6. Conclusion

This study investigated the public discourse on Korean female spectators in Seoul from the beginnings of the playhouse business around 1900 until the last performance of *A Doll's House* in colonial Korea in 1934. This study started from the observation that Korean newspapers showed great interest in the auditorium in the early twentieth century, and that media representations of Korean audiences—particularly those of women—abruptly changed after Japan annexed Korea in 1910. Using historical discourse analysis as a method, I investigated sociopolitical dimensions of such changes to better understand its impact on audiences and how society imagined and understood them. Mainly, this study adopted two concepts to investigate the politics surrounding Korean colonial audiences: the Foucauldian notion of discourse and other related frameworks on the one hand and Yun Hae-dong's concept of audience publicness on the other. While analyzing the colonial police's intervention into auditoriums and media debates on female audiences as a process of subject making using Foucault's concepts, this study identified moments in which Korean women pursued their own agendas in theater spaces, expanding on Yun's thinking.

The first subsection of the conclusion explains which discourses were relevant to Korean women's spectatorship and Korean playhouses in the early twentieth century. In the second subsection, I will summarize each chapter in detail and discuss my research findings. Based on my research, I argue that Korean female spectators played a significant part in creating political momentums that unsettled colonial and anti-colonial politics as well as patriarchal social norms while launching their own agendas, however ephemeral such moments may appear. In doing so, my research provides evidence of audience publicness, a concept that historian Yun developed to understand the role of media in bringing about political moments in everyday colonial lives. The third subsection contemplates contributions this study can make to the field of Korean history and spectatorship.

Rediscovering Korean Women as Spectators of Colonial Korea

The emergence of playhouses and movie theaters in the capital marks a cultural turning point in Korean history.[1] Theaters, unprecedented on the Korean peninsula, brought up a new business model and accelerated changes in the performing arts, which significantly impacted Korean people's understanding and practices of spectation. From a sociopolitical perspective, theaters facilitated not only interactions between people of different genders, social strata, and classes but also negotiation processes between various interest groups, such as entertainers, businessmen, pro-independence intellectuals, colonial authorities, socialists, and women of diverse backgrounds.

Korean female audiences, who defied the custom of the inside-outside rule, drew public attention, and became a fundamental part of the public discourse about theaters during the early twentieth century.[2] This study revealed that as theatergoing became increasingly popular among women in the colonial period, the spectrum of sociopolitical issues raised in the public discourse about them broadened, too. Thus, the political dimension of women's spectatorship cannot be fully explained within the dichotomy in existing scholarship between nationalistic politics of anti-colonial resistance and colonial politics of the Government-General.[3] My research into various genres of texts revealed that the public discourse on Korean female spectators was directly connected to the discourse of cultural modernization, women's roles and rights, and colonial and anti-colonial politics. Amid the political, societal, and cultural turmoil of the early twentieth century, Korean female spectators became a discursive figure onto which various interests and politics were projected, such as the legitimation of the theater business,[4] emotional assimilation of Korean women into the Japanese Empire,[5] or the construction of images and narratives of ideal as well as deplorable womanhood.[6]

There is little documentation of Korean female spectators speaking out about their experiences. However, upon closer inspection, it emerges that they used theaters as a platform to broaden their realm in an oppressive society: they enjoyed their leisure time but also organized charity events at theaters,[7] fulfilled their romantic or monetary interests,[8] explored their sexuality,[9] and dreamed about achieving freedom with respect to discriminatory expectations about them.[10] Thereby, profession, social stratum, and stage of life influenced each female spectator's interests and the agendas that arose in theater spaces.

1 See chapter 1.2.
2 See chapter 1.1.
3 See introduction.
4 See chapter 2.3.
5 See chapter 3.2.
6 See chapters 3.2, 4.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5.
7 See chapter 2.3.
8 See 2.3 and 4.1.
9 See chapters 3.3 and 4.1.
10 See chapter 5.5.

Creating Ruptures in the Gendered Subjectification Process: Korean Female Spectators' Audience Publicness

The analysis of the historical discourse about female spectators during the colonial era demonstrates that their spectatorship was discussed in close relation to their gender. In the Korean context, sharing the darkened interior of the auditorium with people of various genders and social strata violated the centuries-old custom of gendered segregation. Therefore, upon entering the illicit space of theaters, Korean women were exposed to a gaze that viewed them primarily as sexual objects and wayward women.[11] By offering ladies' seats and curtains that protected them from other visitors' gaze, theater operators created a make-shift environment so that Korean women could attend plays without having to fear other people's gaze.[12] Nevertheless, male audiences, as well as the Korean media in general, perpetuated the objectivizing gaze at female spectators, particularly after the *Maeil Shinbo*, the media organ of the Government-General, became the uncontested channel after Korea's annexation by Japan in 1910 and started reporting on individual women's behaviors instead of high-ranked government officials and businessmen.[13]

The gendered gaze at women in public was a part of the patriarchal disciplinary power that various political groups wielded over women's conduct and minds.[14] During the early twentieth century, various political concepts, such as nationalism, enlightenment and development, sexual reform, feminism, and socialism, found their way into the public discourse of Korea and influenced debates on women's theatergoing. This study found that ultimately, the discourse on Korean female audiences was a mechanism of spectator subjectification appropriated by different agents including Korean male intellectuals and colonial authorities to realize their own political goals. Therefore, Korean women's spectatorship was discussed in close relation to the political situation and goals of the time.

Meanwhile, this study also questioned the widespread conception of colonial Korean audiences as being passive subjects of Japanese colonial power or patriotic agents of anti-colonial resistance. Instead, it investigated political moments using Yun's notion of audience publicness, which the dichotomy mentioned above could not fully explain. The analysis of the historical discourse about Seoul's female spectators shows that such moments emerged when they expanded their social activities,[15] represented the interests of their groups,[16] persisted in their ways of enjoying plays and motion pictures,[17] and maintained their own interpretation of plays.[18]

For instance, in the pre-colonial discourse between 1902 and 1910, theater audiences were regarded as evidence of the national crisis. Under the influence of the nationalist

11 See chapters 2.2 and 4.1.
12 See chapter 3.3.
13 See chapter 3.3.
14 See chapter 3.3.
15 See chapters 1.2, 2.3, and 4.1.
16 See chapter 2.3.
17 See chapters 3.2 and 4.3.
18 See chapter 5.5.

and anti-colonial discourse after the 1905 Protectorate Treaty, newspapers labeled Koreans who went to theaters as morally corrupted egoists who worked against the nation's collective zeal for sovereignty. While the Korean media of this period generally focused on political decision-makers and businessmen in the auditorium, other audience members also were mentioned in the papers. Newspapers categorized them into several groups such as the affluent, male students, and women, and created stereotypical images of them.[19] As outcasts of the Korean nation, Korean female audiences were depicted as lewd and consumerist. These characteristics defied not only Confucian virtues of diligence and sexual abstinence but also the joint effort to regain Korea's economic independence from Japan through the National Debt Repayment Movement.

At the same time, Seoul's female audiences contributed to expanding women's realm in society and changing the visual culture as well, even while women's sightseeing and attendance of public events were still considered a taboo. Analyzing the *Annals of the Chosŏn Dynasty*, this study demonstrated how the right to attend spectacular public events was distributed differently depending on the person's sex and social standing.[20] Defined as objects of the male gaze, women of higher social standing were not allowed to watch processions on streets from the sixteenth century, and the ban on spectating eventually broadened to women of all social strata by the seventeenth century. The custom of treating women primarily as an object rather than a subject of gaze was perpetuated in a contradictory way. Namely, theater operators set up ladies' seats surrounded by curtains to protect female spectators (except for *kisaeng* women) from men's glaring. While this measure seemed to encourage women's theatergoing, only men were interpellated as spectators in advertisements until the early 1910s.[21] Nevertheless, Seoul's Korean women kept going to theaters. This might be a banal yet decisive act that played a significant role in redefining Korean women's spectatorship. Above all, the early female spectators, mostly noblewomen and *kisaeng* women, made women's theatergoing a possibility and showed that women, too, could become bearers of the gaze, despite controversies.

Korean women actively appropriated theater space for their personal and collective interests as well. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Korean women began organizing charity events from 1906 for humanitarian aims such as sending aid to Kyŏngsŏng Orphanage and women's schools. While previous studies considered these events as proof of Korean women's patriotism, a closer investigation into the organizers revealed a complex intertwining of various interest groups behind those charity concerts, including the Resident-General, Japanese settlers in Seoul, theater operators, as well as *kisaeng* women and *kibu* men, the procurers. For the Japanese authorities, supporting charity concerts for Korean beneficiaries was part of a strategy to build an emotional bond to Koreans for their colonial endeavors, which provided opportunities for leaders of the Japanese settler community to cooperate with the authorities. Meanwhile, theater owners utilized charity events to justify running their businesses despite ever-growing public antipathy towards them—a bandwagon that *kibu* men could not miss.

19 See chapter 2.2.

20 See chapter 1.1.

21 See chapter 1.2.

Concurrently, such events were a chance for Korean women to organize themselves and take the lead in charity work that was considered to fit the womanly nature and the modern virtue of benevolence. Seeing this as their opportunity, *kisaeng* women dominated the field as organizers, performers, and donors, which helped them refashion themselves as moral and enlightened artists and enhance their social standing in times of reformatory rhetoric.

Among all cases this study investigated, the charity concerts most evidently showed Korean women's audience publicness. What is remarkable is that women who organized and promoted charity events did not use Korean playhouses primarily as a platform to build a national community or reinforce their cultural identities as Koreans. While previous studies tend to consider Korean playhouses an ethno-nationalistic space, thus restricting the scope of audience publicness to the politics of colonial oppression and nationalistic resistance, charity concerts clearly show that there were alliances across boundaries of ethnicities and social strata in Korean playhouses for other aims as well. Although some of their contemporaries praised their enterprise, others doubted the authenticity of the motivation behind charity concerts, particularly against the backdrop of the National Debt Repayment Movement, which mobilized thousands of Koreans. In particular, stones thrown into the theater during a charity concert reveal ruptures that audience publicness, which emerged in the colonial grey zone, created in Korean society.

In this study, I argued that Korean women's various ways of watching plays and movies were fundamental elements of audience publicness. As Korean women's spectatorship pertained to gender, colonialism, social strata, and class, their spectatorship caused complex controversies. There were cases showing that Korean women persistently adhered to their own viewing habits, and thus disharmonized with cultural politics targeting theaters and audiences.

In chapter 3, I established that Korean women, who chatted and laughed at the newly introduced *shinp'a* plays, disrupted the colonial power's plan to achieve their cultural and emotional assimilation into the Japanese Empire through popular culture.[22] In the 1910s, the *Maeil Shinbo* and several Korean theater companies that cooperated with the newspaper promoted the Japanese melodrama as a "new theater" superior to the Korean traditional plays. The *Maeil Shinbo* actively encouraged Korean housewives, most of whom were not in school and out of reach for the colonial assimilation politics, to watch *shinp'a* plays and to learn virtues from the characters—reflecting Japanese pedagogues' discussions on theater as a medium for social education. Against this backdrop, the newspaper reported about colonized Korean women who, on the one hand, were moved by Japanese-style plays and cried. On the other hand, the Government-Official's media criticized Korean women for laughing about the same play, exposing that the description of tearful female audiences was a way of refashioning them as a case for successful cultural assimilation. The *Maeil Shinbo*'s criticisms of Korean female audiences imply that the colonial authorities utilized their playful watching behaviors as a justification for intervention into, and discipline of, the colonized people.

Despite their disruptive impact on colonial assimilation politics, Korean audiences' disapproval of *shinp'a* plays cannot be solely explained by their anti-colonial or anti-

22 See chapter 3.1 and 3.2.

Japanese sentiments. They decided to go to *shinp'a* plays on their own, while Koreans with strong anti-Japanese leaning would not have attended such performances in the first place. More likely, Korean women considered playful watching behaviors a proper way of enjoying *shinp'a* plays as they were not familiar with the Japanese ways of acting and the Korean actors of that period tended to overdress regardless of the characters they played. Nevertheless, by actively pursuing entertainment and expressing their joy despite criticisms, those Korean women reappropriated theaters that the colonial intellectuals and authorities had appropriated as a locus of social education.

Chapter 4 found that the surge in Korean female students' watching of Western romance films in the 1920s broke not only traditional gender norms and society's expectations but also eugenic biopolitics. By analyzing two silent movies and comparing them with the censorship record, I confirmed that the audience of that time could actually watch the erotic scenes such as hugs and kisses in Western movies due to the arbitrary nature of colonial censorship. Due to this graphic representation of eroticism, numerous Koreans from various social backgrounds expressed their concern that Western movies would corrupt the youth by making them sexually active.

Noticing that particularly schoolgirls were imagined to be at the highest risk in the debate, chapter 4 analyzed popular narratives of sexuality and educated young women in the 1920s and identified eugenics as a vehicle for this specific fear. Medical professionals and educators, who embraced the eugenic perspective, treated schoolgirls as a valuable resource that could contribute to racial improvement. Thus, they were expected to build an exemplary family by marrying well-educated men and giving birth to healthy children.[23] Against this backdrop, Western romantic movies symbolized a shortcut to sexual indulgence and STDs which posed a severe threat to eugenic marriage since they would lead to the moral corruption of young women which would consequently cause hereditary damage to all of posterity. As one rare supporter of female students' moviegoing argued in a magazine article, the concerns about their moral decay through romantic movies underestimated their ability to critically judge the films and learn lessons about relationships. Unimpressed by such claims, Yi Kapsu, a prominent advocate for eugenics in colonial Korea, went so far as to dissuade pregnant women from watching movies in the 1930s, claiming it might cause sudden emotional distress and affect the fetus negatively.[24]

Chapter 4 found that despite the taboo, the younger generation of Koreans of that time, including female students, went to theaters for a date, imagined film actors as their idealized romantic partners, and used films and film narrators' explanations as references to perform their own romantic relationships. Despite media scandals about them, young people did not cease to express their excitement in movie theaters. In this way, young female spectators' everyday practices of moviegoing were a means of defying biopolitical control of their bodies and sexuality and actively forming a youth culture with their own language and mannerism echoing the discourse of sexual reform of the 1920s.[25]

23 See chapter 4.2.

24 See chapter 4.3.

25 See chapter 4.1 and 4.3.

Controversies surrounding Korean female audiences in the colonial period often discredited women's abilities to develop their own opinions of plays and movies. Debates on Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* and particularly how Korean women should understand the drama exemplified how this distrust served specific interests, such as maintaining the patriarchal social order or prioritizing other political agendas. By analyzing relevant texts published in the 1920s and 1930s, and resorting to the Foucauldian concept of commentary, Chapter 5 found that Korean male intellectuals, who dominated the discussion, set directions and boundaries for interpreting Ibsen's controversial play even before it was staged. I found that the few affirmative commentaries on *A Doll's House* by male authors tended to foreground political agendas such as Korea's independence from Japan, reform of the nation, and socialist idealism. For instance, reform-oriented Korean men such as Hyŏn Ch'ŏl and Kim Ŏk downplayed the meaning of Nora's emancipatory act—leaving her husband and children—as a surplus of individualism and self-awakening in the 1920s, although they considered these notions necessary for developing the Korean nation's vigor.[26] In the 1930s, Ch'ae Mansik and Shim Hun reintroduced Nora as a positive role model for Korean women in their novels, which diagnosed her crisis as a result of the colonial capitalist economic system and Korean family tradition and proposed socialist activism as the alternative.

Meanwhile, renowned Korean male writers, including Yi Kwangsu, Yang Kŏnsik, and Kim Tong'in, expressed their fear of Nora's influence on Korean women: they would be agitated by the play and eventually overthrow the conventional gender norms and family expectations by leaving their families as Nora did. In line with the disparaging connotation attached to the popular term "Nora of Chosŏn," these authors depicted Korean women influenced by Nora as self-destructive characters in a caricature-like manner. Among all texts analyzed in Chapter 5, Korean men's suspicion and anxiety that women would not understand the play in the same way as they did was most evident in texts written by these three authors.[27] Before Ch'ae and Shim undertook the reassessment of Nora from the socialist perspective in the 1930s, Korean socialists commonly disdained the play as a story of a naïve bourgeois woman destined to fail because of her economic conditions.[28] Overall, the emancipatory message in *A Doll's House* was often sidelined, criticized, or ridiculed in the Korean discourse, and some people even asserted that the play should not yet be played in theaters due to Korean women's alleged lack of cognitive ability.

In this context, the cheers and applause of female audiences at the last scene of the 1934 performance of *A Doll's House* documented in the *Maeil Shinbo* suggest that Korean women, seldom heard in the public discourse, used the theater space to express their endorsement of Nora's choice. Their shared will for emancipation and disregard for negative commentaries is especially apparent given that they voiced their opinions despite male audiences trying to silence them. Although ephemeral, the women in the 1934 production of *A Doll's House* generated a feminist audience publicness in line with a few female writers such as Kim Wŏnju and Na Hyesŏk. Their voices prove that colonial Korean

26 See chapter 5.2.

27 See chapter 5.3.

28 See chapter 5.4.

women could explore alternative readings of plays and movies, although male intellectuals dominated societal discussions of theaters.[29]

Nevertheless, Korean theaters were not a utopian space for women's alliances. The theater was often a space where the severe social hierarchy of the Chosŏn Dynasty based on gender and social stratum was challenged and reestablished between Korean people.[30] Concurrently, women of lower social class and income claimed Korean theaters, which had been stigmatized as an illicit space, as their realm and expressed their hostility towards female students in theaters. The fact that the conflict between women of different social standings evolved further around different modes of play watching shows that Korean women developed various types of spectatorship depending on their sociocultural status and class identities, which in return reinforced their differences and group identities.[31]

Contribution of This Study

In this study, I analyzed the relationship between public discourses on Korean female audiences that have been overlooked in prior studies with various political discourses of the early twentieth century, such as those dealing with nationalism, anti-colonialism, assimilation, modernization, eugenics, and socialism. Furthermore, I identified various moments of the political that Korean female spectators created during the colonial era, thus closing the research gaps surrounding Yun Hae-dong's concept of audience publicness. This study sheds light on the historical process through which Korean women's spectatorship was formed and negotiated in the colonial period and helps to better understand their everyday lives in relation to a broad spectrum of political discourses.

This study argues that Korean women were meaningful actors who forged audience publicness in Korean theaters in the colonial period. Sometimes they devised political moments through organized cooperation like charity events, but more commonly, they created audience publicness by disobeying or not engaging with the disciplinary power targeting them. Korean female spectators' audience publicness was often unintended and sporadic, yet continuous. In doing so, they broadened women's realm in society, represented their interests, and challenged the patriarchal politics of gender—while they pursued pleasure despite the political turmoil in the colonial era. The very banality of playgoing constituted the colonial grey zone that was not fully absorbed by the dichotomy of colonialism and anti-colonialism, creating unexpected ruptures in both realms of politics.

For this study, I collected and examined numerous sources to retrace a discourse spanning between 1900 and 1934 as accurately and extensively as possible. Nonetheless, this endeavor has its limits in that I was unable to investigate firsthand accounts of the subaltern audience, especially women, who are at the heart of the study. Furthermore, discourse about audiences in both Korean and Japanese theaters published in the

29 See chapter 5.5.

30 See chapter 3.3.

31 See chapter 4.1.

Japanese media was left unexamined in this study due to the limited access to sources, which I hope to supplement through future, dedicated research.

Notwithstanding these limitations, I hope that this study can productively contribute to the discussion of the Korean colonial era, which has been dominated by the hypotheses of colonial exploitation and colonial modernization, through the intersectional spectatorship of Korean audiences and their own momentums in theater space. In addition, this study may provide a meaningful historiographic complement to the symbolic and psychoanalytic approaches to the question of spectatorship in the theater and film studies fields. In the context of Korean studies, this study may be helpful to rediscover colonial Korean women's spectatorship on other occasions, such as sports events and mountaineering, which was increasingly observed and documented during the colonial era. Last but not least, I hope this study will be read as an index that points to the silence of social minorities in Korea who remained as a blank in historical narratives.