructors of women's rights instead of comrades who suffered from the capitalist economy. Determining that Korean women were in the middle of a transition period from the premodern stage to the modern, Ok Sunch'öl promptly diagnosed that "Korean women, too, are in the middle of social evolution,"²⁶⁴ as if men were ahead in the alleged social evolutionary process. Meanwhile, KWSL pointed out that men were responsible for the oppression of women in their 1924 manifesto: "Men deprived us of all rights we originally had and gave us death and diseases instead."²⁶⁵ However, texts from Korean male socialists indicate that this criticism found little resonance among them.

In the discourse of socialist feminism, its evaluation of Nora deteriorated sharply in the late 1920s. There are two main reasons for this change. Firstly, Korean female workers' poor working conditions and lives drew critical attention from the public, which eventually changed the context of the reception of *A Doll's House*. Around this time, women's magazines disgorged articles on Korean female workers' precarious economic situation. The May 1932 issue of *Puin Kongnon* deplored that Korean women earned "an initial salary of a mere 15.6 wŏn per month, although their ordeal was not a small one to graduate from secondary school and find a job as a salesclerk, bank clerk, or office worker."²⁶⁶ Meanwhile, women who took up an occupation that did not require school education worked under even harsher conditions. The socialist women's magazine *Yŏsŏng chi Woo* interviewed a nanny, telephone operator, retailer, tram conductor, taxi driver, servant, housekeeper of a motel, rice cake seller, bank clerk, and oil seller in 1930, all of whom complained about the pressure, insults from supervisors and customers, sexual harassment, and low income.²⁶⁷

The louder Korean working class women's voices were, the harsher the criticisms of Nora's story became. For instance, reflecting on Ibsen's influence on the Korean women's movement, the literary critic Ahn Ham'gwang argued in 1932 that *A Doll's House* was the tragedy of the bourgeois class and that it was outdated: "Women's economic independence is the most important element to abolish bourgeois morality. In general, modern women, who breathe this social atmosphere, have already long been regarding something like Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as an antique."²⁶⁸

Secondly, Russian politician and writer Aleksandra Kollontai (1872–1956) overshadowed Nora as a new role model for Korean socialist women around this time. An "activist, essayist, author of social legislation on women's issues" and "the world's second female

264 Ok Sunch'öl, "Kwadogi ūi Ilban Kyŏngnyang kwa Chosŏn Yŏsŏng ūi Min'gamsŏng (chung) [General Tendency in a Transition Period and Korean Women's Sensibility 2]," *DI*, November 1, 1926, 3.

265 "Yŏsŏng Tong'u Palhoeshik ūn 23-il Ch'ŏndogyo esŏ [KSWL Foundation Meeting on the 23rd at Ch'ŏndogyo Center]," *DI*, May 22, 1924, 2.

266 "Kkosip [Gossip]," *Puin Kongnon* (May 1932), 28–29; refer to 29.

267 "Chigŏb Chŏnsŏn esŏ Iljin Il'toe Hanŭn Nangjagun ūi Hamsŏng [The Shouts of Women Going Back and Forth on the Job Front]," *Yŏsŏng chi Woo* (January 1930), 24–36. For a similar article covering and targeting middle-class women, see "Chigŏp Yŏsŏng Saenghwal Kirok [A Documentation of Working Women's Lives]," *SK* (January 1933), 127–39.

268 See An Ham'gwang, "Chosŏn Yŏsŏng kwa Munye [Korean Women and the Literary Art]," *Yŏin* (October 1932), 14–18; refer to 19.

ambassador”²⁶⁹ in Norway, Kollontai was a vibrant personality in Soviet Russia. She became a pivotal figure in colonial Korean discourse of socialist feminism through her novel *Chōgyōn* (*Red Love*), which appeared in 1928 in Korea following the 1927 Japanese translation.²⁷⁰ Originally titled *Василиса Малыгина* (*Vasilisa Malygina*) after the protagonist, *Red Love* introduced a female character who prioritized her social engagement over domestic labor and marriage.²⁷¹ Furthermore, the *Dong-A Ilbo* published an essay by Kollontai in December 1929 under the title “Views on Love and Marriage in the Future Society”, in which she declared that when more women had income through paid work, they would neither need to marry men nor depend on them:

New women commence work. They will go into business, industry, teaching, and other works. From year to year, the number of women who support themselves increases. As they live an economically independent life, they will lead a life as a human and a useful [person] like men do. They will be gradually liberated from marriage as a means of living. Unlike in the past, they will not have to behave suave or chaste to draw men’s affection. This has been their trouble and handicap.²⁷²

Kollontai foresaw that women’s economic independence from men would change love and marriage. She argued further that

Today’s women, the professionals who have achieved independent living, do not prioritize love (*yōnae*). For instance, it is clear that a female doctor would not misuse her time for her beloved husband. In this way, when women have a sense of fulfillment through their professional duty, they will work for their profession instead of their husbands.²⁷³

Responsive to Kollontai’s texts and biographic details about her love life, some Korean socialists actively spread the idea that women should devote themselves to work instead of love and marriage. While Kollontai emerged as the new role model for socialist women, Nora was depreciated. For instance, Chōng Ch’ilsōng, a socialist feminist and former *kisaeng*, disapproved of Nora as a role model for socialist women in 1929, as she debated Kollontai’s perspective regarding women’s roles in both society and in the family with a journalist in the popular magazine *Samch’ōlli*:

Nora’s [liberation] was a case of individual self-awakening. Because she was awakened to her individuality, she was able to leave her barrister husband’s house one snowy night. But where could she go and what resources did she have to support herself? It

269 Ruth Barraclough, Heather Bowen-Struyk, and Paula Rabinowitz, “Introduction: Sex, Texts, Comrades,” in *Red Love Across the Pacific: Political and Sexual Revolutions of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Barraclough et al., (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), vi–xviii; see xiii.

270 Barraclough et al., “Introduction,” xii.

271 Aleksandra Kollontai, “Vasilisa Malygina,” in *Love of Worker Bees*, trans. Cathy Porter (Chicago: Academy Press Limited, [1923]1978) 21–181.

272 Kollontai, “Changnae Sahoe üi Yōnae kŭp Kyōrhon’gwan (sang), [Views on Love and Marriage in Future Society 1],” trans. KWP-Saeng, *DI*, December 1, 1929, 4.

273 Kollontai, “Views on Love 1,” *DI*, December 1, 1929, 4.

is not "liberation" if she escapes only to starve or freeze to death on the street. Thus, if one is not economically liberated, liberation has no meaning. A woman like Nora is either an empty idealist or not, in fact, truly liberated. In contrast, as described above, Vasilisa is completely liberated, isn't she?²⁷⁴

While criticizing Nora's choice, Chŏng shows some understanding of how Korean women had little room to make their own decisions, which distinguishes her from Korean male socialists. When the journalist asked her if she would choose social activism despite her husband's threat to expel her, Chŏng pointed out the precarity that awaited divorced women without economic power:

But when such a thing happens under Korean circumstances, women typically do not have the means to support themselves or provide for their own basic sustenance. Therefore, women should work for society but only to the extent that their husbands would not abandon them. I believe that women can maintain a balance between domestic and social duties without creating conflict if they work on it daily.²⁷⁵

As Pak Wŏnhŭi and Chŏng Ch'ilsŏng's critiques illustrate, Korean socialist women expressed strong skepticism about Nora's suitability as a symbol of women's emancipation in the second half of the 1920s. They were pessimistic about Nora's final decision due to the lack of material basis to support herself after leaving her home. Notably, Chŏng's question—"Where could she go and what resources did she have to support herself?"—was actively explored in the 1930s in novels written from a socialist perspective by Chae Mansik and Shim Hun, which will be discussed in the following section.

Nora's Awakening as a Socialist (1): *Why She Left the Doll's House*

Why She Left the Doll's House, serialized by the daily newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* from May 27, 1933, to November 14, 1933, depicts Nora's fate after leaving home under a scenario in which she is a Korean woman of that time. By adapting the drama, Ch'ae Mansik tried to overcome the limitations of Nora's choice in *A Doll's House* from a socialist perspective. He wrote:

When a middle-class wife abandons her home and runs away with bare hands, it could be a step for women's liberation, but not yet its completion. In her idealistic mind, Nora left her home for the sake of freedom and liberation, but, indeed, the world would not have moved as she ideally wanted it to. Therefore, which path should she have taken to eliminate the petite-bourgeois meaning she had in life and find a path to true emancipation? In other words, [my novel depicts] a dialectical development process of women's liberation where the freedom, once affirmed, is repeatedly denied, and then reaffirmed.²⁷⁶

274 Chŏng Ch'ilsŏng, "Critique on *Red Love*: Kollontai's Sexual Morality," in Choi, *Sourcebook*, 105–08; refer to 108.

275 Chŏng, "Critique on *Red Love*," 106.

276 Ch'ae Mansik, "Inhyŏng ūi Chip ūl Nawasŏ rŭl Ssŭmyŏnsŏ [On Writing *After Leaving the Doll's House*]," *SL* (September 1933), 77. Based on the novelist's notes, the Korean literary historian Pang

The novelist regarded the liberal feminist agenda in *A Doll's House* as imperfect because Nora's notion of liberation was bound to her class, and the world outside her home would defeat her. Nevertheless, he is more interested in exploring a way to "true emancipation" in the Korean context than defaming middle-class women.

To this end, Ch'ae transplanted the fictional world of *A Doll's House* into colonial Korean society, simply replacing the Norwegian nationality, names, geographic and institutional names with Korean ones while keeping the characteristics and conflicts from the original drama. Nora Helmer becomes a Korean woman named Yim No-ra and her husband Hyön Sökjun, a Korean lawyer and banker. Through this bold localization, the author depicts what a Korean woman would undergo if she left her husband and children behind just as Nora did.

Ch'ae Mansik represented early 1930s colonial Korean society as a precarious place, especially for women without economic means. After leaving her husband and children, No-ra struggles to make a living and tries to support herself through wage labor. To be free from her husband and bring her children back to her, No-ra first needs to earn her own living. However, all she can get are insecure jobs that threaten her economic stability and her sexual self-determination.

No-ra finds occasional jobs as a private tutor, street vendor for cosmetics, and waitress at a café, where she experiences humiliation and sexual violence. No-ra is guaranteed housing and a stable salary as a private tutor, but she quits her job after being molested by the son of the wealthy *yangban* family.²⁷⁷ After earning little money as a cosmetic salesperson, she starts working as a waitress at Café Satan, naïvely believing in the false promise that she could quickly earn a lot of money. At work, No-ra, who goes by the pseudonym Yuriko, is constantly exposed to sexual harassment yet must invest in expensive dresses to attract even more male customers and maintain her living. In doing so, she falls into a vicious cycle of poverty and sex work. Eventually, Yuriko tries to kill herself after being made drunk and raped by a customer. She survives her attempt, but as the commotion surrounding her suicide is featured in a newspaper with a photograph of her face, her social reputation is damaged, and she sees no chance of finding any job.²⁷⁸

Ch'ae Mansik summarizes what No-ra learned from being outside of the doll's house through No-ra's suicide note addressed to her friend Hyegyöng, equivalent to Mrs. Linde in *A Doll's House*.

I left home and my husband, who considered his wife a doll and slave, to become a free human instead of a slave. [...] I, a woman called Yim No-ra, have once become a free human being who can live without any hesitation. But what cost did I pay for obtaining

Minho discovered that Ch'ae planned numerous alterations of the serialized novel, including the title. This study uses the title *Why She Left the Doll's House* as the novelist planned to do so. See Pang Minho, "Hüigwi han Munhak Yusan, Ch'ae Mansik Kyojōngbon Inhyōng ūi Chip ūl Naon Yōnyu [A Rare Literary Legacy, Ch'ae Mansik's Revised Version of *Why She Left the Doll's House*]," in *Inhyōng ūi Chip ūl Naon Yōnyu: Chōja Kyojōngbon Ch'ae Mansik Changp'yōn Sosōl [Why She Left the Doll's House: Ch'ae Mansik's Novel Based on the Author's Recension]*, ed. Pang Minho (Seoul: Yeok, 2009), 512–27; refer to 523–26.

277 Ch'ae, *Why She Left*, 415.

278 Ibid., 505.

this freedom? From the first day of freedom until today, I was only under pressure to support myself. If I had enough money, I could have enjoyed the freedom that I had already gained. But I could not savor the freedom because I was busy earning my daily meal. [...] Eventually, as even this [selling cosmetics] was not enough to avoid famine, I walked into the crowd of prostitutes and got to sell my face and smile just like them. [What I had was] A freedom to sell my smile and flirtation! [...] Well, have I not paid too great a price to earn empty freedom, the false freedom that I cannot fully enjoy? Freedom to starve, a freedom to be lonely, a freedom to become a slave to have food, freedom to sell smiles, flirtation, and chastity! And freedom to violate moral laws of family relationships! Dear Hyegyöng, do you think it is freedom? Nothing of the kind!²⁷⁹

Meanwhile, Ch'ae made it clear that No-ra's ordeal was not just the specific case of an ingenious New Woman. Other female characters such as Oksun, a traditional young woman abandoned by her husband, and Sönghui, dependent on her abusive patron, exemplify other paths that lead Korean women to precarity.²⁸⁰ By carefully examining the different paths that the lives of women from various economic and educational backgrounds took, the novel enriches the Norwegian drama, which solely focused on Nora, a middle-class woman.

This pessimistic outlook is very similar to that of Kim Tong'in's short story *The Wife of the Incompetent Man*, which was analyzed earlier. However, Ch'ae Mansik took a step further from the spot where Kim finished with cynicism and related how No-ra starts a new life as a factory worker. In other words, he presented socialism as the synthesis of the "dialectical development process of women's liberation," which allegedly overcame the limits of the liberal pursuit of individual freedom and the patriarchal and capitalist society that exploited her.

Instead of passing moral judgment on her, Ch'ae Mansik uses No-ra's experience of precarity and sexualized work as a vehicle for her transformation into a socialist feminist worker. She first goes to the printing plant out of necessity after the suicide attempt and naïvely idealizes the physical labor, calling it "sacred."²⁸¹ However, through her neighbor and co-worker Namsu, who introduces her to the job, she becomes aware that in the factory, too, were struggles between the ones who "invest money and take advantage from profits" and the workers who "generate the profit through labor."²⁸² In other words: a class struggle. No-ra, who began using her childhood Korean name Suni upon entering the factory, learns about the necessity of strikes from Namsu.²⁸³ Only then can she finally understand August Bebel's *Puinron* (G: *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*, E: *Women under Socialism*), which she received from her childhood friend and underground socialist activist Oh Pyöngt'aek at the beginning of her departure from home.²⁸⁴

279 Ibid., 481–83.

280 Ibid., 388 and 410.

281 Ibid., 507.

282 Ibid., 508.

283 Ibid., 509.

284 Ibid., 327.

Written by the German Social Democratic Party founder, *Woman under Socialism* was translated into Japanese three times in the 1920s.²⁸⁵ First appearing in German in 1879, *Woman under Socialism* quickly became a very influential book within about 20 years with 33 editions. Encompassing women's history in the West from the era before Christ to the future, Bebel criticized capitalism as the root of discrimination against women and presented socialism as the path women should take to liberate themselves.²⁸⁶ In colonial Korea, the member of the Korean Communist Party Pae Sŏngryong (1896–1964) translated some excerpts of the book and published them under the title *Puin Haebang kwa Hyŏnshil Saenghwal* (*Women's Liberation and Real Life*) in 1925.²⁸⁷

Figure 15: An illustration of Nora reading Bebel's *Woman under Socialism*.



Source: *Chosun Ilbo*, November 12, 1933, 7. Courtesy of Chosun Ilbo.

As No-ra, a middle-class woman who just left her home without any experience with wage labor, she could not understand a single phrase of the book.²⁸⁸ As she becomes a factory worker named Suni and tries to read the book once again (see figure 15), she is

285 There were three Japanese translations of Bebel's *Woman under Socialism*: Yamakawa Kikue's 1923 translation, Kusama Heisaku's 1927 translation, and Kato Katsuo's 1928 translation. All three versions were published under the title *Fujinron* (*On Women*) which was the Japanese equivalent to *Puinron*. Most likely, the Korean translation, published in 1925, was based on Yamakawa Kikue's Japanese translation. See Pang, "Rare Literary Legacy," 517.

286 August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism*, trans. Daniel De Leon (New York: Labor News Company, 1904).

287 "Pae Sŏngryong," in *Han'guk Sahoe Chu'i Inmyŏng Sajŏn* [The Biographical Dictionary of Korean Socialism], ed. Kang Man'gil and Sŏng Taekyŏng (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa Pip'yŏngsa, 1996), 223.

288 Ch'ae, *Why She Left*, 328.

struck by “a phrase that entered her head and made her eyes open wide.”²⁸⁹ This moment marks Suni's second self-awakening as a socialist and feminist worker of colonial Korea that would replace the first one that led to “false freedom.” Ch'ae Mansik quoted:

Namely, the question concerns the position that woman should occupy in our social organism; how she may unfold her powers and faculties in all directions, to the end that she becomes a complete and useful member of human society, enjoying equal rights with all. From our viewpoint, this question coincides with that other: —what shape and organization human society must assume to the end that, in the place of *want and misery* in manifold forms, there shall be physical and social *progress* on the part of the individual and of society. To us, accordingly, the woman question is only one of the aspects of the general social question, which is now filling the brains of all people of thought and *setting all minds in motion*. *Omission* (emphasis added).²⁹⁰

The quote is included in the newspaper version of the novel, but Ch'ae removed the whole citation as he prepared for the book's publication. Regarding the frequent deletion of terms related to socialism in the novel, it is very likely that he had to remove the quote due to the colonial censorship.²⁹¹ Meanwhile, I found that the quote in the newspaper version already contained alterations of Bebel's text reflecting the colonial Korean situation.²⁹² Firstly, the Korean translation omitted “oppression (*Unterdrückung*)” and “exploitation (*Ausbeutung*)” and mentioned only “want and misery in manifold terms” as the social problem. Secondly, instead of “physical and social health (*physische und soziale Gesundheit*),” the Korean translation used “physical and social progress.” Thirdly, while Bebel ended the paragraph with a political claim that the social question “can find its final solution only in the abolition of the existing social contradictions, and of the evils which flow from them (*sie kann daher ihre endgültige Lösung nur finden durch die Aufhebung der gesellschaftlichen Gegensätze und Beseitigung der aus diesen hervorgehenden Übel*),” this is omitted in the Korean version. Notably, this is indicated by the word “omission” at the end of the sentence. While the change from “health” to “progress” reflected the zeal for modernity in colonial Korea, the first and the third alterations evoke the impression that they had to be changed due to the subversive and regime-critical undertone, which might have provoked the colonial censorship. Through these alterations, Bebel's call for the system-changing revolution vanished, and emphasis was put on the woman question as one part of a *bigger* social problem.

Combined with her own biography, this passage makes No-ra rethink her ordeal from a different—socialists would say *broad*—perspective: that it is rooted in the capitalist economic system. This recognition offers her an explanation for her hardship

289 Ibid., 509.

290 Ch'ae, “Why She Left the Doll's House 149,” *CI*, November 12, 1933, 7, as cited in: Pang, “Rare Literary Legacy,” 526. For the English translation of Ch'ae Mansik's Korean citation I refer to Daniel De Leon's 1904 English translation. See Bebel, *Woman under Socialism*, 1.

291 Pang, “Rare Literary Legacy,” 526.

292 For the comparison, I consulted the following German edition: August Bebel, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*: 136. bis 140. Tausend nach der Jubiläumsausgabe unverändert (Stuttgart: Verlag von J.H.W. Dietz nachf. G.m.b.H. 1913), 1.

and a new goal at the same time. From now on, No-ra aims to fight against capitalism as factory worker Suni instead of the gender norms that forced her to play the part of a mother and wife.

Ch'ae Mansik's novel adopts the famous final scene of *A Doll's House* in the final part. While the last conversation between Nora and Helmer in the play exposes the patriarchal oppression of women, the last conversation in the Korean adaptation reveals the contradictions and conflicts contained in Korean colonial capitalism in the 1930s. Yim No-ra, the Korean New Woman, is portrayed as a symbolic figure reborn as a socialist worker through a dialectical process and experiences of precarity as a female wage worker. Sökjun, who became a bank manager, runs into No-ra at the printing factory; it turns out that the factory is under the supervision of his bank.²⁹³ This time, the dialogue takes place in the conference room of the factory instead of the living room, as they represent the agents of colonial capitalism and the colonized laborers.

"Oh, you are good at talking. But what a beggar you became although you were so vigorous, and you even came back under my control in the end—that is a sight."

No-ra was about to cry bitter tears at Hyön's triumphant sneer, but she fought back the tears and gave a bold answer.

"Right, you are right. I ran away from your home as I did not want to be your slave, and now I'm dependent on you again. You may find it delightful as if you won, but the fight between you and me is from now on. Although I do not know it yet thoroughly, people say that [living in] the world means a fight. And I think they are right. So, let us fight against each other."

After saying this, No-ra left the conference room.

The machine makes a loud beating sound in the machinery room. No-ra felt the pulse of her vessels where her hot blood flows following the sound of the machine.²⁹⁴

As Sökjun laughs at her economic downfall as her husband, No-ra responds as a worker. This way, the conflict between the two leaves the marital realm and enters the socioeconomic dimension. No-ra is determined to fight against a male beneficiary of the gendered and colonized economic system as a woman who is constantly exposed to the dangers of economic and sexual exploitation. Given that the banking business was under strict control of the Government-General and the high-positioned bankers collaborated closely with the Japanese colonizer, No-ra's last declaration of the fight can be read as an anti-colonial announcement under the cover of marital and anti-capitalist conflict. In this sense, Ch'ae Mansik, too, regarded the women's liberation movement as a path leading to anti-colonialism, which is in line with Yi Sangsu's view as revealed in the preface of *A Doll's House*.

Certainly, No-ra's fate is as precarious as it was after she first ran away and her struggle against her powerful husband is likely to fail. Forty-three years later, the Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek wrote a play that looked like a follow-up to Ch'ae Mansik's novel. *Was geschah, nachdem Nora ihren Mann verlassen hatte oder Stützen der Gesellschaften* (*What Happened after Nora Left Her Husband or Pillars of the Society*) tells the story of Nora, who

293 Ch'ae, *Why She Left*, 509.

294 Ibid., 510–11.

has become a factory worker like No-ra yet returns to her husband as she cannot endure life as a laborer.²⁹⁵ However, in Korean society in the early 1930s, when there was a belief that socialism was an ideology that could counter the totalitarian system of colonialism, No-ra's second awakening as a socialist possibly sent a strong message to New Women of the time, who were despised as the Noras of Chosŏn, as well as to the so-called unawakened readers and spectators.

Nora's Awakening as a Socialist (2): *Vega*

Meanwhile, Shim Hun's novel *Vega* depicts the life of a Korean woman who forms an alternative community under the influence of socialism after divorcing her husband.²⁹⁶ While Ch'ae Mansik focused on the fate of Korean New Women who enjoyed Western-style marriage life, Shim Hun demonstrates that Korean marriage custom and family concepts, too, turn old-fashioned women into voiceless dolls in their own ways. Yim No-ra seeks to establish economic independence outside the family, yet the protagonist of *Vega* re-enters another home where domestic work and child-rearing are considered social labor.

The protagonist Yi Insuk is compared to a doll (*inhyŏng*) from the start because she gets married only for her parents' satisfaction. At the age of fourteen, Insuk is forced to marry a twelve-year-old boy called Yun Ponghwan by an agreement between the fathers of the two families. Her doll-like state is visually highlighted through the wedding scene. On the wedding day, she looked "undoubtedly like a doll" due to "a large decoration on her head, a bucket full of powder that covers [her face], red rouge on her cheeks and forehead while [she] sat finely with eyes closed in a long and wide-sleeved bridal robe."²⁹⁷

By identifying Insuk with Nora from *A Doll's House*, Shim Hun rehabilitates Nora of Chosŏn as a name for Korean women who were expected to be submissive to their in-laws and husband. Having learned traditional women's duties such as sewing, cooking, preparing rituals, and reading Confucian books on women's virtues, Insuk serves the Yun Family as the daughter-in-law who values tradition for more than a decade. Poksun, an incognito socialist activist who works as Ponghwan's tutor, compares Insuk to Ibsen's Nora. As she sees Insuk wearing a married woman's hairdo and playing the role of a daughter-in-law and wife, Poksun thinks to herself: "How young the person is to be married and to serve her in-laws. You, too, are Nora's reincarnation."²⁹⁸

Vega, which handles the ordeal of "Nora's reincarnation" in colonial Korea, serves as an affirmative literary commentary on *A Doll's House*. *Vega* follows in the Norwegian drama's criticism that women are under oppression based on gender differences in marriage. Shim Hun creates a powerful reality by constructing Insuk's story using narratives of Korean women's ordeals, encompassing early marriage and being abandoned and infected

295 See Jelinek, "Was Geschah, nachdem Nora ihren Mann verlassen hatte, oder Stützen der Gesellschaften," in *Theaterstücke* (Reinbek: Rororo 2001), eds. Ute Nyssen et al., 5th edition, 7–78.

296 Shim Hun, *Chingnyŏsŏng (Sang)* and *(Ha)* [*Vega* vol. 1 and 2], ed. Kim Chong'uk and Pak Chŏnghŭi, *Shim Hun Chŏnjip* 4 [Complete Works of Shim Hun 4] (Seoul: Kŭllurim, [1935]2016).

297 Shim, *Vega* 1, 81.

298 Ibid., 201.

with STDs through their husbands, which circulated through newspapers and magazines. As *Vega* was serialized in the daily newspaper *Chosŏn Chung'ang Ilbo*, readers could have even more easily drawn the connection between Insuk's story and Korean women's hardship of that time.

Shim Hun shows how marriage and sexuality reform added a burden to Korean women socialized in a conventional manner. Thereby, Shim Hun takes a critical stance towards Seoul's demimonde as a byproduct of Japan's imperial capitalism, which morally corrupts Korean men and exploits impoverished women as sex workers.²⁹⁹ New urban culture and lifestyles, such as movie watching, studying abroad, and cruising through cafés, offered Ponghwan an unprecedented variety of sexual outlets, which estranges him from the marriage. The novel sheds light on the other side of urban culture praised as symbols of modernity.

Vega depicts the clash between the capitalist entertainment industry that created the space to explore and consume sexuality and the rigorous restriction of sexuality. Ponghwan becomes sexually active by watching "a disgusting scene where [a man] dances tightly with a Western woman in a thin robe that reveals her white and glossy flesh" in a movie and how "they hug, rub, and kiss each other."³⁰⁰ He begins to regard Insuk as "a partner to practice [things] that he saw in the motion picture."³⁰¹ However, by the customary rule that dictates that the family's elders decide if and when the youngest married couple can sleep together, Ponghwan's mother forbids him from spending time with his wife. Ponghwan finds a sexual outlet in the sex industry that flourished under colonial rule, which eventually leads to the economic and moral bankruptcy of the Yun Family.³⁰²

The novel thematizes Insuk's helplessness originating from her duties as a wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law. Despite her husband's repeated affairs and sexual threats, she cannot decide over her own body and sexuality. Outraged by Ponghwan's affair, Insuk eventually runs back to her mother, who begs her to return to her family-in-law and persevere.³⁰³ What awaits her at the Yun Family is her mother-in-law's decision to make her sleep with Ponghwan. Disgusted by his approach, Insuk pushes him away, which gives him excuses to torture her emotionally. He purposefully neglects her for dozens of days and finds support in his family. Feeling guilty, Insuk finally seeks to soothe him by complying with his sexual desire.³⁰⁴

Shim Hun reveals the problem of gendered repression inherent in Korean marriages by showing how Ponghwan, also a victim of the early marriage system like Insuk, abuses her. As the two innocent children grow up, they each take a completely different course of

299 For descriptions of Seoul's cafés, restaurants, and streets in the night see the chapter "Human Hell [In'gan Chiok]," particularly 425–44. "Human Hell" was erased and modified by the colonial censors as the novel was published as a book. For analysis see Kwŏn Ch'ŏlho, "Shim Hun ŭi Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Chingnyŏsŏng Chaego [Rethinking Shim Hun's Novel *Vega*]," *Ōmun Yŏngŭ* 43, no. 2 (2015), 357–85; see 373–77.

300 Shim, *Vega* 1, 222.

301 Ibid., 222–23.

302 Ibid., 223.

303 See *ibid.*, 224–32.

304 See *ibid.*, 233–56.

development and power position in their relationship mainly because of the entitlements and roles unequally given to each of them. Pampered by the elders, Ponghwan grows into a ruthless man solely driven by desire, while Insuk is strictly taught to be submissive to her husband. The bleakness of this inequality becomes most apparent when he rapes her while she sleeps. Doing so, he not only makes her pregnant against her will but also infects her with gonorrhea, which he acquired from his Japanese lover during his art study in Tokyo.³⁰⁵

Unlike in *A Doll's House*, the Yun Family throws Insuk out of their home in the misbelief that she became pregnant through adultery.³⁰⁶ This defamation is Ponghwan's intrigue to divorce her and to marry his new lover. To protect herself and their son Ilnam, Insuk refuses to divorce. However, Ponghwan physically attacks her and their three-month-old son and runs away. Chasing after him through a cold winter night, Insuk forgets about Ilnam's presence on her back, leading to the infant's tragic death. Deep in sorrow, Insuk attempts to commit suicide in the Han River.³⁰⁷ All of this seems to be a painful realization of a phrase from an old poem that her mother once told her: "Do not be born into the body of a woman. A woman's sadness and happiness of life are in the hands of others."³⁰⁸

Like in *Why She Left the Doll's House*, Insuk's life takes a rapid turn after being rescued from the river. Although her new life takes solid shape after divorcing Ponghwan, the means to change her life is offered by other women engaged in socialism and evades the normative family model. Poksun is the crucial figure who introduces Insuk, "an old-fashioned woman who did not know the world outside the walls, to the new ideology and the changing zeitgeist."³⁰⁹ A daughter of the despised stratum and an unmarried socialist woman, Poksun explains to Insuk about socialism, current discussions on *yŏnae* and marriage reform, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and Ellen Key.³¹⁰ Like Yim No-ra from *Why She Left the Doll's House*, Insuk, too, does not understand much about the feminist and socialist agenda at first. Blaming Nora for abandoning her children, Insuk has even more sympathy for Helmer than Nora: "What a cruel mother she is. Even animals cherish their babies."³¹¹

However, Insuk's growing knowledge in socialism and feminism gives her the language and concepts to understand the ordeal she undergoes. Particularly, the feminist agenda of the early 1930s is essential for Insuk to recognize the forced intercourse by Ponghwan as rape in the marriage.³¹² Having heard of feminist claims such as "at least

305 See Shim, *Vega* 2, 160–63.

306 See *ibid.*, 172–79.

307 See *ibid.*, 172–79 and 303–65.

308 *Ibid.*, 364.

309 *Ibid.*, 363.

310 Shim, *Vega* 1, 209.

311 *Ibid.*

312 See Shim, *Vega* 2, 163. The radicalness of this claim in the Korean context of the 1930s might become comprehensible in light of the fact that the Supreme Court of Korea recognized non-consensual sex in marriage as rape for the first time in 2013. See Korean Supreme Court, 2012 To 14788, https://file.scourt.go.kr//AttachDownload?file=1369037623205_171343.pdf&path=001&downFile=2012%B5%B514788.pdf.

after the marriage, men, too, should remain chaste”³¹³ from Poksun, Insuk becomes not only furious about her husband but also the structural injustice underlying her dependence on him, namely economic inequality based on sex:

‘Is it acceptable when a cultured and clean woman’s individuality is neglected, and even her chastity is violated by a venereal disease patient under the name of marriage? Oh, is this what the conjugal system is about? Is this what marriage is about? Is this [the fate of] Chosŏn women concealed in a jail named home that she cannot complain about it even after being degraded this way?’³¹⁴

‘Why can’t a woman live on her own? Is it absolutely impossible to support oneself without becoming a man’s parasite?’ the question arose anew. ‘With or without love, am I not utterly silenced while being humiliated by someone else, just because I am relying on [my husband] to get clothed and fed? Isn’t it because I am not able to be economically independent?’ As she repeated what she read in books and heard from Poksun in her mind, she regretted again and again: ‘If only I persisted in going to school.’³¹⁵

Other socialist women help Insuk to prepare for a new life after the divorce, too. Hŏ Chŏngja, a medical doctor and Poksun’s friend, cures Insuk of the harm that Ponghwan caused: she remedies Insuk’s gonorrhea, helps her with the delivery and tries to save Il-nam’s life without claiming medical expenses.³¹⁶ As a woman who supports herself and has social contacts, Hŏ Chŏngja is a role model for Insuk and helps her establish an independent life of her own. As Insuk decides to become a kindergarten teacher after her divorce, the doctor arranges her admission to a nursery school.³¹⁷

Meanwhile, Ponghŭi, the younger sister of Ponghwan, who increasingly accepts socialism through her lover Sech’öl, plays a role as an ambassador for Insuk in the conservative Yun Family. She supports Insuk’s first school education and enables her to take the first step out of the domestic realm.³¹⁸ Furthermore, Ponghŭi and her socialist husband, Sech’öl, build a new home against the wishes of the elders of the Yun Family and offer Insuk and Poksun to join their community.³¹⁹ As a result, Ponghŭi and Insuk rejoin as members of an alternative family based on their shared political ideals.

Shim Hun demonstrates the alternative family as the smallest unit of a socialist community. As such, Insuk, Poksun, Ponghŭi, and Sech’öl aid “nearly two hundred proletarian children”³²⁰ and run a school and a kindergarten for them with their loans from other jobs. Instead of conventional family roles, they define and fulfill their functions on political terms—“as if they were running a small country.”

313 Shim, *Vega* 1, 240.

314 Shim, *Vega* 2, 163.

315 Ibid., 165.

316 See *ibid.*, 190–200, 279–85, and 347–60.

317 Ibid., 409.

318 Shim, *Vega* 1, 305.

319 Shim, *Vega* 2, 413–14.

320 Ibid., 412.

[...] as if they were running a small country, they decided that Poksun represents this joint family as a diplomat, Insuk is responsible for the household and childrearing, and Ponghŭi plays the part of a treasurer; as Sech'öl is so busy that he wished he had several bodies, they established a constitution and made him a secretary, who takes care of things in general.³²¹

The cohabitation of the four people, who “came together under the same mind and ideology despite their uniqueness,” represents a utopian community that defies the “old morals, tradition, and concepts”³²² such as social stratum and economic class. Shim Hun idealizes this form of living as a community without any internal conflict.

Vega functions as an affirmative socialist commentary on Ibsen's *A Doll's House* by showing the development of “Nora's reincarnation” as an independent socialist woman. Instead of an educated New Woman, Shim Hun depicts how a conventional woman like Insuk leaves her family and becomes a social worker living in a socialist community. Instead of leaving home for good, the novel's protagonists broaden the notion of home and build an alternative version. In this socialist community, childrearing and chores are classified as a profession outside the family structure. As *Vega* implies the reconceptualization and restructuring of home as the starting point of the regional socialist movement under the Japanese colonial rule, this novel can be read as a commentary of *A Doll's House* with a subversive subtext.

Despite its concept of a rebellious home, it is questionable if *Vega* went so far as to destroy the maternal ideal. Although *Vega* declares the household is also a profession, this specific profession is still imposed on women. The fact that Insuk, once compared to “Nora's reincarnation,” appears at the end of the novel as “the Holy Mother”³²³ hints that even under the socialist utopia, the roles each member takes would be influenced by their gender and the deep-rooted images attached to it. Regarding this, it is conceivable that Insuk would need to open the door and leave her community again to become someone other than the Holy Mother.

5.5 Feminist Commentaries

A Gendered Silence Surrounding *A Doll's House*

Feminist commentaries of *A Doll's House* appeared ephemerally yet continuously in the 1920s and 1930s, forging a space for an alternative audience publicness. By feminist commentaries, I refer to such texts and traces that foregrounded criticisms of patriarchal suppression of women and gender inequalities instead of sidelining them to advocate other political agendas, such as nationalism and socialism. As discussed above, even commentators who called for the improvement of Korean women's precarious situation often considered this problem to be inherently subordinate to *more significant* political

321 Ibid., 421.

322 Ibid., 422.

323 Shim, *Vega* 2, 425.

questions, including the nation's competitiveness or problems of capitalism in colonial Korea when they discussed the Norwegian drama. These commentators tended to affirm *A Doll's House's* emancipatory message if it contributed to addressing other political problems. Furthermore, the late 1920s witnessed the backlash of anti-feminism, which had also influenced commentaries about *A Doll's House*, as some of texts—including Yi Kwangsu's "To Nora" and Kim Tong'in's *The Wife of the Incompetent Man*—exemplify.

Korean women seldom mentioned the drama in their writings about women's issues, not to mention literary treatises. The sparseness of the commentaries written by women can be regarded as a silence requiring decipherment given the following two facts: firstly, there are indications that Korean women were silent on particular issues, including the Norwegian drama. As the drama was translated into the Korean language and vigorously discussed from the early 1920s to the late 1930s, the number of publications written by women increased rapidly. As the so-called cultural rule of the Government-General eased the conditions for Korean media, at least seven novel women's magazines were launched in the first half of the 1920s alone.³²⁴ Newly established Korean daily newspapers such as the *Chosun Ilbo* and the *Dong-A Ilbo* had an extra segment for female readers. Literate women who were amateur writers and readers expressed their ordeals in everyday life, opinions on social issues, and published their literary creations in this new print medium. It is possible that even for Korean women who actively spoke out about their opinions, it was hard to discuss *A Doll's House* openly. Publishers might have regarded the drama as unsuitable for their magazines as most women's magazines and their female writers tried to represent Wise Mothers and Good Wives as role models for their female readers.³²⁵

Secondly, even if the scope is narrowed down to writers and critics, the silence of women is noticeable. Male intellectuals of the same period vigorously published treatises, articles, and reviews on *A Doll's House* or Henrik Ibsen concerning Western literature in general or Western philosophies. While Korean male authors contributed to the interpretation and construction of the drama's meaning by writing literary works of various genres, female writers did not. Except for Na Hyesök, female writers of that time did not actively use *A Doll's House* as literary material.

324 These include *Yöja Shiron* (*Women's Timely Discussions*, established in January 1920), *Shin Yöja* (*New Women*, established in March 1920), *Kajöng Chapchi* (*Home Magazine*, established in May 1922), *Puin'gye* (*Women's World*, established in February 1923), *Söng'ae* (*Sexual Love*, established in March 1924), *Punyö chi Kwang* (*Women's Light*, established in July 1924), and *Puin* (*Women*, May 1925). See Oh Yöngsik, "Yösöng Chapchi Yöng'inbon Haeje [Introduction to the Photoprint Edition of Korean Women's Magazines]," in *Collectanea: Women's Magazines* 1, ed. Adan Mun'go (Seoul: Somyöng Ch'ulp'an, 2014), 6–46.

325 Examining Korean women's magazines' role in constructing the ideal womanhood in the 1920s and 1930s, Kim Kyöng'yön's 2017 study found that "in the 1920s and 30s, women's magazines became the main discourse space that formed 'woman' as a 'group' or 'category,' as the discourse that imposed the duties and roles of women became dominant while women's subjective awakening or self-discovery was negated." See *Kündae Yösöng Munhak üi T'ansaeng kwa Midiö üi Kyot'ong: 1920–30-nyöndae Yösöng Munhak üi Hyöngsöng kwa Yösöng Chapchi üi Chendö Chöngch'i* [*Women's Magazines in the 1920s-1930s and Their Effect on the Formation of Modern Women's Literature in Korea*] (Seoul: Somyöng Ch'ulp'an, 2017), 123.

Taking this as a whole, one can see that commentaries about *A Doll's House* in colonial Korea were made under women's silence, which prevailed in the male-dominated literary criticisms and even in literary publications where women actively participated. The very rareness of accounts written by women proves that the rarefaction of participants took place in the discourse of the drama.³²⁶ In this regard, the reception and the interpretation of *A Doll's House* should be analyzed in terms of the gendered power relations surrounding these cultural activities. In this section, I suggest reading feminist commentaries of Ibsen's famous drama as proof that female recipients defied the mainstream debate. Through the analysis, I propose to consider non-feminist commentaries that are handled in other subsections as attempts to intervene into the feminist understanding of *A Doll's House* as an emancipatory drama.

Reenacting Nora's Declaration: Na Hyesök's Emancipatory Commentaries

The painter Na Hyesök (1896–1948) belonged to the first generation of Korean New Women. She published six short stories, seven poems, and nearly eighty essays in addition to the paintings she created during her lifetime.³²⁷ The conflict between her self-understanding as an individual and the social expectations placed on her as a wife, mother, and elite woman of the nation was an essential topic in her writing, and Nora served as a pivotal figure in her publications. Some of her prominent commentaries about Ibsen's drama include the 1914 essay "The Ideal Woman" and lyrics titled "A Doll's House (1921)" and "Nora (1922)," written from Nora's perspective.³²⁸ Meanwhile, her 1934 essay "A Confession About My Divorce: To Ch'önggu" may not seem to be a commentary about Ibsen's drama on its surface.³²⁹ However, as an unprecedented performative speech act, the publication of the essay did share essential qualities with Nora's taboo-breaking utterance in the last scene of *A Doll's House*. Before elaborating on this argument later, her earlier texts on Ibsen and Nora need to be examined closer.

326 In *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault explains how discourses are made inaccessible to certain people by coining the term rarefaction as follows: "[...] it is more a question of determining the conditions under which it may be employed, of imposing a certain number of rules upon those individuals who employ it, thus denying access to everyone else. This amounts to a rarefaction among speaking subjects: none may enter into discourse on a specific subject unless he has satisfied certain conditions or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so. More exactly, not all areas of discourse are equally open and penetrable [...]." Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 224–25.

327 Number based on the works included in *Wönbön Na Hyesök Chönjip* [*The Complete Works of Na Hyesök*], ed. Sö Chöngja (Seoul: Purün Sasangsa, 2013).

328 Na Hyesök, "The Ideal Woman," in *Sourcebook*, 28–29; Inhyöng üi Ka [*A Doll's House*], in *Complete Works*, 251–53; "Nora," in *Complete Works*, 257–58.

329 Na Hyesök, "Ihon Kobaekjang: Ch'önggu Ssi ege [*A Confession about My Divorce: To Ch'önggu*]," in *Complete Works*, 496–512; "Ihon Kobaekjang: Ch'önggu Ssi ege (sok) [*A Confession about My Divorce: To Ch'önggu (continued)*]," in *Complete Works* 513–27. For the English version refer to Hyaewool Choi's translation: *Sourcebook*, 123–38. Ch'önggu was another name of Na's ex-husband Kim Wuyöng. Choi, *Sourcebook*, 137 (see note 17). As Choi's translation omits some parts of the original text, I used both versions.

In her 1914 essay titled “The Ideal Women,” the aspiring painter Na Hyesök introduced Nora as an ideal modern woman who pursued “true love (*yönae*).”³³⁰ She understood that Nora left home primarily because she realized that her marriage was not based on true love. Considering that the heroine did not chose to leave her husband and children to find true love but her Self, Na’s interpretation leans toward the discourse of Love’s Supremacy. Despite the bold claim that leaving home for true love was a quality of an ideal modern woman, Na’s early essay did not cause any heated debates in Korea, as it was published in a magazine run by a Korean students’ circle in Japan.³³¹ Nevertheless, her first commentary about Nora was exemplary for her later publications, which claimed that aiming for one’s individuality was more important than fulfilling the socially expected role of women as mothers and wives.

Upon returning to Korea, Na Hyesök played an essential role in reminding colonial Korean readers of the feminist message in *A Doll’s House*. As the drama was serialized in the daily newspaper *Maeil Shinbo* in 1921, she not only contributed to the boom of the drama with her illustrations but also wrote lyrics titled *A Doll’s House*.³³² The lyrics were published on the newspaper’s front page, with the last segment of the drama on April 3, 1921.³³³ The lyrics were accompanied by a musical score written by the pianist Kim Yöngghan.³³⁴ Because inserting a theme song sung by the main female character of a play had become an essential element for the commercial success of theatrical plays from the late 1910s, literary historian Pak Chinyöng argues that this was a clear indication that there was a plan to produce *A Doll’s House* as a play already in 1921.³³⁵ As the drama was published as a book under the new title *Nora*, Na changed the title and content of the lyrics, too. The fact that a new melody was composed by Paek Wuyong strengthens the hypothesis that the song was an essential part of the plan to produce a play soon.³³⁶

330 Na, “Ideal Woman,” 28. Chapter 4 offers an extensive analysis how *yönae* became an inevitable part of the reform-oriented discourse in the 1920s.

331 Notably, she preempted the debate over *yönae* already in the 1910s, as she was studying in Japan and familiar with Japanese *renai* discourse and the sensation surrounding *A Doll’s House*. Literary scholar Deng Qian pointed out that Chinese and Korean intellectuals, such as Hu Shih, Hyön Ch’öl, and Na Hyesök, studied in Japan when there was a boom of this drama and played a key role in introducing the Japanese debate to their home countries. See Deng, “Interpellation of Nora,” 43.

332 On Na Hyesök’s illustrations see Ryu, “Reception of Ibsen,” 207–08.

333 Na Hyesök, “Inhyöng üi Ka [A Doll’s House],” MS, April 3, 1921, 1.

334 Na, “Doll’s House,” MS, April 3, 1921, 1.

335 See Pak, “Ibsen and Colony,” 21. Including a theme song, particularly sung by female characters, became popular through Geijutsuza’s production of *The Resurrection* in Japan in 1908. *The Song of Katjusha* (*Katsyusha no uta*) was a major commercial hit with over 20,000 record sales, which inspired Yesöngjwa to stage the same piece with a Korean version of the song in 1916. In Korea, too, the song and the play were very successful. For more on the role of theme songs in Western plays during the colonial era in Korea and Japan, see Woo, *Dynamics of Korean Drama*, 150–59.

336 Pak, “Ibsen and Colony,” 21

A Doll's House³³⁷

1
 Like I am joyful
 When I play with my doll
 I became a doll, my father's daughter
 I became a doll, my husband's wife
 A plaything that makes them
 Joyful
 [Refrain]
 Let Nora go
 For the last time, quietly
 From behind the tightly sealed barrier
 Open the door
 That was firmly closed
 Let Nora go

2
 Like the duty towards
 My husband and my children
 I have another holy duty
 To follow the road of my mission
 That makes me a human being
 To become a human being

3
 I know
 That without the true human being
 That is revealed when everything
 Of my heart is broke down
 That I am worthless
 Now I know it

4
 Oh, dear girls
 Look at me
 And devote yourselves
 Though the apparent darkness may be
 rampant
 Some day after the storm
 May true human beings be there who is
 You and I

Nora³³⁸

I was a doll
 A doll, my father's daughter
 A doll, my husband's wife
 I was their plaything

Let go Nora

Let her go quietly
 Tear down high barriers and
 Open up the deep gates
 Let go Nora
 Into the air of freedom

I am a human being
 Before my husband's wife
 Before my children's mother
 Above all, I am a human being

I am a human being
 The restraints have weakened already
 The road of freedom is open
 The power Heaven gave is overflowing

Oh girls
 Wake up and follow me
 Stand up and use your power
 The light of the new day is shining through

Both lyrics were written from the perspective of Nora and provided a summary of the new cognition that she gained in the last scene of the drama. In addition, Nora, the persona of the lyric, encouraged contemporary Korean women to follow her in both versions. Through the editing, Na Hyesök made the emancipatory call for Korean women clearer: the invitation to “look at me / And devote yourselves” in the 1921 version became a more appellative spurring to “wake up and follow me / Stand up and use your power.” Furthermore, using imagery such as “the tightly sealed barrier” and “the deep gates,” synonyms

337 *The Complete Works*, 251–53; first published in the MS, April 3, 1921, 1.

338 *The Complete Works*, 257–58; first published in Ibsen and Yang, *Nora*.

for the inner gate in Chosŏn Dynasty architecture that separated women's boudoirs from the outer world, Na Hyesŏk skillfully invited Korean female readers to see Nora's leaving as a departure from the domestic realm in the Korean context, too. Her lyrics showed "the intellectual influence of Ibsen and how strongly Nora's longing for selfhood and emancipation resonated with readers"³³⁹ in colonial Korea. By writing the poem from Nora's point of view, Na Hyesŏk reenacted Nora's declaration. The song could have been disseminated through the newspaper, book, and eventually through the play and sung by Korean women of the time. In this sense, her lyrics invited her female compatriots to identify themselves with Nora on the level of speech act, too.

According to John Austin, some utterances have a performative nature, while others are "to 'describe' some state of affair, or to 'state some fact'."³⁴⁰ Making an oral pledge, naming, will, and assurance are typical examples of utterances whose "being-spoken-out" itself means an action; Austin called such utterances "performative."³⁴¹ Declaring her independence from her husband with words in a confronting and self-assured manner, Nora's word in the last scene is an exemplary performative utterance. Likewise, Na Hyesŏk broke the taboo of women speaking about their sexuality and the critique of normative roles by publishing them. For instance, her 1923 essay "Thoughts After Becoming a Mother" evoked controversy as she publicly opposed the widespread belief that maternal love might come naturally to any woman. Na Hyesŏk expressed her inner confusion as an aspiring female artist who became unexpectedly pregnant in a language of "momentary intuition that is unconditioned and irresponsible,"³⁴² as she put it.

I needed much time for calm contemplations, study, and actions to educate my Self to prepare the substance required to live humanly, womanly, and individually. However, it seemed that I would never have such time once I had a child, so I thought it [having a child] was useless for me and a big obstacle for my individual development.³⁴³

Although she did not refer to *A Doll's House*, her refusal of the maternal role echoed Nora's decision to leave her children behind as well. Na Hyesŏk contradicted criticisms with an unapologetic statement published later:

I am confident. I believe that there are some people whose hearts resonate with my "Thoughts After Becoming a Mother." If a mother denies this [claim], I believe that she would feel an inevitable empathy as soon as her mind's eyes open. And I do hope she feels the empathy. I hope there will be many of them rather than only a few. I know that only with such experience would we step onto the road to a solid life. I hope you believe [me].³⁴⁴

339 Choi, "Debating Korean New Women," 62. Original in English.

340 John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) 1–6.

341 Austin, *Do Things with Words*, 5.

342 Na Hyesŏk, "Paekkyŏlsaeng e Tap'am [An Answer to Paekkyŏlsaeng]," in *Complete Works*, 388–89.

343 Na Hyesŏk, "Mo Toen Kamsanggi [Thoughts After Becoming a Mother]," in *Complete Works*, 441.

344 Na, "Answer to Paekkyŏlsaeng," 389.

While her 1923 essay questioned women's role as mothers, the 1934 essay "A Confession about My Divorce: To Ch'önggu" tackled the expectations of women as wives. The essay was written in the form of a letter addressed to her ex-husband, thus formally similar to that of Nora's argument with her husband. At the beginning of the essay, Na Hyesök revealed that she was divorced. Consequently, Na gave a detailed account of her marriage and divorce in chronological order in over 6,500 words. Her confession consisted of two segments and fifteen sections titled "History Before Engagement," "Ten Years of Married Life," "Both Housewife and Painter," "A Tour of Europe and the United States," "Everyday Conflicts with Mother- and Sister-in-law," "Relationships With C.," "Family Fortune in Trouble," "Divorce," "After the Divorce," "Where Should I Go," "Maternal Love," "An Ascetic Life," "Thoughts After the Divorce," "Popular Sentiments of the Korean Society," and "To Ch'önggu."³⁴⁵ To explain why her ex-husband divorced her, she openly talked about her love affair with Ch'oe Rin in Paris and Cologne during the world travels with her husband. Additionally, she depicted how her contribution to the family wealth was ignored, and how her husband decided to keep the children despite her dissuasion.³⁴⁶

There are obvious differences between Ibsen's drama and Na's essay. Unlike the drama, it was Na's husband, Kim Wuyöng, who demanded a divorce.³⁴⁷ The main reason for the marriage crisis was different, too: while Nora tried to help her husband by faking a document, Na pursued love outside the marriage.³⁴⁸ Nevertheless, in terms of the performativity, the topic, and the impact on society, Na's essay is comparable to Nora's words in the last scene of the drama. Nora revisits the eight years of her marriage and tells Helmer that she has been handed over from her father to her husband like a doll.³⁴⁹ Her utterance that "before all else I am a human being"³⁵⁰ became an idiomatic phrase widely used in texts discussing women's rights and enlightenment in Korea. Concurrently, the conversation itself as well as Nora's act of declaration were groundbreaking, too, particularly because her act challenged the Confucian norm that a wife must obey her husband, which dictated the mode of conversation in a marriage since the Chosön

345 Na, "Confession about My Divorce," in *Complete Works*, 496–512; "Confession about My Divorce (continued)," in *Complete Works*, 513–27. Hyaeweol Choi translated most sections into English, and I cited her translation. See "A Confession about My Divorce: To Ch'önggu," in *Sourcebook*, 123–38.

346 See Na, "Confession about My Divorce," in *Complete Works*, 508–09.

347 *Ibid.*, 508.

348 *Ibid.*, 504–05.

349 Ibsen and Archer, *Doll's House*, 114.

350 *Ibid.*, 116–17. For instance, Kim Wönju urged readers of her magazine *Shin Yöja* that "from now on, we must take off the yoke men have placed on us and be prepared to play a role as human beings in the truest sense" in 1920. Kim, "The Self-Awakening of Women," in *Sourcebook*, 30–31; see 31. Similar statements were made by Im Chinsil: "Young women have developed a stronger faith in gender equality, and all young people support the argument that women are human beings and should be treated as such." Im, "An Observation on the Status of Women," in *Sourcebook*, 37–39; see 38. In the open letter to her ex-husband, Na Hyesök adopted the phrase as well: "I wanted to have a full life as a housewife, a member of society, and a human being." Na, "A Confession about My Divorce: To Ch'önggu," in *Sourcebook*, 126.

Dynasty.³⁵¹ Nora persistently speaks back to her husband—"No, don't interrupt. Only listen to what I say"³⁵²—and uncompromisingly stands behind her analysis of their relationship:

Nora: [...] I lived by performing tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and father have done me a great wrong. It is your fault that my life has been wasted.

Helmer: Why, Nora, how unreasonable and ungrateful you are. Haven't you been happy here?

Nora: No, never; I thought I was, but I never was.

Helmer: Not—not happy?

Nora: No, only merry.³⁵³

The theater historian Woo Sujin identifies the last dialogue between Nora and Helmer as one of the three moments that gave birth to modern theatrical language in the Korean theater.³⁵⁴ According to her, starting from 1908, Yi Injik assigned multiple singers and made each of them play a single role instead of letting a soloist sing and narrate the whole parts, which was common in *p'ansori* pieces.³⁵⁵ Consequently, the early 1910s' introduction of *shin'pa* theater made players speak, while in *p'ansori* tradition, singers told the stories by singing the lines.³⁵⁶ Woo explains that *A Doll's House* integrated argumentative speech into the Korean theater, which invited readers and the audience to judge the conflict.³⁵⁷

The Korean audiences of that time considered Nora's uninterrupted and self-assured way of speaking as a declaration. Sō Hangsōk's 1936 essay "Ibsen and the Woman Question" addressed the subversive power in Nora's act of speech by calling it "women's independence declaration" and "bombshell declaration."³⁵⁸ The combination of argument and declaration in Nora's utterance made a powerful impression on Korean readers and audiences ever since the first publication of *A Doll's House*. Hong Nanp'a's 1921 novel *The Last Handshake*, which was serially published in the *Maeil Shinbo* right after *A Doll's House*, serves as evidence. The novelist adopted Nora's characteristic way of speaking to show the cognitive change of his protagonist.³⁵⁹ After attending the 1934 production of *A Doll's*

351 *The Book of Rites*, one of the texts of the Confucian canon, defines the relationship between husband and wife as follows: "What are the things which men consider right? [...] righteousness on the part of the husband, and submission on that of the wife." Legge, *Sacred Books*, 379–80.

352 Ibsen and Archer, *Doll's House*, 112.

353 *Ibid.*, 114.

354 See Woo, *Dynamics of Korean Drama*, 197–201.

355 *Ibid.*, 198. Although Woo does not mention it, the Korean masked dance (*t'alch'um*) used to engage multiple players.

356 *Ibid.*, 198–99.

357 *Ibid.*, 200.

358 Sō Hangsōk, "Ipsen kwa Yōsōng Munje [Ibsen and Women Question]," *SK* (May 1936), 9–10.

359 Realizing that her lover did not trust her as unconditionally as she did him, the protagonist Hwabong leaves him after declaring the end of their relationship as follows: "So, you have tested me because you were afraid that my feelings would have changed? Until today, I have loved you with all my body and soul, and I have admired you and respected you. I would have killed myself or ran away from here today if you would have told me to do so. Isn't it proven by drinking this poison? I drank it to die. And you have been testing me out of your suspicion... So, you have loved me only superficially? I lost my virginity to you, physically as well as mentally. It left an in-

House in Seoul, the literary critic Na Ung, too, considered Nora's reflection upon the mode of conversation the most evident sign of her awakening as an individual:

Instead of vanishing away, Nora's words are still creating a stir in my mind.

"We have been married eight years. This is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife, have talked together seriously."

"Ever since the day we first met—we have never exchanged one serious word about serious things."

Oh! What a great truth is lurking behind these ordinary words! Nora, who has been playing a part of a doll, has finally realized. [...] How many of today's Korean women, who have been forced to bear with endurance and extreme humiliation for hundreds of years, are willing to wake up from a long sleep and find out their status and the world? No, how many modern people want to seriously think about the world and themselves before they finish their lives?³⁶⁰

These examples show that Koreans were aware of the impact of Nora's declaration as a performative utterance that brought her existential change into being through the act of speaking.

Na Hyesök not only spread the call for women's emancipation on the level of content but also practiced Nora's taboo-breaking speech act through her publications, which shocked Korean society. An anonymous housewife from P'yŏng'yang sent an open letter to the women's magazine *Shin Kajŏng* and criticized Na for sharing the details of her marriage and divorce:

I was surprised by the news that you, the representative of modern Korean women, were divorced; as a housewife like you, I had the same nerves and emotions as yours. However, after reading your open letter, I thought it was indeed a misfortune. Nevertheless, I was surprised anew because I could not fully sympathize with you regarding the reason for the divorce and your responsibility for it. Additionally, *I was disgusted by your attitude in publishing such a confession to society.*

As a housewife responsible for deciding what my children and younger siblings read, I had to cut your divorce confession out and throw it into the furnace. [...] Wouldn't it have been enough if you had just announced your stance in simple and neat sentences? (emphasis added)³⁶¹

delible stain on my life. From now on, I have nothing to do with you. Until the very last second, I was completely your possession. However, this body is different from that of earlier Hwabong's. I don't want to spend any further minute or even second with you, who has committed a great sin against me. I don't need to listen to you or read your words. You are the enemy of my love. In revenge, my love killed itself by drinking the alcohol more poisonous than the poison that you poured into the glass with your own hands. Now, withdraw yourself. I'm leaving." Hong, "Ch'oeuhu ŭi Aksu 39 [The Last Handshake 39]," *MS*, June 6, 1921, 4.

360 Na Ung, "Kŭkyŏn che 6-hoe Kong'yŏn Inhyŏng ŭi Chip ŭl Pogo 1 [After Watching A *Doll's House*, the 6th Performance by Dramatic Arts Research Group 1]," *DI*, April 27, 1934, 3. The translation of Na Ung's citation, a shortened form of Nora's words, is based on William Archer's 1889 translation. See Ibsen and Archer, *Doll's House*, 113.

361 P'yŏngyang Il Yŏja, "Nahyesök Ssi ege [To Mrs. Na Hyesök]," *SK* (October 1934), 92–97; the quote is from 92–93.

The housewife pointed out that Na Hyesök, as a public figure, might have felt the necessity to share her divorce with the public, yet she argued that “everything that exceeds necessity is as unnecessary as a snake’s feet.”³⁶² She blamed Na for keeping the habit of writing novels and refashioning herself into a heroine this time.³⁶³ Instead of “a snake’s feet,” however, Na’s confession can be regarded as a consciously outspoken performative utterance. Through her extensive self-disclosure, Na declared her private matter as a public concern in a similar way that Ibsen staged the marriage crisis of Nora and Helmer—not in the sense that she sought the media’s attention, but in that she urged her contemporaries to see the impact of the gender-biased notion of chastity on her fate. The fact that she decided to write the letter four years after the actual divorce and publish it indicates her willingness to make her divorce public. She invited the readers to be audiences to the conversation by publishing the letter in the magazine *Samch’ölli*. In her letter, Na Hyesök questioned the notion of chastity in Korean society, which had led to her divorce. She called readers’ attention to the fact that Kim Wuyöng, her ex-husband, had an affair with a *kisaeng* woman without any moral conflict before they were legally divorced.³⁶⁴ In doing so, she pointed out that men advocated women’s chastity while neglecting their own fidelity:

The psychology of Korean men is absurd. They do not have any concept of chastity for themselves, but they demand the chastity of their wives and other women. Despite their requirement of chastity for any viable partner, they pour their energies into taking the virginity of still more women. Men take pleasure in playing with loose women, but they destroy women’s chastity in doing so. What kind of primitive immorality is this? If men stress the importance of women’s chastity, isn’t it reasonable to expect them to try to protect women’s chastity? If a man doesn’t value chastity in the West and Tokyo, he does not expect others to maintain chastity.³⁶⁵

In short: in terms of the formal characteristics as a performative utterance and the criticisms of gendered norms surrounding marriage and sexuality, Na Hyesök’s “A Confession About My Divorce” shared many characteristics with Nora’s words from the last scene of *A Doll’s House*. Through her writing, Na disseminated the emancipatory idea in the drama and practiced the public disclosure of the private as a way to unsettle the gendered power structure.

Nora and Ibsen as Role Models for Feminist Activism

Some Korean feminist activists commented that *A Doll’s House* was about awakening as an individual and women’s political activism. Through the publication of short essays in newspapers, these activists advocated for the reading of the drama as an indispensable experience for those involved in feminist causes. In doing so, they embedded an activist subtext into the way Korean women perceived this Norwegian drama. Notable figures

362 P’yöngyang Il Yöja, “To Na Hyesök,” 93.

363 See *ibid.*

364 Na, “Confession about My Divorce,” in *Complete Works*, 510.

365 Na, “Confession about My Divorce,” in *Sourcebook*, 132.

such as the socialist feminist activist Kang P'yöngguk, the poet Kim Ryösun, and anonymous female students of Seoul exemplify a moment of audience publicness through the reading and watching of *A Doll's House*.

In 1925, Kang P'yöngguk published an essay titled "Thoughts on Women's Liberation" in the daily newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo*.³⁶⁶ This essay shows how some Korean women considered Nora's departure a call for women's organized activism to be liberated from the misogynic system. Drawing readers' attention to the custom of bride kidnapping in many different cultures, Kang insisted that "history means nothing but 'women are men's slaves.' It would not be exaggerated to say that today's morality, no, law, is based on this notion."³⁶⁷ In her eyes, Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was a sign that women began "preparing acts of revenge against the winners [men] who made women live a life of toil and did what no human should do."³⁶⁸ She summarized the morals she learned from the drama: "If someone treats us, women, as slaves, we should fight them anytime, however poor and powerless we are."³⁶⁹

Kang P'yöngguk's perspective as a socialist was unmistakably expressed when she emphasized that "the matter of women's emancipation cannot be solved through abstract theories but economic emancipation [of women] in a materialist sense."³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, she prioritized the abolition of suppression against women above the socialist doctrine, which made her distinguishable from male socialist intellectuals of her time. As discussed in chapter 5.4, male socialists refashioned women's economic independence from men as a *qualification* to enjoy equal rights from the late 1920s onwards. Meanwhile, Kang sought alliances with Korean women who were not socialists with the aim of achieving women's emancipation from men. As part of such efforts, she founded the Tokyo branch of the Korean feminist organization Künühoe, which strived to overcome ideological differences for the cause of women's rights.³⁷¹ Although Kang identified with socialist ideas, she regarded Nora not as a woman with a restricted view as a member of the petite bourgeoisie but as a symbol of all women who suffered from the patriarchal system.

As discussed in prior part of chapter 5, Nora had a various symbolic meanings in colonial Korean discourses in the late 1920s: a role model for Korean women, a wayward divorcee or a bourgeois woman who did not know the world.³⁷² Concurrently, there are indications that these criticisms did not stop Korean women from reading the book and discovering emancipatory meaning in it. The fact that the second edition of Yi Sangsu's

366 Kang P'yöngguk, "Yösöng Haebang üi Chapkam [Thoughts on Women's Liberation]," *DI*, June 1, 1925, 4, and "Yösöng Haebang üi Chapkam: Sok [Thoughts on Women's Liberation, Continued]," July 20, 1925, 4. The reason behind the gap of fifty days between the publication of the first and second segments is unclear.

367 Kang, "Thoughts on Women's Liberation," *DI*, June 1, 1925, 4.

368 Ibid.

369 Kang, "Thoughts on Women's Liberation, Continued," July 20, 1925, 4.

370 Ibid.

371 "Künü Tongkyöng Chihoe Söllip Taehoe Iship Il Il e [The Opening Ceremony of Künühoe's Tokyo Branch on the 21st of February]," *DI*, February 1, 1928, 3.

372 See chapter 5.3.

Myōnghui, as well as August Bebel's *Women under Socialism, Biographies of Famous Women Around the World*, and the biography of *Jean D'Arc*.³⁷⁵ The term "transition period" referred to at least two different currents of the time: in the long run, the long-term sociopolitical and cultural changes that Korea was undergoing since the late nineteenth century. In the short term, the phrase referred to the popularization of socialism and socialist feminism from the late 1920s onwards. The list of books captured the broadening spectrum of female readers' interests amid these changes from empowering stories of famous Western women to socialist theories. It seems that despite the growing popularity of Alexandra Kollontai, the symbolic figure of socialist feminism, *A Doll's House* still functioned as an introductory book to feminist issues.

A survey of readers' interests by *Dong-A Ilbo* in January 1936 demonstrated that the conservative backlash and socialist criticisms of Nora could not stop the younger generation of Korean women from reading *A Doll's House* and finding their own meaning in this experience. The daily newspaper asked 44 female students from three women's schools in Seoul about the books they read last week, how they came to read the books, and what they thought about them. By doing so, the newspaper aimed to "investigate the trends of the time and listen to the contemporaries' demand."³⁷⁶ According to the survey, 39 out of 44 female students read books that were not part of the school curriculum. Among them, 13 students read books written by Western authors. The newspaper observed that "equal numbers of female students named Kollontai's *Red Love* and Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which accounted for the majority of responses."³⁷⁷ An anonymous female student commented on *A Doll's House*, saying that "if there were a woman like Nora in this world, I am confident that the women's movement would be successful."³⁷⁸

Meanwhile, a female poet named Kim Ryōsun stated that she would take Ibsen as her role model and write feminist works. In her answer to a 1932 survey titled "Declaration of War Against Men: Fierce Words of Old-fashioned Women and New Women from Various Fields," Kim criticized Korean men with Western-style education for hypocrisy:

[Against which aspect of men do you declare war?]

I despise men who ignore women's rights because they have the same mentality as old-fashioned men.

[What is the reason?]

Men of this type do not know how vital their responsibility and duty towards their home are. They are ready to sacrifice everything to pursue pleasure at cafés and restaurants through alcohol and prostitutes. The men who claim to understand modernism (*modōnijūm*) only look different from old-fashioned men while insulting

375 See chapter 5.4.

376 "Toksō Kyōngnyang: Ch'oego nūn Sosōl Hūngmi Innūn Tokhu ūi Sogam Tonggi Ch'oego nūn Ch'in'gu ūi Kwōnyu [Reading Tendency: Novels Are the Most Popular. Interesting Reading Impressions. The Biggest Motivation Is Recommendations from Friends]," *DI*, January 26, 1936, 4.

377 "Reading Tendency," *DI*, January 26, 1936, 4.

378 Ibid.

women under the same spirit of Honor Men, Despise Women (*namjon yōbi*), just like the old-fashioned men did.³⁷⁹

Kim Ryōsun pointed out that the self-proclaimed “modern men” of colonial Korea were as unfaithful to their wives as their forefathers because they pursued extramarital relationships with waitresses and barmaids. Her criticism bespoke a failure of the generation that supported the idea of marriage reform as part of the country’s modernization. Kim pointed out that despite the Western-style school education and bits of knowledge in modern arts, Korean men still tended to look down on women. Based on these observations, she resolved to contribute herself to the women’s rights movement by writing texts—as Ibsen did with *A Doll’s House*.

[What is a concrete way of engagement?]

By writing *A Doll’s House*, Ibsen evoked the spirit of women’s emancipation in his time. A single book of drama can have such enormous power. A woman whose blood is running through her veins and passionate would strive for the cause of the women’s rights movement in every possible direction and field. I think each woman’s critical mission is to fight for individual life and freedom through writing, education, or profession.³⁸⁰

Kim Ryōsun’s short commentary on *A Doll’s House* deviated from the tendency of her time to belittle the drama as a story of a self-destructive New Woman or a naïve middle-class woman’s impulsive rebellion. Calling it a text of women’s emancipation, she countered the anti-feminist backlash of the late 1920s and early 1930s.³⁸¹

The lack of documentation makes it hard to reconstruct to what extent she thematized women’s rights in her poems. However, she represented married women’s voices through her contributions to the *Dong-A Ilbo* in the years that followed. In August 1935, for instance, she refuted some Korean male intellectuals who diminished Korean New Women categorically. She wrote: “Reflect on yourselves how you are dominated by prostitutes, who only take advantage of you, while you neglect your wife who loves you and respects you. When you have done that, we will welcome your criticisms and advice.”³⁸²

With time, Kim Ryōsun showed solidarity with a broader range of Korean women. In the 1937 text titled “House Maidens Are Also Humans,” Kim partially mended the gap between married women and women of precarious status.³⁸³ She urged housewives, who employed female housekeepers, to show more sympathy towards the housemaids in their

379 Kim Ryōsun, “Namsōng e taehan Sōnjōn P’ogo: Kakgye Shin Ku Yōsōng ūi Kiyōm 2 [Declaration of War Against Men: Fierce Words of Old-Fashioned Women and New Women from Various Fields 2],” *DI*, January 2, 1932, 11.

380 Kim, “Declaration of War,” *DI*, January 2, 1932, 11.

381 The anti-feminist backlash and the reevaluation of Nora is discussed in chapter 5.3.

382 Kim Ryōsun, “Yōsōng Shiron 23: Kajōng ūl Chonjung hi Yōgija [Women’s Opinion: Let’s Respect the Home],” *DI*, August 3, 1935, 3.

383 Kim Ryōsun, “1-in 1-ōn 5: Shingmo to Saram [A Word per Person 5: House Maidens Are Also Humans],” *DI*, June 9, 1937, 3.

own households and to improve working conditions for them by treating them kindlier and allowing them more time to rest and go out:³⁸⁴

Among all workers, housemaids, inevitable for our home, seem to be the most hard-working and the least paid laborers. Their life, too, is the most wretched. Even when they are sick, they cannot lay down and rest as they wish, and housemaids cannot go out freely even if they wanted to. From dawn till night, they work for us without saying a word of complaint. Some people say that eight hours of labor a day is already too much, yet housemaids work more than 15 hours per day. Nevertheless, when they make a small mistake, some of us scold them until they cry. [...] For a small sum of money, we make them work for us as much as we want. [But] They are humans, too. They have the same emotion and bodies as ours. They miss their parents and the children that they had to leave behind, and they recognize the difficulty of their own lives. They can feel sad about harsh mistreatments, too. Let's show sympathy for those who are working like cows and cannot say a word. Let's pity them. Even if we cannot start a big business in society and pay for charity works, how can we not sympathize with a housemaid? [...] This [treating them better] would be the social work and charity work for us housewives.³⁸⁵

Kim recognized the power imbalance between wealthier housewives as employers and housemaids as employees and came to see it as a human rights problem. Instead of "big business" or charity works, she suggested seeing the housekeepers as equally dignified human beings and implementing simple but meaningful changes to their working conditions.³⁸⁶ This way, Kim offered concrete practices "for the cause of women's rights movement in every possible direction and field,"³⁸⁷ including the household. The fact that she joined a women's organization named Housewives' Association (Kajǒng Puin Hyǒphoe) in June 1934 supports the assumption that she broadened her feminist activism beyond her study room, too.³⁸⁸

In the 1920s and 1930s, some colonial Korean women recognized their own struggles and injustices in their everyday lives while reading *A Doll's House* and called for feminist activism. Female activists of Korea did not leave lengthy commentaries as their male compatriots did. Despite the confrontational interpretations of the drama and social antipathy towards feminist women, these women brought together the Norwegian drama and Korean women's movement through their short commentaries. In doing so, they maintained a feminist audience publicness, ensuring that the discourse about the drama and women's spectatorship was not fully absorbed into the *broader* political debates, such as the modernization of the nation or the socialist reimagination of the country.

384 Kim, "House Maidens Are Humans," *DI*, June 9, 1937, 3.

385 Ibid.

386 Ibid.

387 Kim, "Declaration of War," *DI*, January 2, 1932, 11.

388 "Kajǒng Puin Hyǒphoe Shin Yǒkwǒndŭl [New Members of Housewives' Association]," *Chosǒn Chung'ang Ilbo*, June 8, 1934, 3.

Female Audiences' Applause

On April 18 and 19, 1934, the Dramatic Arts Research Group staged the fourth and final production of *A Doll's House* in colonial Korea.³⁸⁹ A dozen Korean students who majored in European and American literature at Japanese universities initiated this group.³⁹⁰ Hong Haesŏng, who worked as an actor for the Japanese theater company Tsukiji Shōgekijō (The Tsukiji Little Theater) between 1924 and 1929, was the artistic backbone of this group until November 1935.³⁹¹

The emergence of the elite theater group made news in colonial Korean society. The *Maeil Shinbo* reported about the confident young theater-makers, citing their bold aim “to broaden the general public’s understanding of dramatic art, to rescue [Korean theater] from the current that preexisting theater groups created, and ultimately, to establish our own new theater in the truest sense of the word.”³⁹² In the following eight years, Dramatic Arts Research Group and its successor Kūkyōn’ja organized 26 theatrical presentations based on 36 plays. Among them, 24 pieces were translations from European and American drama, and twelve were written by Korean playwrights.³⁹³

A Doll's House was Kūkyōn’s sixth production. Unlike previous productions of the same drama, the 1934 production was accompanied by several commentaries about the play before and after the two nights of stage performances. As the boom of Korean movie and theater magazines between the late 1920s and the early 1930s exemplified, movie and theater critique became an independent genre. Between 1928 and 1932, periodicals including *Munye Yōnghwa* (*Art Cinema*, 1928), *Taejung Yōnghwa* (*Popular Cinema*, 1930), *Yōnghwa Shidae* (*Cinema Era*, 1931), *Shinhūng Yesul* (*New Arts*, 1932), *Yōn’gūk Undong* (*Theater Movement*, 1932), and *Kūk Yesul* (*Dramatic Art*, 1934) appeared.³⁹⁴ In line with this change, daily newspapers, too, featured critiques written by authors or professional critics who gave detailed accounts of directing, adaptation, and acting skills besides synopses and happenings in the auditorium.

Between April 15 and April 18, 1934, the *Dong-A Ilbo* printed a commentary of *A Doll's House* written by Yi Hōngu, a member of Kūkyōn. The commentary explained that “the artistic or humane matter of this piece lies neither in the left- nor right-wing’s criticisms and conjectures, but in the third position.”³⁹⁵ By “left-wing criticism,” he meant the socialists’ reproach that Nora “was only focused on the home while completely lacking an

389 “Last Performance of *Nora*,” *DI*, April 12, 1934, 3.

390 See Yu, *New History* 2, 355–56.

391 See Yi Sangwoo, “Kūk Yesul Yōn’guhoe e taehan Yōn’gu: Pōnyōk Kūk Rep’ōt’ori e taehan Koch’al ūl Chungsim ūro [A Study on Kūkyōn: Focusing on Translated Plays in Their Repertoire],” *Han’guk Kūk Yesul Yōn’gu* 7 (June 1997), 95–135; see 99 and 115.

392 “Kūk Yesul Hagi Yōn’guhoe Kūk Yesul Yōn’guhoe esō Ch’ōt Saōp ūro Shijak Hae [Dramatic Arts Research Group Starts Off with the Summer School of Dramatic Arts],” *MS*, July 19, 1931, 5.

393 See Yi, “Study on Kūkyōn,” 121.

394 See Adan Mun’go, “Yōn’gūk Yōnghwa Chapchi [Theater and Movie Magazines],” in *Collectanea: Movie and Theater Magazines* 6, xv–xxi.

395 Yi Hōngu, “Kūkyōn Che 6-hoe Kong’yōn Kūkbon Inhyōng ūi Ka Haesōl 3 [Commentary on *A Doll's House*, the Script for Kūkyōn’s Sixth Presentation 3],” *DI*, April 18, 1934, 3.

understanding of the ugly and cold-blooded social reality,”³⁹⁶ which referred to the capitalist economy. Meanwhile, the judgment of “old-fashioned moralists, religious persons, and scholars of ethics that denounce Nora’s departure as an immoral, selfish, and illegal action that destroys peaceful homes” is categorized as the right-wing interpretation of the piece.³⁹⁷ Yi Hǒngu tried to steer the debate into an alternative direction by foregrounding “the everlasting question of humanity.”³⁹⁸ Explaining that one could discover “the world of the individual with a strong will that fights against the hideousness in everyday life to realize one’s ideal” in *A Doll’s House*, the commentary reiterated the call for individualism prevalent in the early reception of the drama at the beginning of the 1920s as a means of defying socialist and Confucian criticisms.³⁹⁹ Yi Hǒngu asserted that Nora’s departure was “one expressive action in the drama, not all [emphasis added].”⁴⁰⁰

Figure 17: Female audiences attending the 1934 production of *A Doll’s House* on its first day.



Source: *Dong-A Ilbo*, April 19, 1934, 2. Courtesy of Dong-A Ilbo.

After the performance, the *Dong-A Ilbo* published the critique of Na Ung, a famous actor, in four segments. Taking the form of a dialogue among three male audience members that the author allegedly overheard by accident, the critique encompassed philosophical reflections on the drama, direction, each actor’s performing skills, and audiences’ reactions. The three men, named A., B., and C., started the conversation with commentaries about the female audiences’ enthusiastic applause for Nora’s self-declaration and male

396 Yi, “Commentary on *Doll’s House* 3,” *DI*, April 18, 1934, 3.

397 *Ibid.*

398 *Ibid.*

399 *Ibid.*

400 *Ibid.*

audiences' useless efforts to silence them. Their discussion focused on female audiences' reactions and concluded that the women's behavior was inappropriate.

A.: What was the big deal about Nora's words so that the women had to clap so wildly? Hahaha.

B.: How about the men shushing in the men's section?

A., B., C.: Hahahahaha.

They seem to talk about the atmosphere among the audience members during Nora and [Torvald] Helmer's dialogue in the last scene.

C.: Well, but isn't it a small sign that shows how eagerly they want to escape from men's oppression?

B.: If that were the case, that would be beyond my expectations. It was nothing but a mere protest to show that they felt the same way.

A.: And they bear something different in their minds.

B.: Of course. Although they want to marry someone rich no matter what and want to be pampered deep down in their hearts, on the outside, hahaha... They try to cheat people with shallow tricks.

C.: You might be right in some sense. But you cannot say all of them are like that. Look how suddenly and impulsively they reacted—as if they were waiting for it [Nora's words]. Can't you guess how much they were hoping for it? A big part of it [female audiences' enthusiastic reaction] was due to the lack of truthfulness in the drama. A thoughtful woman would deeply reflect on herself without clapping her hands and begin to ponder even more seriously than Nora did in the play.

A.: You are right. If a play greatly impacted people, the audience would be nervous and examine themselves in earnest rather than clapping frivolously and laughing crudely.⁴⁰¹

The depiction of the three men in this scene was an allegorical representation of debates surrounding the theatrical piece in colonial Korea. Female audiences recognized the emancipatory potential in the drama and enthusiastically expressed their affirmation through the nonverbal act of hand clapping. Through the applause, the female audiences could communicate with actors and other audiences, strengthening the feminist reading of the drama and encouraging others who shared the same point of view. The fact that the male audience, seated separately from women (see figure 17), tried to silence them by making shushing sounds perfectly captured the moment of gendered silencing related to *A Doll's House* and the moment of colonial publicness in theaters.

The three commentators' laughter signaled that they dissociated themselves from the allegedly overheated reactions from both sides of the auditorium. As it becomes apparent through the conversation, A., B., and C. downplayed the feminist reading and the low-key conflict that this reading caused. Although the three figures laughed about female and male audiences, they concentrated on women's reactions as their conversation advanced only to deride them. A. and B. agreed on the assumption that Korean women wanted nothing but to marry rich men, even if they claimed to want women's emancipation. C. disavowed the generalizing and ridiculing comments on women's urge to express

401 Na, "After *Doll's House* 1," *DI*, April 27, 1934, 3.

their approval of Nora's choice. However, he posed a question on the appropriateness of their reaction regarding the play's enlightening effect on the audience and the women's alleged lack of self-reflection. Assuming that "a thoughtful woman would deeply reflect on herself without clapping her hands,"⁴⁰² he implied that the applause was a result of female audiences' thoughtlessness. Eventually, A. and C. concluded that female audiences' applause was an indication that the drama "lacked reality" and the theater company was incapable of making "a great impression"⁴⁰³ on the audience.

Na Ung's commentary on the female audiences dismantled, in effect, the feminist reading of the play. Although it criticized the blunt negation of Korean women's genuineness in their emancipatory claims, the commentary declared women's clapping as evidence of their lacking self-reflection and the drama's inherent flaws. In doing so, Na Ung provided logic and words to the shushing sounds coming from the men's section in the theater, which tried to silence Korean women's critical engagement with the gendered discriminations in colonial Korean society through Ibsen's drama.

A Doll's House challenged the notion of gender roles across the world, including in colonial Korea. While most Korean women remained silent about this controversial drama, male intellectuals expressed both excitement and concern about the drama's influence on Korean women, dominating the media discourse in the 1920s and 1930s. Numerous Korean men published various genres of texts, including book reviews, prefaces, theater reviews, essays, and fiction, revolving around the protagonist's choice at the end of the drama to leave her husband and children in order to pursue her Self. These publications were commentaries in Foucauldian sense because they actively sought to intervene into the direction of the drama's reception among Korean female readers and audiences, often overriding the emancipatory message. Among them, there were affirmative, rejective, and affirmative-critical commentaries. Some welcomed Nora as a symbolic figure of individualism and saw her awakening as a driving force for societal change in colonial Korea. Meanwhile, rejective commentaries were commonly based on anxiety that Nora would agitate Korean women to leave home and denied the necessity of feminist politics. Cho Ch'un'gwang's assertion that *A Doll's House* should not be performed in theaters because Korean women might not be able to understand the true meaning of this drama clearly shows that some Korean men defined and managed the orientation, time, and resources of the so-called "modernization" based on gendered discrimination against women, putting them into another waiting room of history.

While problematizing women's financial dependency on men, some socialist Korean men blamed Korean women for being *parasitic* to men without reflecting on the structural handicap forced upon women in the economic system. Socialist Korean women, too, considered women's financial dependency on men as a problem, yet grasped it as a structural problem and helped other women to support themselves by teaching them valuable skills. Meanwhile, novelists Ch'ae Mansik and Shim Hun adapted the drama and created female characters who realize that they were suppressed by Korean marriage custom and the capitalist economic system, and thus choose socialism as an alternative. As both affirmative and critical commentaries of the drama, these novels recognized women

402 Ibid.

403 Ibid.

as a driving force of societal change while at the same time subjugating feminist politics to socialism.

Last but not least, there were feminist commentaries on *A Doll's House*, which embraced its emancipatory message for women. While Na Hyesök reenacted Nora's declaration of the self through her poems and her essay by adopting her performative mode of speaking in magazines and in newspapers, most feminist commentaries remained marginal. Nevertheless, these short accounts show that Korean feminists took Nora and Ibsen as an empowering example for their own feminist endeavors. Notably, the female audiences' cheers and applause observed at the last show in 1934 tell us that Korean women clearly understood Nora's declaration and walkout as a decisive moment of creating a rupture in the discriminatory marriage system despite derisive commentaries written by male intellectuals. Korean women's non-verbal acclamation forms a symbolic contrast with the silence they were subjected to in the public debate on the play, which was dominated by male intellectuals. The sound of the applause might have been ephemeral, yet its sudden eruption indicates the continuity of female audiences' appropriation of theater as an everyday space for feminist politics, momentary emancipation, and audience publicness.