

4. Female Students and Romantic Movies¹

Now a film titled DEMI-VIERGES is playing, about which the critics write: A typical case shows the mentality of young girls from so-called good society who want to savor the tingling charm of erotic adventures with precocious sensuality. They attract the man and give him almost everything – *tout excepté ça*. They play lustfully with the fire until they burn themselves on it. This is my exact picture, except for the final sentence, of course, that will come soon!

*Marlene Dietrich, Diary of September 17, 1919*²

The 1920s witnessed “a surge in Korean female students in ladies’ seats of theaters.”³ As school education was still rare for Korean women, secondary school students were counted as the elite of the nation. Korean newspapers and magazines, whose number increased under the so-called cultural rule (*munhwa t’ongch’i*) of the Government-General since 1920, competitively spread observations, criticisms, and rumors of the Korean female students in movie theaters. Criticisms of female students’ moviegoing, which were closely related to ideas about their sexuality, depicted romantic movies as a kind of a sexual stimulant that the young women eagerly took. Also, contemporaries believed that Western romantic movies were a gateway to *yŏnae*, or romance, for female students.

Considering that women of other professions and ages, such as *kisaeng* women and laborers, were regarded as an intrinsic part of the auditorium by the early 1920s, the pub-

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- 1 A part of Chapter 4 has been published under the title “Liebesfilme, Geschlechtskrankheiten und eugenische Ehe: Diskurse über Seouler Kinobesucherinnen in den 1920er- und 30er-Jahren” in the *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 48(2), in German.
 - 2 Marlene Dietrich, *Diary of September 17, 1919*, as cited in Eva Gesine Baur, *Einsame Klasse: Das Leben der Marlene Dietrich* (München: C.H. Beck 2017), 50.
 - 3 “Kükchang Puinsök e Kyökhchüŋ Toen Chosön Yöhaaksaeng: Tobalchöck Yönaegük e Shimch’wi Hayö Ch’önyö üi Sunjinhan Chöngsö Nanmu [A Surge in Korean Female Students in Ladies’ Seats of Theaters: The Virgin Sentiment Dances Wildly, Drunk on Provocative Romantic Dramas],” *MS*, December 15, 1926, 4.

lic debates of female students' theatergoing warrant an in-depth analysis. Based on articles, commentaries, readers' letters, and films, chapter 4 examines the politics behind the controversy over the Korean female students' spectatorship during the 1920s. Analyzing these traces, I examine how the younger generation, particularly women, appropriated the disdained pastime as part of a budding youth culture that distinguished them from the rest of Korean society. Thereby, this chapter pays close attention to the reformist discourse of sexuality, marriage, and sexually transmitted diseases (STD), which were entangled with the discourse on women's role in society on the one hand, and movies that ran in theaters on the other hand.

4.1 Western Romantic Movies and Korean Female Students

Korean Cinema Culture in the 1920s

By the early 1920s, there were three Korean and four Japanese movie theaters in Seoul. Cinemas that targeted Korean audiences such as Umigwan, Tansöngsa, and Chosön Kükchang (Chosön Movie Theater), were located at Jongno, the main street of the capital.⁴ Meanwhile, Kirakukan, Chūōkan, Taishōkan, and Koganekan targeted Japanese settlers in Seoul, whose number rapidly increased after the 1910 annexation.⁵ These movie theaters were operating at Kirakucho (present-day Ŭljiro) on the southern bank of Chönggyech'ön stream.⁶

The separation between the Korean and Japanese movie theaters was rooted in the language barrier during the silent movie era. As there was no sound, film narrators used to give an introductory explanation of the movie. For instance, Kyöngsöng Kodüŋ Yönye Kwan (Kyöngsöng High-Class Entertainment Hall) started as a mixed-language cinema in 1910 and offered explanations in both Korean and Japanese languages.⁷ However, the film narration changed with time. Instead of a simple explanation before the screening, movie theaters in Seoul began offering accompanying explanations (*chungsöl*) like in Tokyo. Film narrators described each scene and did the voice acting on behalf of the silent actors on the screen, which could not be done in two languages concurrently.⁸ As a result, the linguistic separation became institutional, geographic, and often ethnic separations in the movie theaters in Seoul.⁹

4 Kim Sunju, "Yöngghwa Shijang ürosö üi Shingminji Chosön: 1920-nyöndae Kyöngsöng üi Chosönin Kükchang kwa Ilbonin Kükchang üi Chungsim üro [Colonial Korea as a Movie Market: Focusing on Seoul's Korean Theaters and Japanese Theaters in the 1920s]," *Han'guk Munhwa Illyuhak* 47, no. 1 (2014), 135–72; refer to 136.

5 Kim, "Colonial Korean Movie Market," 136. The number of Japanese settlers living in Seoul rose sharply from 25,242 in 1909 to 38,186 in 1910 and 66,024 in 1914. See Han Sang'ön, "1910-nyöndae Kyöngsöng üi Kükchang kwa Kükchang Munhwa e kwanhan Yöng'u [A Study on Theater and Theater Culture in Seoul During the 1910's]," *Yöngghwa Yöng'u* 53 (2012), 403–29; refer to 406.

6 Kim, "Colonial Korean Movie Market," 143–44.

7 Han, *Birth of Korean Cinema*, 211–12.

8 *Ibid.*, 213.

9 Chöng, *Watching Movies*, 138.

The cornerstone for cinema's development "into a prominent form of mass entertainment"¹⁰ in Korea was laid in the late 1910s. Around this time, colonial Korea became "a part of the market managed by branch offices of the U.S. movie companies that advanced to Japan."¹¹ In 1916, Umigwan began supplying American movies under a special contract with Universal Pictures, while Tansōngsa and Chosōn Movie Theater brought Western films through Shōchiku, a Japanese distribution company.¹² Indeed, the contract relationships changed several times over the 1920s as American film distributors such as Paramount, United Artists, MGM, Fox, as well as Japanese competitors, including Nikkatsu and Star Film, entered the picture.¹³

Securing a film distribution network was essential to the colonial Korean film business because hardly any commercial films were produced by Korean creators until the early 1920s.¹⁴ As film historian Dong Hoon Kim points out, "the unstable political and economic state of Joseon [Korea] as a colony [...] affected not only the growth of the film business but the culture industry overall."¹⁵ Even after Korean film creators began to produce commercial films in the early 1920s, Korean films accounted for "at best, 5 percent of all the films screened at cinemas"¹⁶ during the colonial era.

During the "era of watching-only (*kamsang man ūi shidae*)," Korean audiences preferred Western films to Japanese films.¹⁷ Following this preference, movie theaters targeting the Korean audience mainly showed foreign films and only a few Japanese movies.¹⁸ Oka Shigematsu, a colonial censor, wrote in a 1933 essay that Korean movie theaters might "currently completely boycott Japanese movies."¹⁹ Uneasy over this tendency, the Government-General restricted the number of foreign movies in 1934 to

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- 10 Dong Hoon Kim, *Eclipsed Cinema: The Film Culture of Colonial Korea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 18. Original in English.
 - 11 Yi Hogöl, "Shingminji Chosōn ūi Oeguk Yōnghwa: 1920-nyōndae Kyōngsōng ūi Chosōnin Yōnghwagwan esō ūi Oehwa Sang'yōng [Foreign Films in Colonized Korea: Exhibition of Foreign Films in Korean Film Theaters of Seoul in 1920s]," *Taedong Munhwa Yōngu* 72 (2010), 79–116; refer to 83.
 - 12 Yi, "Foreign Films," 83–85.
 - 13 Ibid., 86–91.
 - 14 Kim, "Colonial Korean Movie Market," 135–72.
 - 15 Kim, *Eclipsed Cinema*, 18.
 - 16 Ibid., 1. Analyzing the statistics of the censorship organ, Korean film scholar Yi Sunjin found that among 2,422 films censored in a year between August 1926 and July 1927 only 18 were categorized as "genuinely Korean films whose producers, stories, and actors were all, or mainly, Korean." "Shingminji Shigi Yōnghwa Kōmyōl ūi Chaengjōmdul: Ch'onsōl [Issues of Colonial Movie Censorship: An Introduction]," in *Shingminji Shidae ūi Yōnghwa Kōmyōl 1910–1934 [Movie Censorship During the Colonial Era: 1910–1934]*, ed. Korean Film Archive (KOFA) (Seoul: KOFA, 2009), 15–39; see 17.
 - 17 Korean author Yim Hwa used the term in his 1941 treatise. "Chosōn Yōnghwaron [On Korean Cinema]," *Ch'unchu* 13, no. 6 (1941), 84, as cited in Baek Moonim, "Chosōn Yōnghwa ūi Chonjaeron: Yim Hwa ūi Chosōn Yōnghwaron ūl Chungsim ūro [An Ontology of Korean Cinema: Focusing on Yim Hwa's 'On Korean Cinema']," *Sanghō Hakpo* 33 (2011), 73–213; refer to 191.
 - 18 Police Bureau, Government-General of Chosōn, "Hwaltong Sajin P'ilūm Kōmyōl Kaeyo: Taishyo 15-nyōn (1926-nyōn) 8-wōl putō Syowa 2-nyōn (1927-nyōn) 7-wōl kkaji (1931) [A Report on the Movie and Film Censorship: From August 1926 to July 1927 (1931)]," *Movie Censorship 1910–1934*, trans. Hong Sōnyōng, Yu Sōnyōng, and Ch'ae Yōng, 153–290; refer to 188.
 - 19 Oka Shigematsu, "Yōnghwa Kōmyōl Chapgam (1933) [Thoughts on Movie Censorship (1933)]," in *Movie Censorship 1910–1934*, trans. Hong, Yu, and Ch'ae, 324–27; refer to 324.

expand the influence of Japanese movies and profit from Japanese entertainment capital that advanced into Korea.²⁰

Koreans' preference for Hollywood movies is notable because Japan was geographically and culturally closer to the Korean peninsula than the U.S. Korean movie scholar Baek Moonim points out that previous studies often explained this tendency as an example of Koreans' political rejection of the colonizer's culture.²¹ However, recent film scholarship has revisited this subject, considering further aspects behind Koreans' preference of American movies. Baek emphasizes that the feeling of coevalness that American movies evoked among Koreans played a decisive role.²² According to her, American movies, which enabled viewers to share the same time consciousness as America, could compensate for the sense of delay that Korea might be behind the times in terms of Enlightenment and Civilization.²³

Meanwhile, the colonial government's censorship organ found that Korean audiences of the late 1920s had difficulties with differences in language and culture when they watched Japanese movies.

Considering genres of movies, movie theaters operated by Japanese show historical movies, contemporary stories, and others as they initially aim for Japanese audiences, while movie theaters that aim for Korean audiences show primarily Western movies and Korean movies produced in Korea, such as Korean historical movies, contemporary stories, et cetera. This [tendency] originated from a marketing strategy, yet Korean audiences cannot understand Japanese movies because these are different in terms of history, humanity, and custom; thus, they are not interested in them, and Japanese movies attract fewer audiences. Western movies mainly deal with contemporary stories, and the European films are translated and narrated in the Korean language—in general, they are easier to understand than Japanese movies, and Korean audiences especially tend to like the Western action movies from America.²⁴

This report indicates that the urban audience of Korean theaters in the 1920s identified themselves more with the modernity depicted in the Hollywood movies of that time than the Japanese movies. In combination, Korean audiences were more interested in experiencing the vision of modernity transmitted through American movies than comprehending the geographically close yet unfamiliar Japanese movies.

20 Yi, "Issues of Film Censorship," 28.

21 Baek Moonim, "Kamsang ūi Shidae, Chosŏn ūi Miguk Yŏnsok Yŏnghwa [American Serial Movies in Korea during the Era of Viewing]," in *Chosŏn Yŏnghwa wa Halliudū* [Chosun Cinema and Hollywood], ed. Yŏngu Moim Sinema Babel (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch'ulp'an, 2014), 15–72; refer to 26.

22 Baek, "American Serial Movies," 26.

23 Ibid.

24 Police Bureau, "Report on Movie Censorship," 282.

Kissing Scenes in Romantic Movies

Western romantic movies, or *yōnaegŭk*, arose as a new popular genre of Seoul's movie theaters in the early 1920s.²⁵ According to the censorship organ's statistics, romantic movies were the second most popular genre after action movies (*hwalgŭk*), which had attracted Korean audiences since the 1910s.²⁶ The great success of the movie *WAY DOWN EAST* (1920) and the public's unabated interest in the director, David W. Griffith, were indicators of the 1920s romance movie boom in colonial Korea.²⁷

The popularization of romantic movies posed a new challenge to the colonial censors. The Police Bureau of the Government-General justified the censorship of Western films with "public security" and "public morality"²⁸ reasons. Colonial censors cut numerous action films due to their depiction of "ethnic conflicts, class conflicts" and "revolution and revolts,"²⁹ which could remind colonized Korean audiences of their own struggles with unjust colonial rule. Meanwhile, what concerned the censors about romantic movies were loving scenes.³⁰ Thereby, they justified the colonial censorship with the alleged underdevelopment of Korean society. "In particular, there are many parts of human drama (*injŏngmul*) and romantic movies that cannot be admitted in light of the current public order and morals of Korea, so many such things are cut out."³¹

Kissing scenes, which were abundant in movies from the West, particularly challenged the colonial censors, and contemporaries were aware of this fact. An anonymous essay published by the daily newspaper *Chung'oe Ilbo* in 1927 reveals that Koreans knew about the censorship practice: "Kissing scenes are the ones that censors of the police department pay the most attention to [...] whenever his [a censor's] eyes catch these [kissing] scenes, scissors cut off the film under his stern order."³²

Because the censors were not always thorough, Koreans could still watch kissing scenes in Western movies and came to associate Western movies with the visual representation of kisses. The writer of the essay claimed that "there is no Western motion picture without any kissing scene. When I think about it, no one seems to have seen a motion picture where nobody kisses at all."³³ A 1935 article titled "A History of the Kiss" went so far as to assert that "in Chosŏn, there had not been kisses before. [...] It was since the American movies came to [colonial Korea] that kissing was popularized."³⁴ Contrary to this claim, Shin Yunbok's painting *Wŏlha Chŏng'in* (Lovers under the Moonlight; see

25 Yi, "Foreign Films," 99.

26 Police Bureau, "Report on Movie Censorship," 204.

27 Yi, "Foreign Films," 99.

28 Police Bureau, "Report on Movie Censorship," 227.

29 Ibid., 228.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 P'isaeng, "Kissŭ Nandam [Talking Wildly about Kisses]," *Chung'oe Ilbo* [hereafter CO], July 10, 1927, 3.

33 P'isaeng, "Talking about Kisses," CO, July 10, 1927, 3.

34 "K'issŭ ūi Yŏksa (sang) Kŭ Saengni wa Pyŏngni nŭn Öttŏhan ka [A History of the Kiss 1: What Is Its Physiology and Pathology]," *DI*, June 28, 1935, 4.

figure 5), produced before Hollywood movies came to the Korean peninsula, shows that Chosŏn Koreans, too, kissed to express their affection.

Figure 5: Shin Yunbok, *Wŏlha Chŏng'in* (Lovers under the Moonlight).



Source: Eighteenth-nineteenth century, Ink painting with pale color, 28.2 x 35.6 cm, Seoul. Courtesy of Kansong Art and Culture Foundation.

The article “History of Kiss” reveals two aspects of the colonial Korean reception of kissing scenes in Western movies. Firstly, the article created a false genealogy of kisses and asserted that they were from the West, which was inaccurate. Korean feminist scholar Pak-Ch’a Minjŏng analyzed the newspaper discourse of kisses in the 1930s and concluded that “kisses were gaining meaning as a specifically Western and up-to-date sexual practice”³⁵ in the 1930s. Thereby, some Koreans considered kisses not just as a Western and foreign practice but as a marker of civilization. A 1938 article claimed that the more a folk’s reproductive function degenerates, the more developed its competence in kissing.³⁶ “History of Kiss” explained that depending on the degree of civilization, people might focus on different senses while kissing as well.³⁷

Secondly, kisses were closely related to the cinematic experience of the colonial Korean audience. A 1928 analysis of kissing scenes in American movies suggests that watch-

35 Pak-Ch’a Minjŏng, *Chosŏn ūi K’uiŏ: Kūndae ūi T’ūmsae e Sumŭn Pyŏnt’aedŭl ūi Ch’osang* [The Queer of Chosŏn: Portraits of the Perverts Hiding in the Ruptures of Modern Times] (Seoul: Hyŏnshil Munhwa Yŏn’gu 2018), 86.

36 “Saengsik Kinŭng i T’oehwa Toel surok K’isŭ ka Paldal Twe [The More a Folk’s Reproductive Function Degenerates, The More Developed Its Sufficiency in Kissing],” *CI*, June 21, 1938, as cited in Pak-Ch’a, *Queer of Chosŏn*, 86.

37 “History of Kiss 1,” *DI*, June 28, 1935, 4.

ing kissing scenes shot in close-up on the large screen in movie theaters had an immense impact on the audience:

[American movies] thrust kissing scenes right into the face of the audience using close-up. Then the audience cannot help but be thrilled by this as if one came to the movie theater to see only this one love scene. Just as comedians are needed in comedy, tens of thousands of love scenes are embedded in celluloid films by countless researchers of love scenes.³⁸

Chosŏn Koreans did circulate paintings explicitly depicting sexual acts called *ch'unhwa*, but they consumed such paintings in private.³⁹ The collective and public nature of movie watching made on-screen kisses particularly problematic. Even in the U.S., where most kissing scenes in colonial Korean theaters were produced, the first on-screen kiss shot by Thomas Edison sparked a public uproar.⁴⁰ Pointing out that Edison's film featured a kissing scene that two actors used to play at the end of a musical farce, historian John E. Semonche underlines the importance of the medium on people's reception.⁴¹ Eventually, the Hays Production Code (1930) "set a limit of thirty seconds" ⁴² for kissing scenes in a movie.

Even before the Hays Production Code was enforced, Hollywood movies were put under censorship in colonial Korea. The colonial censorship was often arbitrary, so that censors erased some kissing scenes while leaving others untouched. Cecil B. DeMille's 1921 movie *FORBIDDEN FRUIT* and Charles Chaplin's 1923 movie *A WOMAN OF PARIS* (see figure 6) provides material evidence.⁴³ In *FORBIDDEN FRUIT*, a romantic comedy drawing upon the story of Cinderella, censors erased two kissing scenes that were four seconds and one

38 "Hŭnghaeng Kach'i rŭl Chŏnghanhŭn Yŏnghwa ŭi Rŏbŭssin-K'isŭ Chal Hanŭn Paeu ka Kŏbu ka Toenda [Love Scenes in the Movie that Decide Over the Success: Actors Who Kiss Well Become Rich]," *CI*, March 6, 1928, 3.

39 *Ch'unhwa* was produced and circulated through personal connections between painters and patrons. See Kim Hŏnsŏn, "Sam kwa Sŏng'yok ŭi Yesul, Ch'unhwa ŭi Unmyŏng: Han'guk ŭi Ch'unhwa Yŏtbogi [The Art of Life and Sexual Desire and the Fate of *Ch'unhwa*: A Glance at Korean *ch'unhwa*]," ed. Kyujanggak Han'gukak Yŏnguwŏn, *Kŭrim ŭro Pon Chosŏn [Comprehending Chosŏn Through Paintings]* (Seoul: Kŭl Hang'ari, 2014), 383–414.

40 John E. Semonche, *Censoring Sex: A Historical Journey Through American Media* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 97–98.

41 Semonche, *Censoring Sex*, 97.

42 *Ibid.*, 114.

43 The Korean daily newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo* published lists of 46 censored movies with scene descriptions, length, and reasons twice in 1926. Based on these lists, I was able to identify and examine two feature length movies that were still preserved. *FORBIDDEN FRUIT* was first shown in Korea at Chosŏn Movie Theater on January 17, 1926. "Sinae Kak Kŭkchang Kŭmju Sang'yŏng Yŏnghwa: Moda Myŏnghwa rŭl Sang'yŏng chung [Movies Running This Week in Downtown: All Theaters Showing Great Movies]," *DI*, January 18, 1926, 3. *A WOMAN OF PARIS* premiered in Tansŏngsa on January 31, 1926 under the title *P'ARI ŭi Yŏsŏng*. "P'ARI ŭi Yŏsŏng [A WOMAN OF PARIS]," *Shidae Ilbo*, February 1, 1926, 2. Copies used for this study are as follows: *FORBIDDEN FRUIT*, directed by Cecil B. DeMille (1921; Hollywood, CA: Paramount, Silent Hall of Fame Enterprises, 2016), DVD; *A WOMAN OF PARIS: A DRAMA OF FATE*, directed by Charles Chaplin (1923; Hollywood, CA: Chaplin Studio, Warner Home Video, 2004), DVD.

second each.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, four kisses (two on lips, one on a hand, and another on foot) between Mary and Nelson, the two protagonists, and two hugging scenes (one between Mary and Nelson, the other between Mary and Steve) passed the censorship.

As there was no written guideline for the censorship, it is unclear what criteria the censors used to decide whether or not to delete kissing scenes in *FORBIDDEN FRUIT*. Possibly, the censor weighed the relationship between the characters more heavily than their marital status: the kisses that remained were all between Mary and Nelson, the two protagonists of the movie, while Steve, Mary's legal husband, is an antagonist who abuses her. The kiss in the theatrical play that Mary and Nelson attend might have been cut off due to the prevailing eroticism despite its short duration.

Figure 6: A kissing scene with Adolphe Menjou (left) and Edna Purviance (right) from the film A WOMAN OF PARIS.



Source: Courtesy of Roy Export S.A.S.

Scenes depicting physical affection in *A WOMAN OF PARIS*, too, were censored arbitrarily. While cutting out the first kissing scene between the two protagonists, Marie and Jean, the censors left three kissing scenes and a hugging scene. Although *A WOMAN OF PARIS* was inspected in the same month as *FORBIDDEN FRUIT*, it is difficult to identify any patterns in the censorship regarding kissing scenes in these movies.

44 The calculation is based on the length of cut films and Bruce F. Kavin's 1987 book *How Movies Work*. Kavin explained that "a reel is approximately 950 feet of 35mm film, with a maximum length of 1000 feet," equivalent to ca. 28,960 to 30,480 centimeters. According to him, 16 fps (frames per second) was "a more-or-less the standard silent projection rate" and "a full reel took about 15 minutes to project." See *How Movies Work* (New York: MacMillan, 1987), 46–47.

Recent studies established that movie censorship in colonial Korea became standardized and professionalized with the 1926 Censorship Regulation on Motion Picture Films.⁴⁵ This new rule was not yet enacted as *FORBIDDEN FRUITS* and *A WOMAN OF PARIS* were censored. The 1926 Censorship Regulation, however, also left room for arbitrary censorship practices by setting an ambiguous standard. According to the new law, “provocative embraces and kisses in love scenes or brutal images” could be cut off when censors considered them to have “a disturbing impact on the impression directly coming from the screen image.”⁴⁶

Kissing scenes that survived colonial censorship had a lasting impact on young audiences. The 1927 essay in the *Chung’oe Ilbo* claimed that “even with their eyes shut, they could see beautiful stars kissing. Eventually, kisses in Western motion pictures had a profound impact on young men and women of Chosŏn.”⁴⁷ The 1935 article on the history of the kiss noted that two Hollywood stars in particular, Rudolph Valentino and Adolphe Menjou, “became teachers of kissing (*kissŭ ŭi sŏnsaeng*)”⁴⁸ to Korean people, indicating that the audience took Western movies as references for their relationships.

Kissing scenes in Western movies had a broad impact on the discourse of the body and sexuality in colonial Korea. Notably, women’s lips became a fetishized and symbolic object as well as an economic investment. Some argued that “[women’s] red lips are the first to catch one’s eye” and lips were “a substitute for genitals.”⁴⁹ Others claimed that one could read a woman’s characteristics based on the shape of her lips.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the increased interest in kisses and Hollywood stars led to the popularization of lipsticks, too.⁵¹

Pak-Ch’a’s study demonstrates how kisses became a highly desired yet perverted and outlandish act among Koreans under the strict social control of sexuality during the 1920s and 1930s. While on-screen kisses widely circulated, actually kissing someone in public was regarded as delinquency and controlled by the police.⁵² Pak-Ch’a argues that the only realm where the physical expression of intimacy was legitimated was the commercial one, which included movies, advertisements, and places where women worked.⁵³ Some men used physical violence to kiss women working in precarity, such as those employed

45 Pak Hyeyŏng, “1926-nyŏn ‘Hwaltong Sajin Ch’wich’e Kyuch’ik 1934-nyŏn ‘Hwaltong Sajin Yŏnghwa Ch’wich’e Kyuch’ik’ ŭl Chungsim ŭro [Focusing on the 1926 Censorship Regulation on Motion Picture Films and the 1934 Censorship Regulation on Motion Picture Movies],” *Movie Censorship 1910–1934*, 113–23; see 115.

46 Oka, “Chosŏn esŏ ŭi Yŏnghwa Kŏmyŏl e taehayŏ [On Movie Censorship in Chosŏn] (1931),” *Movie Censorship 1910–1934*, trans. Hong, Yu, and Ch’ae, 314–23; refer to 317.

47 P’isaeng, “Talking about Kisses,” *CO*, July 10, 1927, 3.

48 “History of Kiss 1,” *DI*, June 28, 1935, 4.

49 Yi Tal, “Sŏng’yokgam ŭl Chungsim ŭro Hayŏ Pon Yŏnghwa Yŏbaeu ŭi Yukch’e Ko [Thoughts on Movie Actresses’ Body with a Focus on Their Sex Appeal],” *Yŏnghwa Shidae* (March 1935), 63–64; refer to 64.

50 “Yŏnji Ch’irhan Kŭ Ipsul Pomyŏn Kŭ Yŏja ŭi Sŏngjŏng ŭl Anda [You Can Read a Woman’s Characteristics by Her Lips Wearing Rouge],” *CI*, March 21, 1934, 1.

51 “History of Kiss 1,” *DI*, June 28, 1935, 4.

52 Pak-Ch’a, *Queer of Chosŏn*, 93–94.

53 *Ibid.*, 92–94.

at bars, restaurants, and cafés.⁵⁴ She points out that colonial Korean society showed little sympathy towards women working in the public sphere who experienced such harassment because “the society was only interested in protecting women worth the protection,” to which “female servers of cafés or female drivers”⁵⁵ did not count.

In this context, female students and unmarried young women who went to movie theaters in the 1920s and 1930s challenged far more than public expectations. Behind the public discourse on these unexpected female audiences, there was the politics of gender, class, and strata. Who were they, and why were they regarded as worth protecting, while other groups of Korean women in playhouses and movie theaters were not?

Female Students: Controversies and Agency

In March 1924, the *Maeil Shinbo* reported a rapid increase in Seoul’s cinema audience size. The daily newspaper indicated that the steep growth of the entertainment industry was mainly due to the increase in moviegoers, who sought consolation in cinema: “Watching motion pictures is necessary for a moment of comfort, yet we cannot help but be surprised by the amount of money spent on it.”⁵⁶ According to an article, 1,436,187 people visited playhouses and movie theaters in Seoul in 1923, and these theaters had 3,101 business days altogether.⁵⁷ Furthermore, ticket sales for playhouses and movie theaters in Seoul amounted to 1,430,000 won, equivalent to five won a year per every citizen of Seoul.⁵⁸

Despite the popularization of movie watching, not every individual’s theater attendance was socially accepted. Female students in theaters were among the most stigmatized audience groups in the 1920s. Geographically, Seoul’s female students could easily access the Korean theater district as most women’s schools were situated in the old city center.⁵⁹ Priced between a minimum of twenty chŏn and one hundred chŏn (or one wŏn), movie tickets were not cheap, but students receiving family support had money at their disposal to buy books, go shopping, and watch movies. Furthermore, many female students who came to Seoul from other regions lived outside their home and dormitories, evading surveillance by their parents and schools.⁶⁰

54 Ibid., 96–97.

55 Ibid., 98.

56 “Yŏnghwagye [Movie Industry],” *MS*, March 2, 1924, 3.

57 “Movie Industry,” *MS*, March 2, 1924, 3.

58 Ibid.

59 As of 1926, there were seven women’s secondary schools in Jongno-gu district and one in Chung-gu district.

60 For instance, a study of Tongdŏk Women’s Secondary School showed that of 1,435 students between 1926 and 1945, 526 students or 36.7 percent of the students lived separated from their family. See Kim Myŏngsuk, “Hakchŏkpu rŭl t’onghae Pon Ilche Kangjŏmgi Tongdŏk Yŏgo Yŏhaksang ŭi T’ŭksŏng Yŏn’gu [A Study on the Characteristics of Female Students at Dongduk Girls’ High School during the Japanese Colonial Period],” *Yŏsŏng kwa Yŏksa* 26 (2017), 273–303; see 287–88. Hyae-weol Choi argued that Christian schools in particular regarded the strict control of female students’ lives a necessity to discipline them, and thus supervised their everyday lives including visits from parents and the receipt of letters. On October 15, 1923, students of Sung’ui Girls’ School

Female students were confronted with alienization and criticisms when they went to theaters. A letter sent to the women's monthly magazine *Shin Yŏsŏng* in 1924 vividly captures the moment of encounter between female students and other people in the Korean theater. The writer, a female student, complained about her friends' unpleasant experiences at a theater:

It was last autumn. Back then, the theater company T'owŏlhoe did something called a literary art drama (*munyegŭk*) at Chosŏn Theater. My friend R. went there with three friends of hers to watch the piece. In the women's section on the second floor, commoner women, female servants, and *kisaeng* were sitting together. As the female students appeared there, the theater's atmosphere changed, and everyone looked at them as if they were goblins who emerged in the daylight. Although they, too, were women, other women (not to mention the men) were suspicious of them and talked a lot about them. "They must be *kisaeng* women," "they are girl students," "but no girl student comes to such place" (where is the law that bans female students' theatergoing?), "if they are girl students, they must be indiscreet," "recently, there are *kisaeng* women who dress up like girl students' and the like."⁶¹

The letter attests that female students' theater visits were considered unusual, if not delinquent, in the early 1920s. Ten years later, people still suspected that young women strolling Seoul's theater district might be prostituting women.⁶² The students expected acceptance, at least from other women in the theater who challenged the inside-outside norm just like they did. However, the women of other ages, strata, and professions showed hostility towards them. The "commoner women, female servants, and *kisaeng*" in the theater, often branded as the lewd women, were in this instance the gatekeepers who alienated the female students. The other women even questioned the authenticity of their identity, indicating that the well-educated and wealthy young women had landed on a terrain of socially marginalized and branded people.

Besides their mere presence in the auditorium, their understanding of theater, too, was challenged by other audiences. The young students considered T'owŏlhoe's play, an interpretation of Anton Chekhov's *The Bear*, an educational cultural production categorized as "literary art play," which served also as a pretext for them to go to theaters despite the social norms. Nevertheless, the playful banter of other audience members overwhelmed them. The anonymous writer complained how a woman yelled, "Chastity? Oh, what a rotten piece of meat is that!"⁶³ in the middle of the play, where the heroine refused to consent to a male antagonist. Ironically, people looking for the source of the mishap

protested the oppressive education environment and demanded, among other things, the substitution of Ra Chingyŏng, the head of the dormitory. See *Gender and Mission*, 104–05.

61 Yi, "T'owŏlhoe ūi Yŏngŭk Kukyŏng ūl Kattaga [As They Went to see a Play by T'owŏlhoe]," *Shin Yŏsŏng* (February 1924), 35–36; citation from 35.

62 Kang Yangsu's 1932 essay begins with the assumption that the women who seemed lost in the theater district "must be nightly flowers or [...] daughters of rich families." Kang, "Kŭkchangga esŏ Pon Kŭ Yŏja ūi Chach'wi [The Vestiges of the Woman I Saw at the Theater District]," *Puin Kongnon* (May 1932), 56–57; refer to 56.

63 Yi, "As They Went," 35.

wrongfully accused the female students of this provocative call.⁶⁴ The audience considered female students who went to theaters audacious enough to make crude jokes on sexuality.

Despite suspicions and criticisms, Korean female students went to theaters and cinemas. As they discovered their preferences for romantic movies, newspapers and magazines discussed it as a worrisome phenomenon. On December 15, 1926, the *Maeil Shinbo* published an article titled "A Surge in Korean Female Students in Ladies' Seats of Theaters: The Virgin Sentiment Dances Wildly, Drunk on Provocative Romantic Dramas."⁶⁵ This article offers valuable insight into the rationales behind the critiques of female students' movie watching and society's joint efforts to discourage them from going to theaters. A journalist asserted that female students' theatergoing allegedly demonstrated that "the harmful effect of women's liberation at its very beginning"⁶⁶ because it was only a recent development that Korean women entered the public sphere.

The journalist interviewed four teachers at renowned women's schools in Seoul and a theater manager. A principal claimed that female students' theatergoing was "wrong, not [only] because films might corrupt their morality, but [also] [...] visiting such poorly lit spaces could lead to *some kind of harm* (emphasis added)."⁶⁷ Ahn Haengjung, a teacher of Ehwa Women's High School, explained why he was concerned about girl students' moviegoing and what his school was planning to do to control them:

If the government announces that a film is necessary for an educational purpose, our school lets [our students] see the film in a group viewing. If students frequent movie theaters on their own, they can easily be entangled with bad people, and their innocent sentiments can easily be agitated by entertaining films. Thus, from now on, homeroom teachers will undertake rounds of patrols and strictly discipline [the students in movie theaters].⁶⁸

Meanwhile, the comment of an anonymous theater director in the same newspaper article points to the societal and medical complexity of the supposedly cinema-typical damages. "As you know, the theater is a place where all kinds of guests come. *Even kisaeng women would get sick if they frequented the theater*, therefore much more temptation might be there for damsels who do not know the world (emphasis added)."⁶⁹ This pathological argument against female students' movie watching and the distinction between them and *kisaeng* women are elaborated upon in chapter 4.3. Before that, I focus on sociocultural background of the concern that female students might pursue romance under the influence of romantic movies, which was widely shared throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The interviewees and the journalist believed that moviegoing could encourage female students to meet somebody who was not approved by their usual custodians, namely their parents, and start a romance.

64 Ibid., 36.

65 "Surge in Female Students," *MS*, December 15, 1926, 4.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

To understand why female students' romance was problematic, it is necessary to understand society's expectations of them. Based on sheer numbers, they might have been a negligible audience group. As of 1925, only about 52,000 girls were in the public primary schools, and the approximately 2,000 female students in secondary schools.⁷⁰ The rarity of Korean female students in the 1920s became more apparent given the total number of Korean women, which was approximately 9.5 million in 1925.⁷¹

Uncommon as they were, there were great expectations placed upon Korean female students as educated young women. Women's historian Hyaewol Choi points out that women's school education was aimed at raising the future Wise Mother and Good Wife (*hyŏnmo yangchŏ*): while the slogan was new, the idea that this slogan propagated was nourished by the old inside-outside notion.⁷² The basic idea behind Wise Mother and Good Wife was that the educated women would reform the home, raise children in modern ways, and take better care of their husbands to contribute to the country's development. In view of this aim, "in the curricula of girls' schools, the importance of the domestic sciences to train young Korean women to set a splendid dinner table and manage a household efficiently ultimately stressed the role of women as mothers."⁷³

Female students also posed a new hope for Korea's independence from Japan. Nationalist intellectuals praised female students of public secondary schools for "standing in the front row and yelling out 'hurray' [for the independence of Korea] even though they had been indoctrinated with the assimilation ideology day and night"⁷⁴ during the March First Movement (*Samil Undong*), a nationwide protest against the Japanese colonial rule in 1919. News of a ten-year-old female student from Tongrae, who jumped in front of a police officer as he was about to shoot at the protesters' march and challenged him to fire at her instead, circulated through the underground newspaper; her action had overwhelmed the officer and made him cry.⁷⁵

70 Data extracted from Korean Statistical Information Service (hereafter KOSIS), "Kongnip Kodŭng Yŏhakkyo Sanghwang [State of Public Secondary Schooling for Women]," http://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=999&tblId=DT_999N_43811014&conn_path=I2; "Sarip Yŏja Kotŭng Pot'ong Hakkyo Sanghwang [State of Private Secondary Schooling for Women]," https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=999&tblId=DT_999N_44111014&conn_path=I2.

71 KOSIS, "Haengjŏng Kuyŏk/Sŏng/Kagu Chonglyu Pyŏl In'gu mit Kagu [Population and household by Area, Sex, and Type of household]," http://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=DT_11N2502&conn_path=I2.

72 "For Korean women, who were now deemed to have the same human rights as men, the physical engagement in the public space was a radical departure from the centuries-long *naeoebŏp* (inside-outside rule) that confined women to the inner chambers and, as a result, kept them out of public life. This transition, of course, was not immediate for Korean women. Residual forces of the inside-outside ideology doggedly remained. This tension between the public and the private, I will argue, ultimately culminated in the modern notion of the family as the central foundation for a modern nation-state, with women's roles reconfigured according to the ideology of *hyŏnmo yangchŏ* (wise mother, good wife)." Choi, *Gender and Mission*, 19. Original in English.

73 Choi, *Gender and Mission*, 102.

74 "Yŏhaksaeng ŭi Ŭiyong [Female Students' Loyal Courage]," *Chosŏn Tongnip Shinmun* 2, March 2, 1919, https://db.history.go.kr/samil/home/manifesto/select_manifesto_list.do?search_word=%E5%A5%B3%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%EC%9D%98%20%E7%BE%A9%E5%8B%87.

75 "Siwi Undong ŭi Husok Podo [A Subsequent Report on the Protest Movement]," *Chayu Minbo*, April 3, 1919.

Figure 7: Police register card of Yu Kwan-sun.



Source: Courtesy of the National Institute of Korean History (Korean History Database).

A prime embodiment of the notion of female students as the nation's new hope was Yu Kwansun (1902–20; see figure 7). The student of Ehwa Women's Secondary School became a symbolic figure of the movement after she was caught by the colonial police due to her participation in the protest and was tortured to death at the notorious Sōdaemun prison.⁷⁶ Female students' heroic activism during the March First Movement evoked the hope that educated women would contribute to Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule. Some observers considered the increase in students itself as a result of the March First Movement. An American observer reported in 1924 that Koreans were showing a growing interest in sending their children to schools. He understood this new trend as an aftermath of the March First Movement in 1919 against Japan's "application of naked force."⁷⁷ He wrote: "A few years ago—before 1919—the people were indifferent or hostile to the schools. Now they are eager to have their children attend, and the problem is to take care of them all."⁷⁸ His comment implies that the active participation of young Korean students in the anti-colonial movement might have demonstrated the necessity of school education, which, in turn, could have led to an increase in the number of Korean youth in the school system.

Indeed, the number of Korean students rapidly increased starting from 1919. The number of students enrolled in Korean public primary schools exceeded 100,000 for the

76 For the impact of Yu Kwansun's protest on her cohort during and after the March First Movement see Kwōn Podŭrae, 3-wŏl 1-il ūi Pam: P'ongnyŏk ūi Segi e Kkum Kkumŭn P'yŏnghwa ūi Kkum [*The Night of March First: A Dream of Peace in the Century of Violence*] (P'aju: Tolbegae, 2019), 387–89.

77 Ralston Hayden, "Japan's New Policy in Korea and Formosa," *Foreign Affairs* 2, no. 3 (1924), 474–87; see 474.

78 Hayden, "Japan's New Policy," 484.

first time in 1920. Between 1919 and 1925, this figure recorded a growth of about 10–50 percent every year and reached 315,000 in 1925.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, there were significantly fewer students in secondary education than in primary, indicating its prestigious status. As of 1925, there were about 9,100 Korean male students in public and private secondary schools.⁸⁰ In comparison, the number of female students attending the same level of schools was 84 percent and 78 percent less, respectively. Because of their rarity, female students became a burning focal point of public interest.

Shortly after the March First Movement, the narrative and imagery of female students gained a new hue. Instead of political activists, female students were consumed as a subject of gossip, “whose thoughts, attitudes, fashion, and private lives became almost a public obsession”⁸¹ in the 1920s and 1930s. The theatergoing and criticisms of Korean female students were situated in this atmosphere of post-1919 society, where their desire to explore the world outside their homes and schools and social expectations collided. As female students developed interests in romantic movies, their contemporaries were alarmed because they defied the idealized role of future Wise Mothers and Good Wives and the nation's new political hope.

Sexuality was a realm where the collision became most apparent. As students' moviegoing was considered “a study of kissing”⁸² and “a field trip for love,”⁸³ female students' movie watching was primarily interpreted as their active exploration of sexuality. For instance, in March 1927, the popular magazine *Pyŏlgŏn'gon* highlighted female students' moviegoing as “a strange phenomenon.”⁸⁴ According to an anonymous writer,

79 KOSIS, “Kongnip Pot'ong Hakkyo Kyowŏn mit Saengdo [Teachers and students in Korean public primary schools],” https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=999&tblId=DT_999N_4281114&conn_path=12.

80 KOSIS, “Kwallip Kodŭng Pot'ong Hakkyo sanghwang [Situations of the Korean Public Secondary Schools],” https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=999&tblId=DT_999N_57711211&conn_path=12; “Sarip Chunghakkyo Sanghwang (wŏn kodŭng pot'ong hakkyo) [Situations of the Korean Private Secondary Schools],” https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=999&tblId=DT_999N_203042&conn_path=12.

81 Choi, *Gender and Mission*, 104.

82 Songjaksang & Sŏrungsaeng, “Pyŏnjang Kija Amya T'amsagi [The Story of an Investigation Through the Dark Night by Journalists in Disguise],” in *Pyŏlgŏn'gon* (hereafter *PG*; January 1927), 64.

83 Samdae Pugung and P'ayŏng, “Puryang Namnyŏ Ilmang T'ajin, Pyŏnjang Kija Yagan T'ambanggi [Catching Prodigal Men and Women with One Throw: The Story of an Investigation Through the Night by Journalists in Disguise],” *PG* (February 1928), 121.

84 “Kŭkchang Mandam [Humorous Commentary on Theaters],” *PG* (March 1927), 94. *Pyŏlgŏn'gon* was published from November 1926 to August 1934 by the publishing house Kaebŏksa. Initially founded in 1920 with the aim of enlightening and politically awakening the Korean public, the Kaebŏksa successfully launched the magazine *Kaebŏk*. However, as the August 1926 issue was banned and all copies were confiscated and destroyed, the magazine was discontinued. Consequently, the publisher established *Pyŏlgŏn'gon* with the motto “Hobby and Practical Use (*Ch'wimi wa Shirik*),” shifting the focus to providing entertainment-oriented reading material. According to Kim Ŭn'gyu, the magazine was affiliated with the Ch'ŏndogyo (Religion of Heavenly Way) and its religious social movement, which sought social reform and independence through cultural endeavors. “1920/30-nyŏndae Kŭndae Ch'wimi Tongmul Chapchi Pyŏlgŏn'gon ŭl t'onghan Kaebŏksa ŭi Maech'e Parhaeng Chŏllyak e taehan Yŏn'gu: Parhaeng Chuch'e, P'yŏnjip Panghyang, Parhaeng

female students “account[ed] for more than half” of women in the auditorium by then and did not fail to shriek at every kissing scene—as “just woken up sexually”⁸⁵ as they were. For the author, the fact that young women enjoyed the graphic representation of intimacy was “astonishing.”⁸⁶

Another essay, written by the popular playwright Yi Sögu, bluntly expressed the anxiety of romantic motion pictures’ affective power on female students. He claimed that motion pictures would sexually activate them and would eventually ruin their lives:

When a love scene reaches its peak, a youthful exclamation comes from ladies’ seats. We all have seen the second or third graders of women’s schools having their hands around the other’s waist and repeatedly howling “*aigo* [oh, my].” In this way, they have too many chances to mislead themselves. As they are virgin women who are awakening sexually, it is impossible that their minds remain silent after [listening to] the film narrator’s sweet explanations and seeing the demonstration of love shown on the screen. Thus, the desire for the other sex explodes [...] and [the girl student audience] goes to parks, Wölmido island, and theaters seeking a lover. However, all she has is a history of prostitution and disgrace when she wakes up from the dream.⁸⁷

In his imagination, female students who frequently watched romantic films would not only end up with a failed romance but “a history of prostitution and disgrace.” It was an abrupt argument to make, even against the background that of that time, since women’s pursuit of romance and sexual desire was regarded as disgraceful for them and their families.

While there is no reliable account of individual women’s fates after watching romantic movies, there are indications that movies influenced both the dating culture of the youth and its reception in colonial Korea. The youth of Seoul met and dated in playhouses and movie theaters. By the early 1930s, young Korean men asked women to go to movie theaters, parks, the Han River for a boat ride, and the hot springs in Wölmido.⁸⁸ Some

Ch’eje rül Chungsim üro [On Kaeb’yöksa’s Publishing Strategy in the 1920s and 30s through the Modern Hobby Magazine *Pyölgön’gon*. Focusing on the Publishing Entity, Editorial Direction, and Publishing System],” in *Han’guk Ch’ulp’anhak Yöngu* 39(2), 5–33; see 18–19. Kim Kyöngmi’s recent study found that *Pyölgön’gon* reinforced its focus on entertainment while reducing the price from 50 chönn to 5 chönn in 1931, leading to the explosive popularization and broadening of readership, including the working class, for this magazine. In the first two months following this reconceptualization, the circulation of this magazine increased by 20,000 copies. “Pyölgön’gon 5-chönn Chapchi üi Maech’e Chölyyak kwa Taejungsöng üi Yökhak Kwan’gye [The Dynamic Relationship between the Media Strategy of the 5-chönn Magazine *Pyölgön’gon* and Its Popularity],” in *Han’guk Ömun Hakhoe* 148, 131–63; see 135–41.

85 “Humorous Commentary on Theaters,” 94.

86 Ibid.

87 Yi Sögu, “Kyöngsöng’üi Jassü: Söul Mat Soul Ch’ öngjo [Jazz of Seoul: The Taste and Atmosphere of Seoul],” *PG* (September 1929), 36.

88 See Mumyöngch’o, “Yöghaksaeng ül T’alnaenün Ilgop Kaji üi Tae Hamjöng [Seven Traps for Female Students],” *PG* (May 1931), 25.

Korean students purposefully went to Japanese theaters instead of Korean ones to evade social control and “to enjoy a secret rendezvous.”⁸⁹

Furthermore, the new generation of Koreans who sought an alternative to the traditional form of intimacy eagerly took movies as new references to express their emotions. Yi Sögu claimed that young Koreans were writing love letters with an exaggerated pathos which was typical to film narrators’ explanations during romantic movies.⁹⁰ The youth adopted certain behaviors from Western romantic movies and plays, too. A 1936 editorial of the popular magazine *Samchölli* depicted how a student couple that the author had observed flexibly changed their behavior and pretended not to know each other in front of others in a specific way, which he found to “resemble Western movies to an unbelievable degree.”⁹¹ Adopting the rhetoric and behavior from the movies, the younger generation explored their sexualities in new ways. The new mannerisms of showing affection were, in a sense, a performance of modernity, as they took place in public and the witnesses, too, were familiar with the movies so that they could easily see the connection between what they saw on-screen and on Seoul’s streets.

While foregrounding female students’ *yönae* as a sign of their promiscuity, the Korean media concealed or reduced men’s involvement in the romance. “Seven Great Traps for Female Students,” an article published by *Pyölgön’gon* in 1931, exemplifies men’s contradictory urge to protect their female kin from other men and to seduce women to fulfill their desire.⁹² This article, written as a dialogue between “me” and a friend whose younger sister entered a school in Seoul, informed readers how to seduce naïve female students—including asking them out to theaters—while gossiping about women who were raped, betrayed, harassed by men and became mentally ill or chose to die after jumping into a romance.⁹³ In combination with the detailed description of seductive scenarios, the conclusion sounded more like an encouragement of sexual assault and victim-blaming than a warning for men:

So, in the end, it comes to the point that women are still weak. When men tempt them in the first place, women are hesitatingly accepting their advances instead of pulling themselves together. Even when the women realize the men’s true intentions, they would not dare to expose the men at fault because they are afraid of letting others know that they were robbed of their virginity.⁹⁴

Instead of telling men not to rape women, the Korean media focused on warning women. For example, *Pyölgön’gon*’s satirical commentary cautioned that “women should not rush along even if their [female] friends encourage them to go to Japanese theaters. People

89 Sojebu, “Haehak P’ungja Ch’un’gye Tae Ch’önggyöl [Humorous and Ironical Cleaning of the Spring],” *PG* (May 1930), 69.

90 Yi, “Jazz of Seoul,” 34.

91 “Yöhaksaeng Haengsang Pogoso” [A Report on Female Students’ Behavior], *Samchölli* (hereafter *SL*) (November 1936), 196.

92 Mumyöngch’o, “Seven Traps,” 23–25.

93 *Ibid.*, 23–25 and 33.

94 Mumyöngch’o, “Seven Traps,” 33.

will already be laughing and pointing at you behind your back.”⁹⁵ Writers and publishers excused such biased warning under the premise that female students were to become “wives and mothers soon, whose habits and behavior could infiltrate the home,”⁹⁶ omitting the equally important role of men as future husbands and fathers.

Some even asserted that male students were only victims of female students when it came to sexuality. In an essay titled “On Female Students,” the novelist Pang In’gün boldly insisted that “it was always the girl students who showed interest first,”⁹⁷ even if boys seemed to seduce girls. According to his logic, men were mere “idiots” and “slaves of girl students.”⁹⁸ He asserted that female students had to take special care of their bodies and minds because they could be “easily addicted to romance.”⁹⁹ If a young woman entered marriage “as a withered flower” after experiencing “all kinds of things” or pre-marital sex, there might be “no chance for the home’s prosperity.”¹⁰⁰ According to him, female students were to become “precious mothers to bear the new Korea,”¹⁰¹ thus any romance before the marriage would harm her future home.

Echoing these views on female students’ spectatorship and responsibility, women’s schools tried to control the movie watching. Teachers from women’s schools gathered to discuss how to prevent their students from going to theaters.¹⁰² Some women’s schools in Taegu, a city in the southern part of the Korean peninsula, even expelled their pupils when they were caught in playhouses.¹⁰³

Although rare, female students’ watching of romantic movies did find some support in the public debate. In an essay titled “The Cinema and Female Students” published in the cinema magazine *Munye Yŏnghwa* (Art Movie) in 1928, an anonymous author insisted that young women could gain insights into men-women relationships through romantic mo-

95 Sojebu, “Humourous and Ironical Cleaning,” 69.

96 “Report on Female Students,” 200.

97 Pang In’gün, “Yŏhaksang Ron [On Female Students],” *Tonggwang* (December 1931), 55.

98 Pang, “On Female Students,” 55. The argument that men might be, by nature, driven by their libido and thus cannot be held accountable for their sexual acts can also be observed in the Weimar Republic. Max von Gruber, a medical doctor, claimed that “most men are entirely without will against the power of their sexual urges,” thus “nothing can be hoped for from the stupid and weak masses” as he attended Reichsgesundheitsrat in 1919 to discuss the spread of STDs among soldiers (as cited in Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth-Century Berlin*, Cambridge 2010, 72). While similar claims have been made across time and space, the temporal and thematic similarities between the German and colonial Korean cases do require further inspection. A hypothetical assumption is that this perception of men’s sexuality in the context of STD prevention might have migrated from Europe to East Asia with the popularization of sexology. On reception and development of sexology in Japan see Sabine Frühstück, *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). This remains a task for future research. I extend my deep gratitude to the anonymous peer reviewer who provided me with this valuable information.

99 Pang, “On Female Students,” 55.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid., 56.

102 Pödl, “K’inema wa Yŏhaksang [The Cinema and Female Students],” *Munye Yŏnghwa* (1928), 38.

103 Various Authors, “Taegu Yŏsŏng Chwadamhoe [A Roundtable of Women from Taegu],” *SK* (May 1934), 209–15; refer to 213.

tion pictures.¹⁰⁴ Using his niece as an example, the author depicted how female student audiences actively interpreted and questioned the images and narratives in motion pictures. When asked by the author, his sixteen-year-old niece, a cinephile, summed up the plot of a romantic motion picture she recently watched. In this love story, the male character becomes furious after finding out about the female character's past lover, although he, too, had had a lover before her. Pointing out his double standard, the girl commented that his reaction was "ridiculous." As the author showed empathy towards the male character, she refuted him: "Why should he be entitled to get angry [about her past]? What right does he have? They both have the same kind of past."¹⁰⁵

Her response exemplified how female students became aware of gendered inequalities in both films and their own lives even while consuming the representation of idealized romance on the screen. In this specific case, the young cinephile touched upon the contemporary critique of chastity that had been a unilateral obligation on women.¹⁰⁶ Such an attack on the cult of female chastity was regarded radical in the 1920s: the major women's magazines remained silent about it, while the most provocative periodical titled *Sōng'ae*, literally, "sexual love," published head-on critiques of the unequally imposed duty of chastity, which were partially removed through censorship.¹⁰⁷ Unlike male intellectuals' misconception that all young women would pursue romance after watching romantic motion pictures, some female student audiences critically grappled with what they saw and formed their own opinions about relationships.

"The Cinema and Female Students" underlined that watching movies helped female students by citing a self-proclaimed "modern boy" and "expert of developing romantic relationships with girl students."¹⁰⁸ The modern boy insisted that female students who watched motion pictures were not to be fooled, whereas others could be tempted—"as fast as in three hours."¹⁰⁹ Following the essay's logic, watching romantic motion pictures might even be advisable for young women because they could provide them with indirect experiences in romance, thus preventing them from falling into actual romance. In this way, the essay advocated the female students' spectatorship. Concurrently, this essay shared similar expectations of young, educated women with opponents of their movie watching in that young women should neither become sexually active nor pursue romantic relationships regardless of the influence of films.

104 Pōdūl, "Cinema and Female Students," 38.

105 Ibid.

106 Lee, *History of Chastity*, 34.

107 See Kim Ch'ōnpa, "Chōngjo Kwannyōm ūi Pip'an [Criticizing the Notion of Chastity]," *Sōng'ae* (April 1924), 29–33; refer to 32.

108 Pōdūl, "Cinema and Female Students," 38.

109 Ibid.

4.2 Redefining Marriage and Intimacy

Influences of Eugenics and Social Darwinism

The discourse of Korean female students at movie theaters captures the junction of the long-standing *naeoe* principle, newly formulated social expectations of the elite women, prevailing eroticism in Western movies, and young women's zeal for exploration and leisure. However, female students' consumption of romantic movies was closely related to the reform of sexuality and marriage taking place as a part of the nation's modernization process, too. In particular, the contempt and fascination projected onto female students' bodies in theaters reveal the conflict between the desire for the so-called Love's Supremacy and the biopolitics of eugenic marriage.

The reformist zeal at the end of the nineteenth century seized marriage custom in Korea as well. The 1894 Kabo Reform brought two new rules: firstly, widowed noblewomen were now allowed to marry again;¹¹⁰ secondly, the Chosŏn government set the minimum age for marriage at sixteen for women and twenty for men, putting an end to the custom of marriage between children (*chohon*).¹¹¹

Noble women's remarriage was strictly forbidden during the Chosŏn Dynasty as women of this stratum were considered a moral example.¹¹² The feminist Confucian scholar Lee Sook-in points out that the lesson that "a woman should not serve two husbands" was considered the equivalent of the doctrine that "one should not serve two kings," the fundament of the hierarchical state order.¹¹³ As a means of keeping the Confucian social order upright, the Chosŏn government punished women's remarriage and discriminated against their male offspring when they tried to reach for official positions.¹¹⁴ By legalizing widows' remarriage, the government finally yielded to centuries-long appeals for their humanitarian aid due to the precarity, the hardship of remaining chaste, and vulnerability to crisis that widows faced.¹¹⁵

Meanwhile, criticisms of marriage between children served a different purpose. The historian Chŏn Ponggwon explained the custom of early marriage as a product of the Confucian notion of family duty.¹¹⁶ Giving birth to a son and passing on ritual services for ancestors to the male heir was considered an essential duty for an individual. Thus, parents and elders of clans arranged marriages for the younger generation to increase the chances of obtaining a male heir.¹¹⁷ Besides, as "the average life expectancy was ex-

110 Lee Sook-in points out that ban on noblewomen's remarriage was controversial ever since its enforcement in 1485. *History of Chastity*, 308.

111 *Kojong Sillok*, June 28, 1894.

112 Lee, *History of Chastity*, 59.

113 *Ibid.*, 298.

114 See *ibid.*, 299.

115 See *ibid.*, 304–14.

116 Chŏn Ponggwon, *Kyŏngsŏng Komin Sangdamso: Tokja Sangdam ūro Pon Kūndae ūi Sŏng kwa Sarang* [Seoul Counseling Service: Sexuality and Love of the Modern Times Through Readers' Counseling] (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 2014), 23.

117 Yoo, *Politics of Gender*, 22–23.

tremely short due to starvation, warlords, and diseases,”¹¹⁸ early marriage flourished in Chosŏn.

Core to child marriage was the interest of the patriarchal clan to continue its lineage. The reformist calls for abolishing the early marriage custom were based on the premise that marriage should prioritize the interests of the Korean nation as a whole over that of the clan. Instead of gaining a male heir who would continue the ancestral ritual, Western-oriented reformists of the Independence Club argued that marriage should contribute to the nation by producing physically and mentally fit Koreans, which they believed to be essential for national prosperity and competitiveness. An editorial in the February 12, 1898 issue of *Tongnip Shinmun* on Korea's early marriage exemplifies this line of argument:

The marriage between a man and a woman is a matter of great importance in life. However, it is related to those who marry and *the whole country*, posterity, and *the rise and fall of the race*. Thus, every country regulates marriage by law and forces a man and a woman to receive approval from the government and the church to become a married couple. The people of other nations nowadays are independent, *of strong race*, and have *full-grown bodies* because the marriage law is rigorously enforced to a certain degree. Abroad, the marriage law first regulates the age of men and women; a man should be over twenty-one, and a woman nineteen. Unlike in Qing China or Korea, no stranger makes a match between a girl and a boy who do not know each other. Instead, when grown up, a man and a woman voluntarily promise to become a married couple in freedom. Then they get governmental and church approval, perform a wedding ceremony with good manners in front of relatives and friends. From that day, the two bodies become one and share the life, death, ups and downs together (emphasis added).¹¹⁹

Notably, the editorial asserted that state intervention into marriage was necessary because marriage and reproduction would decide “the rise and fall of the race.” The Western-oriented intellectuals behind *Tongnip Shinmun* set foreign nations' characteristics and bodily features as the ideal and suggested regulating marriage in order to create a “strong race” with an “independent” mindset and “full-grown bodies.” This editorial proves that the reform-oriented public discourse of sexuality and marriage was from very early on bound to the idea of racial competitiveness and nation-building.

The argument that Koreans should regulate marriage age to improve national health was disseminated by reform-oriented intellectuals starting in the late nineteenth century. Criticizing early marriage in Korea and advocating Western marital custom, another editorial in the *Tongnip Shinmun* in 1896 pointed out that “what is most detrimental to the nation is that children marry before their bones grow, and *their children are not strong enough, and the human seeds are gradually reduced* (emphasis added).”¹²⁰ A decade later, Yun Ch'iho, a Western-oriented reformist and former member of the Independence Club, affirmed in a public speech that “India, China, and Chosŏn are the Eastern countries where

118 Chŏn, *Seoul Counseling Service*, 22.

119 “Namnyŏ kan ūi honin ... [A marriage between a man and a woman ...],” TS, February 12, 1898, 1. The remarks on race are discussed later in this section.

120 “Namp'yŏn kwa anae ran kŏt ūn ... [A husband and a wife are ...],” TS, June 6, 1896, 1.

the custom of child marriage is rampant, and unfortunately, these three countries are weak.”¹²¹ In doing so, he indicated that marriage between children might have led to foreign dominance of these countries.

Inherent to these calls was the eugenic and Social Darwinian understanding of marriage and reproduction. Eugenics can be summarized as “the rational planning of, and intervention into, human breeding, the application of *selection* to humans based on statistical probability and an understanding of the mechanisms of heredity.”¹²² This idea emerged under the influence of European biological science, which discovered “patterns of human, plant, and animal heredity”¹²³ starting in the eighteenth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin’s (1809–82) *Origin of Species* (1859) and the theory of natural selection motivated his cousin, Francis Galton (1822–1911), to establish the ideas and practices of eugenics.¹²⁴ Through *Hereditary Genius* (1869) and other publications, he asserted that humankind should control its evolutionary process by allowing people with *good* mental and physical traits to reproduce while disqualifying those with *bad* qualities for breeding using state violence in order to “improve” human populations.¹²⁵ Although first met with skepticism, his project of eugenics was institutionalized in 1907 with the establishment of the Francis Galton Laboratory for the Study of National Eugenics at University College London in Britain.¹²⁶

Although the term eugenics (*usaenghak*) became popularized in the 1920s, editorials in the *Tongnip Shinmun* and Yun’s speech show that Korean reform-oriented intellectuals were already familiar with its core ideas since the late nineteenth century. My research into the diary of Yun Ch’iho from November 5, 1892 shows that the “pioneering Social Darwinist”¹²⁷ became acquainted with the eugenic perspective during his studies in the U.S. Comparing the poor manners of Lottie Berry, a daughter of a streetcar driver, to the excellent manners of children from better social standing, Yun noted: “Compare this little girl [Lottie] with Faith, the bright and sweet girl of Professor Harris, or with Sarah Br., or with Mary McClure—all nearly of the same age. *We cannot then help believing in the hereditary transmission of culture and refinement* (emphasis added).”¹²⁸

Historian Vladimir Tikhonov identifies Social Darwinism “as a common, unifying mode of thinking for almost all the major groups and personalities of the modernization-oriented intelligentsia”¹²⁹ in early twentieth-century Korea. He explains that Her-

121 Yun Ch’iho, “Taehan Chaganghoe Yönsöl Chohon üi Ihae [A Speech at the Korean Self-Strengthening Society: Understanding Early Marriage],” *HS*, July 23, 1906, 3.

122 Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford, “Introduction: Eugenics and the Modern World,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, eds. Bashford and Levine (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3–26; refer to 5.

123 Levine and Bashford, “Eugenics and Modern World,” 4.

124 Diane B. Paul and James Moore, “The Darwinian Context: Evolution and Inheritance,” in *History of Eugenics*, 27–42; 27.

125 Paul and Moore, “Darwinian Context,” 28–31.

126 *Ibid.*, 37.

127 Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism*, 8.

128 Yun Ch’iho, *Yun Ch’iho Ilgi* 2 [Yun Ch’iho’s Diary], November 5, 1892, 404, http://db.history.go.kr/i/d/sa_025_0030_0110_0050. Original in English.

129 Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism*, 8.

bert Spencer (1820–1903), particularly his famous phrase “survival of the fittest” from 1852, contributed to the establishment of “the cluster of ideas”¹³⁰ named Social Darwinism. Spencer’s prospect that the lack of resources would lead to competition for the sake of survival found resonance across political, social, national, and religious borders.¹³¹ Tikhonov identifies three main factors for the widespread acceptance of this idea in the Korean discourse: firstly, there was “a certain demand for a new all-explaining, all-encompassing creed”¹³² that the crisis of Neo-Confucianism created. Secondly, Social Darwinism provided Koreans with explanations for their experiences of international conflicts and threats from foreign powers; as a result, “the struggle for survival was generally understood, first and foremost, as rivalry between nations (or sometimes even whole races), not persons”¹³³ in the Korean discourse. Thirdly, Koreans with higher education could ensure their hegemony over other Koreans even under colonial rule by self-fashioning themselves as bearers of “scientific”¹³⁴ knowledge to improve the nation.

Although “Social Darwinism was hardly pivotal for Japanese nationalism as such,” it was “highly relevant as an ideological background for Japan’s colonial enterprises”¹³⁵ during the 1900s and 1910s. Japanese authorities discussed the ban on spicy food, child marriage, and opium in Korea because these “three evils”¹³⁶ would exhaust Koreans’ vigor, which would negatively impact the efforts of the Japanese administration in Korea. After the Protectorate Treaty, the Korean government changed the age limit for marriage again on August 14, 1907, in line with the Japanese Civil Law: fifteen for women and seventeen for men.¹³⁷ This age limit was reaffirmed through the Government-General’s Ordinance No. 13 in 1922.¹³⁸ For the colonial government, the age limit for marriage was a way to enhance Koreans’ industrial productivity as well. As Korean female factory workers used to stop working after marriage, the Japanese economist Takahashi Kameikichi argued that child marriage was “unfavorable to industries in Korea.”¹³⁹

Despite the repeated ban, the custom of marriage between children persisted in Korea. Shortly after the ban on early marriage was reinforced, the *Taehan Maeil Shinbo* reported that because people made their children marry secretly in the night, the Minister of Law imposed stronger measures which held that children born under such secret marriage were illegitimate.¹⁴⁰ As the Government-General started taking the census in 1912, of the 121,993 newly wedded women, 21,564 people (17.7 percent) were found to be un-

130 Ibid., 4.

131 Ibid., 4–5.

132 Ibid., 13.

133 Ibid., 13.

134 See *ibid.*, 14–16.

135 See *ibid.*, 17–18.

136 “Han’guk Shijōng e Kwanhayō [On the Korean Administration],” *Documents of the Japanese Embassy* 26 [Documents of the Japanese Embassy in Korea], http://db.history.go.kr/id/jh_026r_0110_0250.

137 Chōn, *Seoul Counseling Service*, 26.

138 Yoo, *Politics of Gender*, 156.

139 Takahashi Kameikichi, *Gendai Chosen Keizei Ron*, 407, as cited in Yoo, *Politics of Gender*, 157.

140 “Amhon to Mot Hanün Pōp [Law Forbids Secret Marriages],” August 22, 1907, *TMS*, 4.

der fifteen.¹⁴¹ Men's early marriage was not surveyed until 1920; however, 51,974, or 42.6 percent, of grooms in 1912 were aged between seventeen and nineteen, which was still too young according to the age limit for marriage of twenty stipulated by that the Kabo Reform.¹⁴² Consequently, the Government-General revised the Korean Civil Law in 1923 and implemented a solid deterrent to nullify marriages between men under the age of seventeen and women under fifteen.¹⁴³

Besides the intention to improve the Korean nation and Japanese colonial endeavors to boost productivity, the humanitarian problem of child marriages became a relevant issue from the 1920s onwards.¹⁴⁴ Kim Hyegyŏng, a historian of the family system in Korea, found that child marriage was regarded as an infringement of children's rights to be educated and handled as respectable human beings, as the children's rights movement became popularized in the 1920s.¹⁴⁵ Through this movement, colonial Korean society began reconsidering the role of children from that of practitioners of filial duty to persons in need of protection and education.¹⁴⁶

This new line of argument was amalgamated with the Social Darwinian criticism of child marriage in the 1920s. For instance, "The Harms of an Early Marriage," an article published in the women's magazine *Kajŏng Chapchi* (The Home Magazine), argued that Chosŏn Koreans had forced their children to marry to please the elders in the family, to retire from the household labor, and to imitate custom of the aristocrats. The result was, according to the article, the inadequate education at home on the one hand, and the physical problems of the posterity, on the other hand:

Entering a marriage before a person is fully grown up is like hastening a life to age even before it becomes mature. Parents might say that they made their children marry because they cherish them, yet the result is that the parents sentence their children to death. [...] *Everyone knows that the people of Chosŏn become very ill and ugly, mainly because of child marriage.* [...] How could immature persons be good at parenting when they give birth to children before they become mature? As children are raised and taught improperly, society is getting damaged more and more—so much harm is done by one's mistake. [...] [In early marriage,] a father does not choose a woman whom his son likes but a daughter-in-law that he likes. [...] Eventually, the divorce issue emerges, which is a significant moral problem (emphasis added).¹⁴⁷

To eliminate the custom of child marriage, *Kajŏng Chapchi* printed a declaration in front (see figure 8). "Please do not commit the sin of early marriage in your family, dear readers.

141 KOSIS, "Marriage by the Age of Husband and Wife," http://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=999&tblId=DT_999N_020037&conn_path=l2.

142 Ibid.

143 Chŏn, *Seoul Counseling Service*, 26.

144 Yoo, *Politics of Gender*, 172–76.

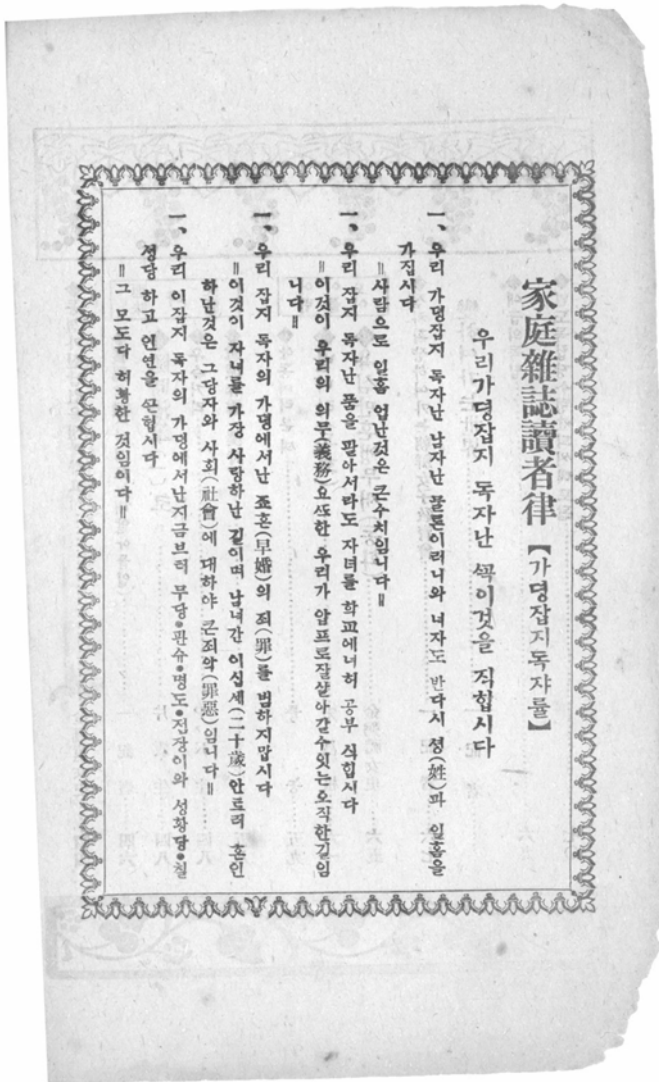
145 See Kim Hyegyŏng, *Shingminji ha Kŭndae Kajok ūi Hyŏngsŏng kwa Chendŏ* [The Formation of the Modern Family and Gender under the Colonial Rule] (P'aju: Ch'angbi, 2006), 184–86.

146 See Kim, *Formation of Modern Family*, 185–94.

147 Yi Chŏngro, "Chohon ūi P'yehae [Harms of Early Marriage]," *Kajŏng Chapchi* (May 1922), 18–20; the quote is from 19–20.

This is the way to love your children the most, and [making children] marry under the age of twenty for both men and women is a great sin for the persons and the society.”¹⁴⁸

Figure 8: The Declaration for the Readers of Kajōng Chapchi (May 1922).



Source: Courtesy of Hyundam Mun'go.

148 "Kajōng Chapchi Tokja Ryul [Kajōng Chapchi Readers' Rule]," *Kajōng Chapchi* (May 1922, page number not provided).

The legalization of widowed noblewomen's remarriage exemplified that such reform was partially a response to contemporary needs. However, the criticisms of child marriage and the state intervention into it were a means of regulating sexuality for macroscopic political aims. In this regard, Western-oriented Korean reformists and the Japanese colonizers shared an interest in regulating child marriage and enhancing Koreans' physical and mental ability through state intervention. Although the recognition of children's right to education changed the debate in the 1920s, the Social Darwinian understanding of early marriage remained.

Influence of Ellen Key

While the prosperity of the Korean nation, colonial politics and economy, and the hardships of individuals emerged as new rationales behind marriage reform, some Koreans began seeing individual happiness as the goal of marriage and intimacy. According to the literary historian Kwŏn Podŭrae, this tendency reached its peak in the early 1920s, making it "the epoch of love (*yŏnae ŭi shidae*)."¹⁴⁹

Kwŏn reveals that three factors were pivotal for the reconceptualization of intimacy during the 1920s. Firstly, the topic gained momentum through the term *yŏnae*, a translation of the word love which exclusively referred to intimacy in an affectionate relationship, while other related Korean words had a patriotic, filial, or religious connotation.¹⁵⁰ Secondly, love became a relevant agenda for the social and political discourse of reform in Korea through the popular reception of the Swedish writer Ellen Key. Thirdly, some of the new generations of Koreans, including educated women and men, modern girls (*modan kŏl*) and boys (*modan poi*), as well as feminist New Women (*shin yŏsŏng*), evoked heated debates in the media by challenging gender norms.¹⁵¹

Notably, the introduction of the new notion, its theorization, and the emergence of a young generation that actively pursued this new ideal of intimacy had preceded in

149 Kwŏn, *Epoch of Love*.

150 *Yŏnae* (C: *liàn'ài*, J: *ren'ai*) originated from a Chinese neologism of the nineteenth century composed of two Chinese characters that meant love: 戀 (K: *yŏn*, C: *liàn*, J: *ren*) and 愛 (K: *ae*, C: *ài*, J: *ai*). As previous studies of its etymology have shown, the new word emerged first as a translation of *love* or *amour* in China, and later spread to Japan and Korea. In China, Walter Henry Medhurst's English and Chinese Dictionary (Ying Hua zidian, 1847–48) first coined the term *liàn'ài* as a translation of "to love tenderly," which was picked up by Nakamura Manasao in 1897 for the translation of Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help*. From the late 1900s onwards, *yŏnae* was sporadically used in Korea until it became a controversial issue in the early 1920s. See Hsiao-yen Peng, *Dandyism and Transcultural Modernity: The Dandy, the Flâneur, and the Translator in 1930s in Shanghai, Tokyo, and Paris* (Routledge: London and New York, 2010), 189; see also Kwŏn, *Epoch of Love*, 15.

151 Kwŏn, *Epoch of Love*, refer to 32–36; 43–53; 58–67 and 128–34. According to Kim Sujin, in Korean, the terms *shin yŏsŏng* and *shin yŏja* were used interchangeably as synonyms. However, in China, the former carried connotations of bourgeois individualists, while in Japan, the latter referred to Japanese women who sympathized with the feminist group Seitō. Kim Sujin, *Shin Yŏsŏng, Kūndae ŭi Kwaing: Shingminji Chosŏn ŭi Shin Yŏsŏng Tamnon kwa Chendŏ Chŏngch'i, 1920–1934* [New Women, the Abundance in the Modern Times: The Discourse of New Women and the Gender Politics of Colonial Korea, 1920–1934] (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch'ulp'an, 2009), 219.

Japan.¹⁵² Japanese historian Kanno Satomi called the Taisho Era (1912–26) the Japanese “era of love (*renai no jidai*)”¹⁵³ in her 2001 study. Kanno and Kwŏn commonly underline that the romanticized ideal of love was able to influence the younger generation through bits of knowledge spread via books and articles. Mainly, the Japanese reception of Ellen Key and Kuriyagawa Hakuson’s book *Kindai no Ren’aikan* (*Modern Views on Love*) played a significant part in the 1920s reform discourse and practice of love in Japan and Korea.

Ellen Key was an influential figure worldwide during the first half of the twentieth century who questioned concepts of parenthood, childhood, sexuality, and women’s rights. Her book *Barnets Århundrade* (*The Century of the Child*, 1900) was translated into nine European languages during the first decade of the 1900s; the first part of *Lifslinjer* (*Lifelines*, 1903–06) appeared in Germany under the title *Über Liebe und Ehe* (1904), to be followed by the American translation entitled *Love and Marriage* (1911) and the Japanese translation (1913).¹⁵⁴

Love and Marriage aims to establish eugenic ideas as a “new morality” that radically transforms “the ideas of the morality of sexual relations upheld by the religions and laws of the Western nations.”¹⁵⁵ In *Love and Marriage*, Key insists on human intervention into the evolution process of humankind for the “strengthening of its position as humanity and its elevation to super-humanity.”¹⁵⁶ With this aim, she called for the regulation of individuals’ reproduction: “The development of the race gains when the lives less worthy to survive are not reproduced in offspring; but the life of the individual and of the race suffers when young people, mature and in every way fit, are not in a position to reproduce and rear offspring.”¹⁵⁷ For her, restricting people’s freedom to find a partner and give birth to children was a minor problem: “Freedom for love’s selection, *under conditions favourable to the race; limitation of the freedom*, not of love, but of procreation, where the conditions are unfavorable to the race—that is the new line of life (emphasis added).”¹⁵⁸ *Love and Marriage* was “not so much a demand for the rights of freedom in love as it is a plea for the recognition of the duty of society not to condemn any love between man and woman, which makes for the enhancement of their own most perfect life and the life of the race.”¹⁵⁹

152 Kanno Satomi, *Kūndae Ilbon ūi Yōnaeron: Sobi Toenūn Yōnae Chōngsa Sūk’aendŭl* [*Theories of Love in Modern Japan: Love, Love-Death, Scandals and Their Consumptions*], trans. Son Chiyŏn (Seoul: Nonhyŏng, 2014), 19.

153 Kanno, *Theories of Love*, 19.

154 Thorbjörn Lengborn, “Ellen Key (1849–1926),” *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* XXIII, no. 3/4 (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 1993), 836; Yu Yŏnsil, “Kūndae Hanjung Yōnae Tamnon ūi Hyōngsŏng: Elen K’ei Yōnae Kwan ūl Chungsim ūro [The Formation of Korean and Chinese Discourse of Love During the Modern Era: Focusing on Ellen Key’s Notion of Love],” *Chungguk Sa Yŏn’gu* 79 (2012), 141–94; see 157.

155 Ellen Key, *Love and Marriage: With a Critical and Biographical Introduction by Havelock Ellis* (New York, London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 1.

156 Key, *Love and Marriage*, 53.

157 Ibid., 43–44.

158 Ibid., 150.

159 R. Dixon Kingham, “Key, Ellen: Love and Marriage,” *Eugenics Review* 3, no. 2 (1911), 178–79; see 178.

Love and Marriage found huge resonance in colonial Korea under the strong influence of the Japanese reception.¹⁶⁰ Essential to the Korean reception of Ellen Key was Japanese literature critic Kuriyagawa Hakuson's 1922 book *Modern Views on Love*. *Modern Views on Love* was published in twenty segments in the daily newspaper *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* between September 30 and October 29, 1921 and was subsequently made into a book the following year, becoming a bestseller.¹⁶¹ According to the Korean literary scholar Ku Inmo, Kuriyagawa's interpretation of Ellen Key was based on "the interest in and the demand of logics for discovering modern individuals' self and liberation."¹⁶² In other words, Kuriyagawa focused on the notion of marriage based on love while neglecting the aspect of eugenics as the goal of such marriages.¹⁶³ Instead of eugenics, he considered the unity of the body and the soul as the essence of Ellen Key's concept of love. The Japanese writer schematized the history of love in a dialectic manner, claiming that it had developed from sexual love via spiritual love to their synthesis—the love that combined body and soul—and declared it a goal that people of the modernized world had to pursue:

It should be an age of the Unitarianism of love (*renai*) that combines the body and the soul, which follows the era of the physical instinct in ancient times and the spiritual and religious worship of women in the Middle Ages. It [the era of the Unitarianism of love] is modern.¹⁶⁴

This reading contradicted Key's critical stance against "follow[ing] their subjective feelings at the cost of the race and treat[ing] their love as an end in itself."¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Key became famous as the advocate of love's ultimate value above other things in Japan and Korea. Ironically, Korean eugenicists tried to dismantle this specific notion of love in the 1920s, discussed later in this chapter.

Under Kuriyagawa's influence, the Korean reception of Ellen Key, too, sidelined her eugenic claims while refashioning her as an advocate of individual happiness through love. A contemporary witness recalled in 1929 that the Japanese translations of *Love and Marriage* and *Modern Views on Love* were widely read among Korean students, but that *Modern Views on Love* had specifically coined the popular phrase "Love's Supremacy" (*yōnae chisang chuūi*).¹⁶⁶ The writer Yi Sōkhun, too, recollected in 1932 that "the ideology of Free Love spread rapidly after the 1919 March First Movement" and "Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Modern Views on Love* had a profound influence on the intelligentsia."¹⁶⁷ Strictly speaking,

160 Yu, "Korean and Chinese Ellen Key," 142.

161 Kanno, *Theories of Love*, 30.

162 Ku Inmo, "Hanil Kündae Munhak kwa Elen K'ei [Ellen Key and Modern Literature of Korea and Japan]," *Yōsōng Munhak Yōngu* 12 (2004), 69–94; refer to 80.

163 Ku, "Ellen Key and Literature," 79.

164 Kuriyagawa Hakuson, *Kündae Ilbon ūi Yōnaegwan* [*Modern Views on Love*], trans. Yi Sūngshin (P'aju: Mun, [1922]2010), 22.

165 Ellen Key, *Love and Marriage*, 19.

166 Ch'oe Ŭisun, "Na ūi Yōnae wa Kyōrhongwan [My Perspective on Love and Marriage]," *SL* (September 1929), 31.

167 Yi Sōkhun, "New Theories of Love," *Shin Tong'a* (December 1932), as cited in Yi Sūngshin, "Han'guk esō ūi Kündae ūi Yōnaegwan Suyong ūi Yangsang: Kim Tong'in ūi Kim Yōnsil Chōn ūl Chungsim ūro

Free Love and Love's Supremacy were two different concepts: the former referred to romantic and physical relationship untied to the duty of marriage, while the latter meant the absolute importance of love over any other thing in life. Yet, both concepts challenged ideologies that sought to restrict and control individual sexuality such as Confucianism and Eugenics, and were sometimes used as synonyms, Yi exemplifies.

No Chayöng's 1921 essay "Ellen Key, the No. 1 Feminist" exemplifies the Korean reception of Key.¹⁶⁸ The essay was published in two segments in the monthly magazine *Kaebhyök* (*The Dawn*) in February and March 1921 and highlighted the love-ethic (*yönae todök*) in *Love and Marriage*.¹⁶⁹ Similar to Kuriyagawa, No emphasized that core to Key's love-ethic was a love that combined body and soul (*yöngyuk ilch'i üi yönae*): "A love that is simply sensual is called Free Love and a love that is simply spiritual is platonic love, or mental love (*chöngsin yönae*)—yet, neither is love in its genuine meaning."¹⁷⁰ No mentioned Ellen Key's allusion to eugenics, yet he did not recognize that Key prioritized racial improvement over love. Instead, he argues that that racial improvement might be something that one might obtain while pursuing individual happiness through love, which contradicted Key's original claim:

Ellen Key considered love to be the ideal, the root, and the spirit of life. She believed that people in love must feel mutual happiness. At the same time, she thought that the happiness one feels during romance was the most crucial element that constructs social happiness. The essence of her masterpiece *Love and Marriage* is that we should find a balance between the ever-growing requirement for racial betterment on the one hand and the individual demand of happiness in love on the other hand. As mentioned above, Ellen Key was a lover of life and an admirer of life. *She believed that the improvement of life could be naturally achieved while individuals pursue the happiness of love* (emphasis added).¹⁷¹

The fact that No prioritized love over eugenic goals becomes clear when he summarizes Key's thoughts with a single phrase that she might have "made love the basis of all morals."¹⁷² In this vein, No completely overlooked the importance of eugenic arguments in Key's notions of love marriage and the so-called free divorce.¹⁷³ Instead, he argued that a marriage based on love was necessary for the realization of personal happiness. What

[Korean Reception of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Modern Views on Love*: Through the Example of Kim Tong'in's Novel *The Life of Kim Yönsil*," *Ilbon Munhak* 74, no. 2 (2008), 271–80; see 274.

168 On the influence of No's essay on the later texts about Ellen Key see Ku, "Ellen Key and Literature," 81.

169 No Chayöng, "Yösöng Undong üi Che Irinja Elen K'ei [Ellen Key, the No. 1 Feminist (Part 1)]," *KB* (February 1921), 46–53; "Yösöng Undong üi Che Irinja Elen K'ei, Sok [Ellen Key, the No. 1 Feminist (Part 2)]," *KB* (March 1921), 45–50. The essay was based on Japanese treatises by Ikuta Chökō and Honma Hisao as well as the Japanese translation of Key's biography by Havelock Ellis. Ku, "Ellen Key and Literature," 80–81.

170 No, "Ellen Key 1," 50.

171 *Ibid.*, 50–51.

172 *Ibid.*, 52.

173 *Ibid.*, 52–53; No, "Ellen Key 2," 45–48.

he amplified was her critique of a loveless marriage, which reminded many Koreans of their own marriages, which they were forced to enter as children.¹⁷⁴

Unlike No's explanation, however, Key considered love important for marriage because it might be necessary to "perfect the race."¹⁷⁵ The ideological backbone of her support for unrestrained divorce, too, was eugenics, as she hinted: "the race does not exist for the sake of monogamy, but monogamy for the sake of the race."¹⁷⁶

Pak Wŏnhŭi's 1926 article reveals that Koreans used Key's aphorisms for claims that completely contradicted her belief in eugenics. Explaining theories related to love, Pak replaced the eugenic connotation of terms such as "life" and "improvement" with the call for self-improvement and self-reflection, reminiscent of Confucian teachings of self-cultivation (*sushin*). He wrote:

Ellen Key said that sexuality is the matter of life and social happiness; thus, it is the most important one among all problems. She meant that love creates not only a new individual but also a more exuberant and more complete human; through love, we can reach sophisticated human nature that combines body and mind.¹⁷⁷

Misinterpreting and appropriating Ellen Key's thinking as an endorsement for individual happiness instead of racial improvement, the Korean reception of *Love and Marriage* laid an essential epistemological foundation for the practices and discourse of love (*yŏnae*) in colonial Korea from the 1920s onwards.

The Boom of Love (*yŏnae*)

Empowered by the idea of Love's Supremacy, the younger generation of the 1920s boldly practiced romance even without justifying it as a preliminary step for marriage. Kwŏn Podŭrae demonstrates that love-death (*chŏngsa*) or love-suicide (*yŏnae chasal*) was a radical expression of Love's Supremacy.¹⁷⁸ According to her, love-deaths became a social problem in the 1920s, as numerous young people attempted to kill themselves after failing in love.¹⁷⁹ To prevent suicides, Seoul's Metropolitan Police increased their patrols. The June 20, 1922 issue of *Dong-A Ilbo* reported:

An Evil Tendency Among the Youth. Police Patrols Parks and Other Sites at Night to Monitor.

Recently an ideology called *yŏnae* permeated the heads of young students, causing them anguish and to suffer; not a small number of them even committed suicide. As the summer comes, some bring their lovers to isolated sites such as the pine grove

174 Kwŏn, *Epoch of Love*, 108.

175 Key, *Love and Marriage*, 23.

176 Ibid., 289.

177 Pak Wŏnhŭi, "Chega ŭi Yŏnaegwan Sok [Various Schools' View of Love: Part 2]," *CI*, January 16, 1926, 3.

178 See *Epoch of Love*, 180–92. According to Kanno Satomi's 2001 study, Japan witnessed increasing numbers of love-deaths during the early 1920s, which indicates concurrence of the phenomenon in Korea and Japan. See *Theories of Love*, 77–82.

179 Kwŏn, *Epoch of Love*, 186.

of Samch'öng-dong, Namsan Park, the Iron Bridge of the Han River, or Changch'ungdan district and [...] talk through the night, while others kill themselves there heart-broken by an unfulfilled love, and the others do ugly things without reserve. As this does much harm to ethics and social morality, the police are planning a crackdown. At nights, the police will send commissars to Samch'öng-dong, the Han River, Namsan Park, and Changch'ungdan district and make them control [such incidents] through the night; an anonymous police officer warned that the public should be aware of the problem.¹⁸⁰

According to statistics published in the *Dong-A Ilbo* on June 25, 1922, there were 37 suicides and about 30 attempted suicides in the capital during the first half of 1922.¹⁸¹ The primary cause of suicide was troubles related to *yönae*, while poverty, the usual cause of suicide in Korea, was the second most frequent cause.¹⁸²

Kwön demonstrates that around this time, love-suicide was becoming a trope in the popular imagination of *yönae*, too, as numerous works of fiction of the time exemplified.¹⁸³ This trope was appealing to the public as the ultimate expression of love, possibly resulting in the “explosive increase”¹⁸⁴ of love-suicides in the early 1920s. After killing herself with poison, Kang Myönghwa, a *kisaeng* woman who experienced severe rejection from her lover's wealthy family, became an icon of “pure and devoted love,” and her story was adapted into at least four different novels and became popular among female students.¹⁸⁵ The incidents of love-death and their consumption as a popular symbol of *yönae* indicate that the idea of Love's Supremacy fascinated the younger generation to the degree of self-destruction.

Achieving individual happiness through *yönae* contradicted the convention that parents or elders of the clan decided one's spouses. According to Korean historian So Hyönsuk, a significant number of educated young men divorced the wives they were forced to marry after they got acquainted with the idea of love marriage.¹⁸⁶ She introduces a lawyer's recollection that there was a sudden boom of divorce among the male students who went abroad for school education after the March First Movement:

[Legal] Divorce emerged—although there was [customary] divorce beforehand—after the March First Movement as a nationwide awakening took place in Korea. Rumors have it that even a divorce alliance was organized among students who studied

180 “Ch'öngnyön Kan üi Ak Kyöngnyang [An Evil Tendency Among the Youth],” *DI*, June 20, 3.

181 “Il-Yönae [Number One-Romance],” *DI*, June 25, 1922, 3.

182 “Number One-Romance,” *DI*, June 25, 1922, 3.

183 See Kwön, *Epoch of Love*, 185.

184 See *ibid.*, 186–90; the quote is from 186.

185 *Ibid.*, 189.

186 For the conflict between educated husbands and their old-fashioned wives, see So Hyönsuk, *Ihon Pöpchöng e Sön Shingminji Chosön Yösöngdül: Kündaejök Ihon Chedo üi Toip kwa Chendö* [Colonial Korean Women at the Divorce Court: The Introduction of the Modern Divorce System and Gender] (Koyang-si: Yöksa Pip'yöngsa, 2017), 254–89. Related cases appeared in the anonymous consultation section of the newspaper. See Chöon, *Seoul Counseling Service*, 13–102.

abroad, and they returned to Korea with a diploma and a firm resolution to divorce their wives.¹⁸⁷

The Western-educated men came to think that old-fashioned women, equally forced to marry as themselves, were not a good match for them. The lawyer summed up this situation, saying, "It is common that [educated men] file for divorce, complaining that 'I cannot live with her because she is ignorant, has low taste, and an ugly face!' but that is not a sufficient reason for a [legal] divorce."¹⁸⁸

The September 1922 issue of the women's magazine *Puin* (*The Lady*) offered a rare insight into conflicts of Korean married couples with an unequal educational background. Through an essay titled "The Resentment Against My Cold-Blooded Husband," a woman named Kim Ch'unhwa spoke out about how her husband had neglected her ever since their wedding. Born in a rural area of P'yŏng'an-do province, she was not sent to school but grew up "taking care of babies, gathering wild herbs, and weeding"¹⁸⁹ until she married her husband, a student, at the age of fifteen. She painfully guessed that he disliked her because she was not as sophisticated and beautiful as her educated husband wished.¹⁹⁰ She wrote,

Of course, we are not a good match because he is an educated man, while I am a mere country bumpkin. [To him] Nothing seems to match. However, what can I do about it? What can I do about how our Chosŏn society functions and how our parents matched us? I can neither divorce nor die suddenly, so what can I do? Bitter or sweet, we manage to live together. Meanwhile, I realize that I am ignorant and ugly.¹⁹¹

Another essay titled "Complaints About My Old-Fashioned Wife" exemplifies the complaints of a man who had a school education. As his wife, an "old-fashioned" (*kushik*) woman, did not attend school, she could not fulfill his requirement of proper child rearing:¹⁹²

[...] she can neither talk to the child logically nor explain to him using examples to make him understand but tries to suppress him quickly. If he does not obey her, the

187 Yi In, "Ihon Munje wa Hyŏndae Pŏmnyul [The Question of Divorce and the Modern Law]," *SL* (September 1929) 38. I became aware of this source through So's 2014 study *Colonial Divorce Court*, 254. There are two other contemporary witnesses that assert the existence of the divorce alliance. See Ch'unp'a, "Ondol Pang Yahwa [Nightly Episodes from the Room with a Heated Floor]," *PG* (December 1931), 28; Ahn Hwasan, "Musŏn Kyegŭp ūi Song Todŏk Ron [On the Sexual Moral of the Proletariat]," *SL* (March 1933), 69.

188 Yi, "Question of Divorce," 39.

189 Kim Ch'unhwa, "Naengjŏng han Namp'yŏn e taehan Na ūi Wŏnhan [The Resentment against My Cold-Blooded Husband]," *Puin* 4 (September 1922), 33.

190 See Kim, "My Cold-Blooded Husband," 33–37.

191 *Ibid.*, 34–36.

192 Myohyangsanin, "Kushik Anae e taehan Na ūi Pulp'yŏng [Complaints About my Old-Fashioned Wife]," *Puin* (September 1922), 38–44.

caretaker [the mother] becomes upset, and they start fighting each other. Thus, she often seems to be ruining his character, which makes me worried.¹⁹³

The Western-educated man grounded his complaint with his wife's inability to nurture their son in a modern way. Kwŏn's 2003 study indicates that men who enjoyed Western-style education developed a sense of entitlement to women of comparable educational and cultural backgrounds while disqualifying other women as their proper partners: The women's magazine *Shin Yŏsong* published a case of a man who even required his old-fashioned wife "to wear pompadour in the manner of female students," only to demand her divorce because "you are dressed like a girl student now, but you have studied nothing, so you have no qualification to be my wife."¹⁹⁴

Historian So Hyŏnsuk notes that although both women and men suffered from child marriage, divorce was not a solution for most Korean women of that time "because it was difficult for a woman to become economically independent or remarry."¹⁹⁵ In practice, men's unrestricted divorce meant abandonment for their wives.¹⁹⁶ For women, "divorce was involved with complex problems that could not be simply substituted by slogans such as 'women's liberation' or 'self-awakening.'"¹⁹⁷ To avoid getting divorced, many Korean women sought out belated school education.¹⁹⁸

The demand for divorce among Western-educated men shows that the new ideal of love-marriage was closely linked to social status. Men believed that educated elite women were the right partners for them and sought divorce. They pursued *yŏnae* as praised by Ellen Key's advocates from Korea and Japan and depicted by Western movie stars on-screen. Ironically, as they desired marriages with women of above-average academic backgrounds and urban taste, their yearning for New Women would likely end in eugenic marriages, despite their belief that they pursued Free Love and Love's Supremacy.

Discussing "Eugenic Marriage" in the Late 1920s

From the mid-1920s onwards, eugenics became a relevant topic in the public discourse of sexuality in colonial Korea. Stimulated by the U.S. law to enforce eugenic population policies, the Japanese Interior Ministry began developing a "racial improvement policy" aimed at "exclusion of bad elements" and "proliferation of good elements"¹⁹⁹ in June 1926. On June 3, 1926, the *Dong-A Ilbo* reported the news in detail:

The Interior Ministry plans to protect and encourage migration and colonization as a solution for the population problem and is concurrently examining the racial improve-

193 Myohyangsanin, "My Old-Fashioned Wife," 42–43.

194 Kwŏn, *Epoch of Love*, 79.

195 So, *Colonial Divorce Court*, 254.

196 Ibid.

197 Ibid.

198 Ibid., 256–57.

199 "Chongjok Kaeryang Kyehoek: Pomnyŏng ūl Chejŏng Hayŏ Naeüihoe e Chech'ul? [Plans on Racial Improvement: A Law Will Be Submitted to the Japanese Parliament?], *DI*, June 3, 1926, 1.

ment (*chongjok kaeryang*) with an attention to racial hygiene (*minjok wisaeng*). According to the Department of Hygiene's study, congenital racial improvement aims at 1. exclusion of bad elements and 2. proliferation of good elements. [The study] Named A. pause of small children's reproduction and B. pause of the reproduction during illness as temporary methods [of racial improvement] and suggests A. ban on marriage and B. elimination of reproductive ability for the fundamental [racial improvement]. To improve the race after the birth, 1. sports and 2. hygiene is to be practiced. As the immediate improvement is entirely depending on the nation's awakening, [the study suggests that the state] would conduct sterilization surgeries or ban the marriage of the leper and the mentally ill by law. Mainly, as the ban on the lepers' marriage is indispensable to terminate leprosy, the Japanese parliament plans to propose this law. As the marriage ban for the mentally ill and others also require legislation, [the Japanese government] is investigating the laws of each state in America.²⁰⁰

Nevertheless, it was not until the late 1930s that the Japanese parliament enforced eugenic laws. According to Sumiko Otsubo and James R. Bartholomew's 1998 study, "a prolonged conflict with China (1931–1945) and expanding colonial territories required more soldiers and colonists, and many Japanese leaders became much more concerned with population policies."²⁰¹ In this zeitgeist, a bill for the sterilization of murderers and miscreants was introduced to the Japanese parliament in 1935.²⁰² The eugenic biopolitics reached its peak as the National Eugenic Law was enacted in July 1940 in Japan.²⁰³ According to Kim Kyōng'ok's 2013 study, the National Eugenic Law aimed to increase the healthy population during the war through two measures: sterilization of the unhealthy and prevention of healthy people's birth control.²⁰⁴ Under this law, 454 people were sterilized in Japan between 1941 and 1945.²⁰⁵

The mid-1920s debate in Japan was the watershed of eugenic discourse in colonial Korea, too, because the adoption of eugenics into the legal system became a relevant topic in the Korean public discourse in the late 1920s. Around this time, Korean medical experts who were trained in America, Europe, and Japan began promoting the importance of hereditary conditions to realize eugenic goals for the nation's sake. In an article titled "Obtaining a Healthy Spouse is the First Step to Domestic Hygiene," Yi Kapsu, a medical doctor educated in Germany, compared marriages and reproduction to cultivation to underline the importance of hereditary health for marriage:

200 "Plans on Racial Improvement?," *DI*, June 3, 1926, 1.

201 Otsubo Sumiko and James R. Bartholomew, "Eugenics in Japan: Some Ironies of Modernity, 1883–1945," *Science in Context* 11, 3–4 (1998), 545–65; see 549.

202 See Kang Hyegyōng, "Ilche Shigi Sōngbyōng ūi Sahoe Munjehwa wa Sōngbyōng Kwalli [Sexually Transmitted Diseases as a Social Problem and Management of Them]," *Han'guk Minjok Undongsa Yōngu* 59 (2009), 87–125; refer to 114.

203 See Kim Kyōng'ok, "Ch'ongnyōkjōn Ch'ejegi Ilbon ūi In'gu Chōngch'aek: Yōsōng ūi Yōkhwal kwa Ch'asedae Sang ūl Chungsim ūro [The Japanese Population Policy During the All-Out War: Focusing on Women's Role and the Vision of the Next Generation]," *Ilbon Yōksa Yōngu* 37 (2013), 35–66; see 38.

204 Kim, "Japanese Population Policy," 39–40.

205 *Ibid.*, 40.

When we talk about domestic hygiene, we discuss clothing, food, and living from a sanitary perspective, yet it is not a fundamental discussion [...]. [...] To realize the family's health, which is the aim of domestic hygiene, the first thing we should strive for is making family members obtain [spouses with] a healthy body or healthy hereditary conditions. In other words, it is like having to improve the tree in order to obtain fruits of fine quality.²⁰⁶

The establishment of the Korean Eugenic Association (KEA) in Seoul in 1933 marked the institutionalization of the eugenic movement in colonial Korea.²⁰⁷ KEA aimed to “increase the society’s happiness by improving the offspring’s body and mind in eugenic terms.”²⁰⁸ As Shin Yŏngjŏn’s 2006 study found, its 85 founders were influential in the public discourse and played a pivotal role in disseminating eugenics through public lectures, roundtable discussions, counseling, newspaper columns, and the KEA’s periodical *Eugenics (Usaeng)*.²⁰⁹ Tapping into the eugenics debates in the United States, Germany, and Japan, Korean eugenicists declared that “one cannot expect a coincidence if one seriously thinks about the future of the nation” and called for “the reduction of the least interesting persons’ breeding in the nation (*minjok chŏk pŏnshik*)” and “the increase of much better persons’ breeding in the nation.”²¹⁰ From this perspective, the advocates of eugenics and members of the KEA propagated the so-called eugenic marriage (*usaenghak chŏk kyŏrhon*) as a new marital ideal from the end of the 1920s onwards.

Unlike in the Japanese archipelago, eugenic laws were not enforced in colonial Korea despite the Japanese colonial rule.²¹¹ Nevertheless, the concept of racial improvement became increasingly popular in Korean public discourse in line with the Japanese discourse. While there was no legal ground to enforce eugenic biopolitics between the late 1920s and mid-1930 on a state-level, Korean eugenicists eagerly promoted the private implementation of their marriage model in the media, particularly choosing the right spouse based on physical and mental health. Concurrently, they criticized the passion-driven *yŏnae* because it might hinder a rational choice. For instance, the social pedagogue Ch’oe Tusŏn emphasized the importance of eugenics to the issue of marriage in 1928. Citing Francis Galton’s studies, he determined that children born to people possessing bad characteristics such as laziness, promiscuity, or mental illnesses were very likely to become orphans, sick, prostitutes, criminals, alcoholics, epileptics, or to die young.²¹² He insisted that people born under parents of “superior lineage”²¹³ became medical doctors, lawyers,

206 Yi Kapsu, “Kŏng’ang han Sangdaeja rŭl Kuhanŭn Kŏt i Kajŏng Wisaneg ŭi Ch’ŏt Kŏrum [Obtaining a Healthy Spouse is the First Step to Domestic Hygiene],” *DI*, January 6, 1928, 5.

207 See KEA, “Chosŏn Usaeng Hyŏphoe Hoech’ik [Bylaws of Korean Eugenic Association],” ed. KEA, *Usaeng* 1 (1934), 36.

208 KEA, “Bylaws,” 36.

209 Shin Yŏngjŏn, “Shingminji Chosŏn esŏ ŭi Usaeng Undong ŭi Chŏnggae wa Kŭ Sŏngkyŏk [The Development of Eugenic Movement in Colonial Korea and Its Characteristics],” *Ŭisahak* 29 (2006), 133–55; see 137.

210 Ch’oe Tusŏn, “Choŭn Kyŏrhon kwa Nappŭn Kyŏrhon: Öttŏn Namnyŏ wa Kyŏrhon Haeya Hal Kŏt In’ga [A Good Marriage and a Bad Marriage: Whom Should We Marry?],” *PG* (February 1928), 140.

211 Shin, “Development of Eugenic Movement,” 152.

212 See Ch’oe, “Good and Bad Marriage,” 140.

213 See *ibid.*

judges, educators, merchants, and landlords; thereby, he refashioned heredity as the sole factor that decided over a person's fate. He claimed that "the most practical way that we could practice [eugenics] is nothing other than through the choice of a spouse," particularly "the choice of the lineage,"²¹⁴ by which he mainly meant hereditary mental characteristics. From the eugenic perspective, he warned readers against romantic love: "Love is blind. [People fall in love] Simply when their eyes meet on the street or receive a love letter. Marriage is the most dangerous when it is done after having a secret affair."²¹⁵

The medical discourse of eugenic marriage defined health primarily as a hereditary condition and warned about the genetic harm that sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) would cause for the marriage and the nation. Eugenists argued against passion-driven relationships mainly due to widespread STDs and their negative impact on hereditary health. The practical way to achieve hereditary health was choosing the right spouse based on physical health, intellect, and mental status. In line with this belief, the medical doctor Yi Kapsu defined the "achievement of the offspring's sound constitution and [sound] race"²¹⁶ as the goal of marriage. Thereby, he asserted that a body free from STDs was key to realize racial hygiene since, as he argued, some STDs could be inherited by the offspring and cause congenital disorder:

Usually, the husband catches syphilis or gonorrhea and infects his wife; simultaneously, [these diseases are] passed from the pregnant mother to the children, causing the offspring's infection with the diseases. Eventually, a family member or blood relatives can fall into a deplorable situation.²¹⁷

Like Ch'oe Tusŏn, the medical doctor also asserted that "the drunken[ness] in the idealized *yŏnae*"²¹⁸ was an obstacle for eugenic marriage, arguing that it could lead to the infections with STDs. What seemingly began as a caution for the youth evolved into a call for totalitarian biopolitics. Although the Government-General did not implement Japanese laws such as the 1927 Venereal Disease Prevention Ordinance or the 1940 National Eugenic Law into the colonial Korean legal system, the discussions and concepts surrounding these laws greatly influenced the public discourse on sex and marriage in colonial Korea starting in the late 1920s.²¹⁹

214 Ibid., 141.

215 Ibid.

216 Yi, "On Domestic Hygiene," 5.

217 Ibid.

218 Ibid.

219 Pak Chŏng'ae's 2016 study found that the colonial government did not introduce the Venereal Disease Prevention Ordinance to colonial Korea due to the lack of budget and police force. She explained that the Government-General revived the idea to implement the revised law as Japan entered the so-called total war period in 1938, yet as the Japanese Parliament postponed the approval of the revised bill due to urgent matters related to the war, the legislation change in colonial Korea was not realized. "Chosŏn Ch'ongdokbu ūi Sŏngbyŏng Yebang Chŏngch'aek kwa Hwaryubyŏng Yebangnyŏng [The STD Prevention Policy of the Government-General in Korea and the Venereal Disease Prevention Ordinance]," *Sarim* 55 (2016), 299–326; see 314–17. Sumiko Otsubo Sitcawich's 1998 dissertation provides insight into Japanese eugenic politics, including the 1940

4.3 Women's Moviegoing in the Context of Eugenic Marriage

Politics of Gender in the Eugenic Discourse

Like their counterparts in other countries, Korean eugenicists called for the state control of reproduction and individuals' careful choice of spouses. They saw considerable risk in the passion-driven romantic relationships, which had attracted the younger generation of Koreans since the early 1920s. In the eyes of eugenicists, pursuing one's happiness through love and marriage could potentially threaten the nation's health and prosperity, and thus needed to be carefully monitored and prohibited. Therefore, Korean eugenicists warned women specifically to maintain sound health by avoiding theaters and the risks attached to them, including STDs. STDs, such as syphilis or gonorrhea, were some of the most common diseases among Koreans during the colonial period.²²⁰ According to the statistics of the Hospital of the Government-General between 1914 and 1926, 20 percent of the patients received medical treatment for STDs, which outnumbered digestive troubles (19.5 percent), and respiratory diseases, including tuberculosis (18.7 percent).²²¹

STDs were usually called *hwaryubyŏng*, or diseases of the demimonde, in colonial Korea.²²² As this name implied, STDs were generally believed to be spread through sexual intercourse with sex workers. As per this understanding, the colonial government mainly focused on controlling female sex workers' health to prevent STDs. For instance, the Japanese colonial power continuously broadened the range of medical inspection from licensed Korean prostitutes (*yunyŏ*) to *kisaeng* women, waitresses, and hostesses at bars, often considered unlicensed sex workers.²²³ However, the medical checkups did not reduce infections with STDs.²²⁴ Kang Hyegyŏng's 2008 study on the colonial regulation of STDs found that the infection rate of Korean women in the sex industry increased from 10 percent in the 1920s to nearly 50 percent in the 1930s, and it was estimated that at least 10 percent of the general population was infected with STDs.²²⁵

From the early 1920s, Korean medical experts pointed out that men who bought sex were responsible for the spread of STDs and demanded legal action against them. For example, Hŏ Yŏngsuk, the first Korean woman to pass the doctoral qualification examination of the Government-General, asserted in 1920 that the law must restrict a man's

National Eugenic Law. "Eugenics in Imperial Japan: Some Ironies of Modernity, 1883–1945" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1998), 7–9.

220 Kang, "STD as Social Problem," 88.

221 Chang Mun'gyŏng, "Pomch'ŏl Puin Wisaeng [Women's Hygiene in the Spring]," *Yŏsŏng* (April 1937), 80–81, as cited in Kim Miyŏng, "Ilche ha Chosŏn Ilbo ūi Sŏngbyŏng Kwallyŏn Tamnon Yŏn'gu [A Study on *Chosun Ilbo*'s Discourse of STD under the Colonial Rule]," *Chŏngshin Munhwa Yŏn'gu* 29 (2006), 389–417; see 392.

222 Kang, "STD as Social Problem," 87.

223 On the broadening of the anti-STDs law's targets during the colonial era, see Yamashita Yŏng'ae, "Shingminji Chibae wa Kongch'ang Chedo ūi Chŏn'gae [The Colonial Rule and the Development of the Licensed Prostitution System]," *Sahoe wa Yŏksa* 51 (1997), 143–83.

224 See Kang, "STD as social problem," 109–10.

225 See *ibid.*, 96–98.

right to marry for a certain period when he had an STD.²²⁶ Similarly, a 1927 *Dong-A Ilbo* article concluded that unless men changed their behavior, the preventive measures, which solely focused on prostituting women, would not stop the spread of STDs.²²⁷ The article pointed out that, due to men who bought sex, “STDs also enter the innocent and peaceful home.”²²⁸ As a solution, the article urged men to marry before they turned twenty-five so as to not feel tempted to go to the red light district.²²⁹ Additionally, the article required men not to buy sex even if their wives got sick or gave birth to children, revealing the degree of the ordinariness of buying sex for married men at the time.²³⁰ The daily newspaper *Chosŏn Chung’ang Ilbo* reported that during the New Year’s holidays between January 1 and 6, 1934, 2,325 men visited the licensed quarter at Shinjŏng in Seoul, and spent 22,523 wŏn.²³¹

Around this time, eugenicists recognized that women, too, played a significant part in the hereditary health of their offspring, just like men. A 1932 *Maeil Shinbo* article explained that the maternal line was as important as the paternal line when it comes to the offspring’s traits: “According to Galton’s study on the influence of ancestors on heredity, generally half of a trait is inherited from each parent.”²³² Such an explanation was necessary due to the customary differentiation between the maternal line called *oega*, literally the *outside family*, and the paternal line *ch’in’ga*, or the *close family*. The article corrected the misbelief that the heredity would also follow this conceptual distinction: “As many of the mother’s traits are inherited by children, the *oega*, too, has a significant relationship to heredity. The formal name and the hereditary content do not match.”²³³ Additionally, the article even asserted that the maternal line might have an even more significant influence on children’s intelligence than the paternal line.²³⁴

Having established the importance of women’s role in heredity, warning about STDs addressed women more often than men, although the latter were habitual sex buyers and the central intermediate hosts of STDs. For instance, Korean eugenicists called for women to build up knowledge of STDs and make the right choice of spouses or manage their sexual health in the marriage. The medical doctor Oh Wŏnsŏk’s 1932 article “Various Venereal Diseases Ruin the Home and the Society: Wives Should Prevent Husbands’

226 Hŏ Yŏngsuk, “Hwaryubyŏng Cha ŭi Honin ŭl Kŭmhal Il [Forbid STD Patients’ Marriage],” *CI*, May 10, 1920, 3.

227 “Hwaryubyŏng Yebang 3 [Preventing STDs 3],” *DI*, February 14, 1927, 3. I became aware of this article through Kang Hyegyŏng’s 2008 study.

228 “Preventing STDs 2,” *DI*, February 13, 1927, 3.

229 See “Preventing STDs 3,” *DI*, February 14, 1927, 3.

230 See *ibid.*

231 For instance, See “Sahoe ŭi Amin Ch’anggi Munje e taehayŏ 8: Maeŭm Ron Ilbyŏl [On the Problem of Prostitutes and *Kisaeng*, the Cancer of the Society 8: An Overview of Opinions on Prostitution],” *Chosŏn Chung’ang Ilbo*, August 18, 1934, 3.

232 “Kyŏrhon kwa Usaenghak 4 Kyŏrhon ŭi Chungdae han Ŭiui: Abŏji P’yŏn Yujŏnja poda Ŭmŏni P’yŏn i Tŏ Chung’yo. Chiryŏk Yujŏn e Issŏsŏ nŭn Tŏ hae [Marriage and Eugenics 4 The Important Meaning of Marriage: Maternal Genes Are More Important than the Paternal, Even More So When It Comes to the Inheritance of the Intellect],” *MS*, October 13, 1932, 3.

233 “Marriage and Eugenics 4,” *MS*, October 13, 1932, 3.

234 *Ibid.*

Venereal Diseases” for *Chosun Ilbo* is a prime example. In this serialized article, he informed Korean women about the infection routes, symptoms, remedies, and dangers of gonorrhea, which was often transmitted from husbands to wives. Instead of men who habitually bought sex and got infected with STDs, Oh Wönsök blamed Korean women for not knowing enough about STDs, thus posing a threat to their homes. “Venereal diseases do not selectively evade women of the demimonde or men who are close to them but also harm good and wise housewives and innocent children. How pathetic that most Korean housewives do not even know the cause of their suffering.”²³⁵ Ironically, as there were a significant number of men infected with STDs, the success of the eugenic marriage was solely dependent on women who were not infected yet. Under this guise, eugenicists assigned Korean women the task of accomplishing a eugenic marriage so that it burdened and even disgraced them instead of empowering them.

The medical doctor knew that men frequently bought sex, infected their wives, and even caused infertility of women.²³⁶ However, while blaming the female sex sellers as “the origin of venereal diseases”²³⁷ and requiring their strict control, Oh Wönsök stated that “the abolishment of licensed and unlicensed sex work in Korean society is impossible” and required only “a better education about sex” for the youth and “the use of a condom”²³⁸ as preventive measures for men. Meanwhile, the eugenicist urged readers to strictly supervise the hygiene and behaviors of daughters from an early age. He advised parents to “wash the wood board used as a seat before girls sit and wash them [particularly when used] in public baths”²³⁹ to avoid an indirect infection with gonorrhea. In combination with other texts on women’s behavior, Oh Wönsök’s article could mislead readers to believe that men might be less responsible than women in STD prevention. “Parents Must Make the Female Students Come Home for the Winter Vacation Even If They Refuse: Female Students Are Easy to Fall,” an article published on the same page as Oh Wönsök’s third segment of his serialized article, reinforced such a misconception. According to the article, if daughters were studying in Seoul separated from their parents in the countryside, parents “must make them come home” on “the very first day of the vacation.”²⁴⁰ The article argued:

For sure male students are easy to fall, especially during this time [vacation]; regarding this, if a female student does not go home but stays in Seoul during the vacation, it means that she has already fallen. Even if she has not fallen yet and remains in Seoul due to a special occasion, all kinds of temptations stretch out from everywhere to an innocent girl who is alone in a lonely room.²⁴¹

235 Oh Wönsök, “Yöörö Kaji Hwaryubyöng ün Kajöng kwa Sahoe rül Mangch’imnida: Kajöng Puindül ün Namp’yön üi Hwaryubyöng üi Miri Yebang Hayö K’un P’ihae rül P’ihashiyo 1 [Various Venereal Diseases Ruin the Home and the Society: Wives Should Avoid Greater Harms by Preventing Husbands’ Venereal Diseases 1],” *CI*, December 7, 1932, 5.

236 See Oh, “Various Venereal Diseases 1,” *CI*, December 7, 1932, 5.

237 Oh, “Various Venereal Diseases 6,” *CI*, December 13, 1932, 5.

238 Oh, “Various Venereal Diseases 7,” *CI*, December 14, 1932, 5.

239 Oh, “Various Venereal Diseases 2,” *CI*, December 9, 1932, 5.

240 Oh, “Various Venereal Diseases 3,” *CI*, December 10, 1932, 5.

241 Oh, “Various Venereal Diseases 3,” *CI*, December 10, 1932, 5.

Figure 9: An advertisement for nutritional supplement during the pregnancy in a women's magazine.

安産讀本

體質向上
母體の強化

弱한母體로는... 트른한아기를 못낳는다
은은한아기를 낳는 데는 무엇보다도 모체 體質을 強化하는 것이 必要합니다.
オフルトリーゼ 母體를 強化하면서 胎兒까지도 強化하는 모체 栄養素를 含有한 것으로 모체 體質을 補正 強化하기를 돕고요 好評입니다.

三百六十錠入 一圓八十錢
百八十錠入 一圓
千錠入 四圓五十錢
五千錠入 二十一圓

店商吉友澤藤 社會式株
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Source: *Shin Kajōng* (September 1936). Courtesy of Hyun-dam Mun'go.

Nevertheless, men had a higher chance of catching syphilis or gonorrhea than female students, as they began to buy sex at very young ages. As of 1930, visiting cafés was customary among male students, which led to increased chances of having sexual contact with unlicensed prostitutes and being infected with STDs.²⁴² In 1934, for instance, the case of a 15-year-old male student who had sex with a waitress and was infected with syphilis became public.²⁴³ In 1938, a professional school found out through a health check that 10 percent of the male applicants aged between 18 and 19 already had venereal dis-

242 Sojebu, "Humourous and Ironical Cleaning," 67.

243 See Akch'önsaeng, "Tae Kyöngsöng üi SOS [SOS from the Grand Kyöngsöng]," *PG* (April 1934), 29–31.

eases.²⁴⁴ In light of these facts, Oh's advice that parents should "think once more about daughters than sons so that they do not fall"²⁴⁵ not only hindered the actual STD prevention but also revealed the gendered bias behind the eugenic biopolitics.

The so-called in-utero infection was a powerful tool to make Korean women as equally responsible for their children's infections with STDs as their husbands. In his contribution to Ehwa Women's Professional School's magazine, Yi Myŏnghyŏk, a Columbia graduate who taught biology at Yŏnhŭi University, informed the female students of the importance of physical and mental health care for women during pregnancy.²⁴⁶ His text revealed the large gap between the responsibilities given to women and their limited scope of action regarding STD prevention. Instead of offering concrete plans or strategies, the biologist repeatedly explained how fathers could pass viruses to babies through mothers:

The fetus and the pregnant mother are closely related to each other, and the nutrition, respiration, and excretion of the fetus are processed through the maternal placenta. Although the blood vessels of the fetus are not directly connected to the maternal blood vessels, they exchange blood and other materials through osmotic action as only a single membrane separates them. Therefore, if a pregnant woman has pathogens of syphilis, they will be transmitted to the fetus in the end. Infectious diseases and other illnesses such as tumors and endometritis will significantly harm the fetus. Even if the pregnant mother does not have any fatal disease, the illness of the refractory and careless father can be inherited by the fetus through the mother, causing miscarriage or stillbirth. [...] Furthermore, some people risk infections with horrible diseases and throw themselves into the hideous depths [of the red-light district]; they not only get injuries and diseases their bodies cannot cure for their whole lives, but also make their wives and children suffer.²⁴⁷

In their articles, Korean eugenicists often categorized women into those who belonged to the demimonde (*hwaryugye*) and those who did not. prostituting women, *kisaeng*, barmaids, and waitresses were regarded as "the least interesting"²⁴⁸ for the nation, as rather a risk to be managed than persons in need of care and protection. Considering that they were not even given the freedom to reject male sex buyers with STDs or resign from work due to their STD infections, such a categorization perpetuated the vicious cycle in which female sex workers were exposed to STDs without any protection while being punished for spreading STDs.²⁴⁹ Meanwhile, they asserted that the women outside the demimonde needed extra protection from STDs, as they were deemed as "much better persons."²⁵⁰ It

244 "Kagyŏng hal Ch'oegŭn Haksaenggye P'unggi! [Recent Students' Surprising Morals!]," *CI*, March 5, 1938, 2.

245 Oh Wŏnsŏk, "Various Venereal Diseases 3," *CI*, December 10, 1932, 5.

246 On Yi Myŏnghyŏk's activities as a member of Korean Eugenic Association, see Shin, "Development of Eugenic Movement," 138.

247 Yi Myŏnghyŏk, "Taegyo ran Kŏt ũn Muŏt In'ga? [What Is Prenatal Education?]," *Kyoji Ihwa* (1930), 13–14.

248 Ch'oe, "Good and Bad Marriage," 140.

249 See "Hwaryubyŏng Yebang 3 Hwaryubyŏng i Manyŏn toenŭn Ne Kaji K'ŭn Wŏnin [STD Prevention 3 Four Reasons Behind the Prevalence of STD]," *DI*, February 14, 1927, 3.

250 Ch'oe, "Good and Bad Marriage," 140.

must be noted that eugenicists did not prioritize women's health for their cause but that of the offspring. A 1927 article titled "The Prevention of STDs" in the *Dong-A Ilbo* exemplifies this:

Allegedly 99 percent of women from the demimonde are infected with venereal diseases. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that all of them have STDs. However, many housewives have been recently infected with STDs, and the diseases are spreading to female factory workers and unmarried peasant women. The pain and the loss of efficiency are the second most serious problem; [the most pressing problem] is that the STDs harm posterity, so that they have congenital syphilis and are born with low intelligence, or with a delinquent nature and easily become criminal, or lose their eyesight. For society and the state, it is a huge loss and a severe problem.²⁵¹

This article revealed that women's good health was primarily regarded as a condition for a sound posterity in the STD discourse. Even their economic value as workers was less critical than their reproductive function: "the pain and the loss of efficiency is the *second* most serious problem (emphasis added)." As a human resource of the colonial economy and a pawn of colonial biopolitics, the beneficiaries of women's health were not themselves but employers, businessmen, and the state.

Meanwhile, the medical doctor Chang Mun'gyōng tenaciously depicted how STDs impeded women's generative functions and children's health. In her article for the women's magazine *Yōsōng* (*Women*), Chang explained that the embryo turned "scary and gross" and would eventually be born dead when the mother passed onto it an STD.²⁵² Moreover, she assumed that syphilitic children would become either inefficient at work or delinquent when grown-up, putting women under even greater moral pressure. Although the doctor defined STDs as "a heavenly punishment for men entering the red-light district" and pointed husbands out as the intermediate host, she argued that women, too, were responsible if babies were born with STDs: "It is not the child's fault, but [...] the parents."²⁵³

Under these circumstances, the women's magazine *Shin Kajōng* (*New Home*) published a special issue on sexual education for women in September 1936 that featured interviews with experts under the title "How Not to Marry a Venereally Infected Man." Nineteen out of twenty-one experts advised readers to demand a health certificate from their future husbands. Several experts added that the women had to take the initiative and bring their men to trusted doctors due to possible manipulation of certificates by their potential husbands.²⁵⁴ Besides the health certificate, three people recommended young women to observe their future husbands' conduct.²⁵⁵ A married couple shared that they traced each other's lives by exchanging their diaries from the last four to five years.²⁵⁶

251 "STD Prevention 1," *DI*, February 12, 1927, 3.

252 Chang Mun'gyōng, "Sōngbyōng e taehayō [On STDs]," *Yōsōng* (June 1936), 46–47; see 46.

253 Chang, "On STDs," 46–47.

254 See "Sōngbyōng Hwanja ege Shijip An Karyōmyōn [How Not to Marry a Venereally Infected Man]," *SK* (September 1936), 32–38.

255 See "How Not to Marry," 32, 35, and 37.

256 *Ibid.*, 38.

Yi Yōsōng, a socialist anti-Japanese activist, even insisted on introducing a state marriage license to realize the ideal of a eugenic nation.²⁵⁷ However, this was only a minority opinion. Chōng Kuch'ung, a doctor and KEA member, advised that the best prevention method was to check a man's health certificate because "only about 50 percent of men around the age of thirty are not sexually ill."²⁵⁸ In general, the interviewees agreed that it was women's task to achieve a eugenic marriage "for the cause of national health."²⁵⁹ Adhering to this view, the magazine also featured a nutritional supplement advertisement that might help mothers give birth to healthy children (see figure 9).

The impact of such burdening and stigmatizing of women can be detected in reports about women who attempted suicide due to their husbands' STDs.²⁶⁰ In March 1926, Kim Tong'ok tried to kill herself after she became syphilitic through her husband. She managed to save money and buy 606, the famous syphilis drug, yet as the drug did not work and her family fell into poverty due to the expensive medicine, she saw no other choice.²⁶¹ Kim Sōngdae, who received gonorrhea from her husband, committed suicide at Pukch'ōn River in the P'yōng'anbuk-do province in March 1928 after her husband and parents-in-law abused and drove her out of their home due to her illness.²⁶² Kim Pong'ae, a twenty-seven-year-old woman from Namhae, killed her daughter and herself in July 1937 after her husband was treated for an STD for four years without showing any improvement.²⁶³ In September 1934, Mrs. Yang and her husband Kim Taesik committed suicide at the Han River after her mother-in-law wrongfully blamed her for her husband's STD infection.²⁶⁴

The eugenic discourse, which emerged at the end of the 1920s and was set in motion in the 1930s, declared the so-called racial improvement as the goal of gender relations. With this aim, eugenicists distanced themselves from traditional marriages, where parents select their children's spouses, and Free Love, where individuals prioritized their happiness and sexual liberty instead of remaining chaste until marriage. Instead, they advised their contemporaries to carefully choose spouses to optimize the hereditary conditions of the offspring and eventually contribute to the nation. In Korea, where STDs were prevalent, the minimum condition for eugenic marriage was a body free of STDs. Even though many men were infected with STDs and spread them to female sex sellers and homemakers, the advocates of eugenics sidelined this problem. Instead, they promoted stricter medical examinations of women working in the sex industry and reinforcing women's self-discipline and social control. Notably, women of childbearing age

257 See *ibid.*, 36.

258 *Ibid.*, 33.

259 *Ibid.*, 33 and 36.

260 I became aware of following newspaper articles through Kang Hyegyōng's 2009 study. Refer to "STD as social problem," 104-06.

261 "Namp'yōn ūro put'ō Chōnyōm toen Maedok [Syphilis Infection Through the Husband]," *CI*, March 14, 1926, 2.

262 "Chega Pyōng Omg'yō chugo Allūndago Ch'ukch'ul [Husband Abandons Wife for Being Sick After Infecting Her]," *DI*, March 21, 1928, 5.

263 "Kayōpsūn Tu Saengmyōng! [Two Poor Lives!]," *DI*, July 17, 1937, 4.

264 "Chōnyul hal Hwaryu Pyōngma Tallak han Kajōng P'agoe, [Horrible STD Destroys a Happy Family]," *DI*, September 5, 1934, 1.

were asked to build up their knowledge of STDs and even “prevent STDs of their husbands” because they could transmit STDs from men to the offspring through in-utero infection. In this way, the discourse of eugenics in colonial Korea reduced sexuality to a reproductive issue and put pressure on Korean women to bear the heavy burden of racial improvement. The discourse of eugenics in the 1930s justified the social demand that women meet more stringent and detailed conditions than men regarding their conduct, and in this context, Korean women were further discouraged from everyday practices such as moviegoing.

Maternal Health and Moviegoing

Korean eugenicists considered the uncontrolled desire for love and intimacy a threat to their goal of racial improvement. While requiring careful management of sexuality, the call for eugenic marriage and hereditary health mainly addressed young women. Therefore, their lifestyle, including theater visits, became a relevant issue for eugenic marriage because films gained notoriety as the medium of love and movie theaters as a site for sexualized contact.

From the late 1920s, Korean medical experts advised women not to go to theaters as it might be harmful for pregnancy. Medical texts brought up the concept of prenatal education (*t'aegyo*) and the so-called mental hygiene (*chöngshin wisaeng*) as they repudiated pregnant women's movie watching. The daily newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo* was the leading portal for spreading the concept of prenatal education and pregnant women's mental hygiene in colonial Korea. Introducing prenatal education through a series of articles in 1929, the newspaper defined prenatal education as “a pregnant mother's mental preparation to give birth to a good child.”²⁶⁵ Highlighting the correlation between physical and mental status, the article considered pregnant women's emotions as the most influential mental factor for the fetus. According to the article, pregnant women were advised to maintain peace of mind—without any “turbulent of emotion” or “desire.”²⁶⁶ Hō Shin, a gynecologist at Seoul Imperial University, underlined the theory of mental hygiene and insisted that “things that could stimulate the emotion, such as plays, music, novels and the likes are bad” for pregnancy.²⁶⁷ Additionally, he stated that “a neighborhood of theaters is not good”²⁶⁸ as a living environment for pregnant women due to its turbulence. In another column, the medical doctor recommended that women avoid theaters during pregnancy because of the danger of catching infectious diseases.²⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the

265 “Chohūn Chanyō Nannūn T'aegyo ran Muōt 1: Imshin jung ūi Chōngshin Wisaengūn T'aea e K'ūn Yōnghyang ūl Chunda [What Is Prenatal Care to Bear Good Children 1: Mental Hygiene During Pregnancy Has a Profound Impact on the Unborn Child],” *DI*, September 29, 1929, 7.

266 “What Is Prenatal Care 1,” *DI*, September 29, 1929, 7.

267 Hō Shin, “Imshin Punman Sanyok e taehan Ilban Chishik kwa Sōpsaengbōp 11: Taech'e T'aea nūn Ōttōk'e Yōngyang ūl Ōnnū'ga [General Knowledge About Pregnancy, Delivery, Childbed and Rules for Maintaining Health 11: How Does a Fetus Take in Nutrition?],” *DI*, March 16, 1930, 5.

268 Hō, “General Knowledge About Pregnancy 11,” *DI*, March 16, 1930, 5.

269 Hō Shin, “Imshin Punman Sanyok e taehan Ilban Chishik kwa Sōpsaengbōp 22 Moch'e T'aea e Yōnghyang Chunūn Imshin chōn hu Pyōng [General Knowledge About Pregnancy, Delivery,

more common argument was that “movies, plays, or books that are likely to stir up feelings”²⁷⁰ might be counterproductive for mental hygiene during pregnancy.²⁷¹

Figure 10: Yi Kapsu's article about sex education in a women's magazine.



Source: *Shin Kajōng* (September 1936). Courtesy of Hy'ondam Mun'go.

Childbed and Rules for Maintaining Health 22: Diseases Before and After the Pregnancy That Affect the Mother and the Unborn Child],” *DI*, April 14, 1930, 4.

270 “Imbu ūi 10-kaewöl (chung) Yusanyul ūl Chögö chinün Imshin Chunggi ūi Chuūi [10 Months of Pregnant Women 2: Things to Care About in the Middle Period of Pregnancy],” *DI*, November 12, 1937, 3.

271 “10 Months of Pregnant Women 2,” *DI*, November 12, 1937, 3.

Notably, an earlier account on prenatal education and theater visits insisted on exactly the opposite. “The Science of Racial Improvement,” one of the earliest Korean articles about eugenics that the women’s magazine *Uri ŭi Kajŏng* (*Our Home*) published in 1914, introduced the concept of eugenics to Korean women and claimed that it “included prenatal education,”²⁷² as both aimed to *improve* the offspring. As a means of maintaining maternal health, the article exemplified how Francis Galton brought his wife “to a theater that played comedy when there was discord in the house.”²⁷³ In other words, Galton recognized comedy’s positive influence on pregnant women because it was thought to help them maintain good psychological health and eventually give birth to *fit* children. Regarding the effect of theater visits on pregnancy, this article did not find great resonance among Korean eugenicists.

To manage sexual and hereditary health, Korean eugenicists disapproved of children’s moviegoing as well. Yi Kapsu, the director of the KEA, called for the sexual education of Korean children from an early age to limit their exposure to sexuality through popular media, including motion pictures, and to stop them from developing uncontrollable lust. In his 1931 contribution to the popular magazine *Pyŏlgŏn’gon*, the eugenicist wrote:

If [parents] do not teach their children any knowledge about sexual desire from an early age, questions of sexuality would torment their nerves when they reach a certain age so that they read evil books or want to listen to the narrations at motion pictures. What is extremely dangerous currently is that children fall into the demimonde and seek lust from prostitutes or practice the bad habit of masturbation. [...] Nevertheless, it occurs very often that children listen to explanations from a lousy friend, motion pictures, or evil books and receive a bad influence because their parents or educators neglect the sexual education that the children need the most.²⁷⁴

Sexual education for children, including restricting their media consumption, was a means of managing hereditary health from an early age. His article published in the women’s magazine *Shin Kajŏng* (see figure 10) offered the argument that when children developed an interest in sexual matters through popular media, they would eventually do great harm to society as a whole:

Thus, too strictly keeping questions of sexuality secret causes children to feel terrified, anxious, or tormented. Moreover, when they develop much stronger curiosity, they try to understand sexuality through bad books, evil motion pictures, or plays. As they have even stronger sexual desire, they come to do unnatural things [...] the most dangerous things are falling into masturbation, perverted sexual desire, or hav-

272 “Injong Kaesŏn Hak [The Science of the Racial Improvement],” *Uri ŭi Kajŏng* (February 1914), 36–38; see 36.

273 “Science of Racial Improvement,” 37.

274 Yi Kapsu, “Chosŏn Yŏsŏng ŭi Song Kyoyuk e taehayŏ: Chanyŏ rŭl Tushin Pun ŭn Pandŭshi Han Pŏn Ilgŭshipshio [On Korean Women’s Sex Education: Parents Should Read It],” *PG* (January 1931), 51–52.

ing sex with prostitutes. Furthermore, they often end up committing a great sin and disturbing society in general.²⁷⁵

Yi named motion pictures as one of the main elements that would activate the youth's desire for actual sexual relationships in a wrong way and even make them descend into the demimonde. As the head of the KEA, it is likely that the "great sin" he mentioned referred to STD infections and disruption of hereditary health.

Figure 11: A picture of Seoul's waitresses receiving health check.



Source: *Maeil Shinbo*, September 2, 1930. Courtesy of the National Library of Korea.

Kisses, which became famous through Western romantic movies, were rediscovered as a means of STD infection under the influence of eugenics in the 1930s. A 1930 article in the *Maeil Shinbo* pointed out that kisses could transmit syphilis, along with tuberculosis, diphtheria, influenza, and cerebrospinal meningitis:

Syphilis causes a rash on the mucous membrane and skin in the second stage. Among them, papules, or colored spots, that erupt on mucous membranes such as lips or gum have many pathogens (spirochete) on their surface; thus, there is a risk that the pathogen will spread directly to the contact area. The reason behind the case that some people catch syphilis through their mouth by a cigarette lit by a woman of the demimonde is because the pathogen from colored spots was attached to [the

275 Yi, "Korean Women's Sex Education," 7.

cigarette]. When one can be infected with [syphilis] through a mere cigarette, the infection is 100 percent sure when a mouth directly touches another mouth, and the movement of teeth or tongues mechanically stimulates the lips, causing bruises to the mucous membrane. Additionally, [syphilis] can also be spread to small children through this way. Often someone other than parents kiss a child, yet this should never be allowed.²⁷⁶

Echoing the concerns about STD infections through kisses, the *Maeil Shinbo* published a picture (see figure 11) that showed how doctors examined waitresses' mouths at a café in Seoul with the caption "Kiss-Crazed Café Boys Should Be Relieved: Health Check of Waitresses of Cafés in Ponchŏng District."²⁷⁷ Nevertheless, in his 1931 contribution to the popular magazine *Tonggwang* (*Eastern Light*), the medical doctor Oh Wŏnsŏk warned that "you should not forget that prostitutes' health check conducted once or twice a week is extremely insufficient, thus do not feel relieved."²⁷⁸ He, too, counted kisses as a means of syphilis infection along with sexual intercourse and indirect contact with syphilis patients via household items and musical instruments.²⁷⁹

The daily newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* soothed readers that it might be unlikely that Easterners catch syphilis through kisses because kisses were not as ordinary as in the West, not to mention that syphilis pathogens were rarely found around the lips.²⁸⁰ However, the article informed that syphilis pathogens deep in the mouth or inherited syphilis were hard to find and could be transmitted through kisses, thus instructed readers to "brush teeth after kissing with hydroperoxide, rivanol, or iodine," although the surest way to prevent the infection might be "not kissing at all."²⁸¹ Another article in the *Dong-A Ilbo* from 1935, which praised Rudolf Valentino and Adolphe Menjou as "teachers of kissing"

276 "Hwabok ūi Mun in Saram ūi Ip: K'issŭ ro putŏ Chŏnyŏm tŏnŭn Yŏrŏ Kaji Chŏnyŏm Pyŏng [The Mouth Is the Entrance of Luck and Unluck: Various Contagious Diseases Transmitted through Kisses]," MS, May 9, 1930, 5.

277 "K'issŭ Kwang Kkap'we Poidŭl Anshim hal II [Kiss-Maniac Café-Boys Should Be Relieved]," MS, September 2, 1930, 2. The symbolic attribution of sexually transmitted diseases to marginalized women who worked as prostitutes, as well as their real health and medical consequences for these women manifested themselves in terms such as "venerea" and "venereal disease," whose etymology leads to the ancient goddess Venus. See Katja Sabisch, *Das Weib als Versuchsperson. Medizinische Menschenexperimente im 19. Jahrhundert am Beispiel der Syphilisforschung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007), 9. Comparative research on German and Korean women who, due to their gender and status, were subjected to health policy and medical intervention in the form of experimentation, control, and media representation would reveal the extent and forms of intersectional violence against marginalized women even more clearly. I became aware of Katja Sabisch's study through one of the reviews for the partial publication of this chapter in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* in German language. I would like to thank the reviewer for the valuable reference.

278 Oh Wŏnsŏk, "Kagong hal Maedok Pyŏng, Kŭ Wŏnin Ch'iryo kŭp Yebang Pŏp, Sunkyŏl han Chŏngnyŏn ege Tŭrinŭn Kyŏngbo [The Terrifying Syphilis, Its Causes, Remedy, and Preventive Methods: An Alarm for the Innocent Youth]," *Tonggwang* (January 1931), 72–77; refer to 77.

279 Oh, "Terrifying Syphilis," 75.

280 "K'issŭ wa Pyŏng ūi Chŏnyŏm: K'issŭ Hayŏdo Pyŏng e ttara Chŏnyŏm i toego An Toemnida [Kisses and the Spread of Diseases: Even If You Kiss, Infection Depends on the Sort of Disease]," CI, June 19, 1932, 4.

281 "Kisses and Spread of Diseases," CI, June 19, 1932, 4.

for Korean cinephiles, stated that “from the perspective of pathology, kisses are treated in the most unfortunate way,” because “debilitated people, people with high blood pressure, and patients with neuralgia should not kiss. Of the various risks transmitted by kissing, tuberculosis and syphilis are the most dangerous.”²⁸²

Unlike in Japan, the colonial government did not enforce eugenic law in Korea.²⁸³ Nevertheless, Korean eugenicists successfully launched the agenda of eugenic marriage through the print media and allocated women's bodies and sexuality to the biopolitics of racial improvement. In this context, women's theater visits and movie watching gained a new meaning as a threat to national health, as these activities might harm their future children's prenatal education. Regarding the ambivalent intellectual influence of eugenics on the discursive construction of individual love and relationship, the supposedly emancipatory practice of romantic love in colonial Korea in the 1920s can also be seen as an attempt by privileged, educated men with a high level of education to find a new lover who corresponds to the (self-)image and ideal of the modern Korean man. The fact that the men who dominated the public discourse in colonial Korea liked to imagine the New Women as their ideal partners sheds a different light on the public on the public uproar over women moviegoers in the 1920s—that they ultimately sought to restrict and control the sexuality of the women they themselves yearned for.

Stories Untold

Medical and eugenic discourses about the disadvantages of women's moviegoing added more weight to the stigmatization of their spectatorship. Under the biopolitics that primarily targeted women's bodies and sexuality, watching movies could be regarded as a sign of a woman's moral corruption and a threat to national health.

The stigmatization of the theater as a space of illicit sexuality, Western romantic movies as catalysts of uncontrollable desire, and biopolitics focusing on women's bodies reinforced the silence of the Korean female audience and writers in the discourse of theater and movies.²⁸⁴ For this study, I consulted nearly 15,000 pages of Korean women's magazines, and 150 pages of movie magazines appeared between 1908 and 1945. I found five texts in magazines, which include women's narrative of their theater- and movie going.²⁸⁵

282 “History of Kiss 1,” *DI*, June 28, 1935, 4, and “History of Kiss 2,” *DI*, June 26, 1935, 4.

283 Shin, “Development of Eugenic Movement,” 152.

284 Korean actresses publicly talked about their work experiences as well as actors and movies. While their narratives require further academic research, this study remains focused on the topic of female audiences' silence about their theater- and movie going. See “Ch'ömdan Yösöng Yöngghwain Chwadamhoe [A Round-Table Talk of the Vanguard Women in the Movie Industry],” *Chosön Yöngghwa* (October 1936), 74. Some contemporaries regarded actresses “cousins” of *kisaeng* women. K.O. Saeng, “Yöbaeu wa Kisaeng [Actress and Kisaeng],” *Changghan* (January 1927), 32.

285 This includes Yi, “As They Went” from 1924; Pödü, “Cinema and Female Students” from 1928; Cho Pongsun, “P'aen üi P'yöngji: Kim Yönsil Önni ege [A Fan Letter: To Sister Kim Yönsil],” *Yösöng* (May 1936), 20–21; Ch'oe Chöngghüi, “The Sorrow that ‘there's no tomorrow,’” *SL* (August 1938), 143; and Various Authors, “Ihwa Yöjön Ibön Pom Choröpsaeng Kasüm sok ül Türyöda Ponün Chwadamhoe [A Round-Table Talk to Look into the Hearts of This Spring's Graduates from Ehwa Women's College],” *Yösöng* (June 1939), 24–32. According to Roh Jiseung, female writers Mo Yunsuk and Yi Sön-

While Korean women remained silent about their movie- and theatergoing, women's magazines began featuring stills and stories of the newest films in the late 1920s. Together with observations made by contemporaries, these articles indicate that *kisaeng* women, female students, and educated homemakers were essential customers of movie theaters. The first women's magazine that featured Western movie stills in 1927 was the *kisaeng* women's magazine *Changhan*.²⁸⁶ By 1933, major women's magazines such as *Shin Kajong* and *Shin Yösŏng* introduced the newest Western movies by publishing stills and summaries regularly.²⁸⁷ This change signalizes growing interest among women of higher economic and social class in moviegoing despite the stigma attached to women's spectatorship.

Around this time, moviegoing was rebranded as a status symbol among the youth and young adults of the urban area.²⁸⁸ Theater scholar Roh Jiseung points out that the intelligentsia and students disregarded Korean films as "mere experiments" and film narrators' performance as "tasteless show,"²⁸⁹ while most Korean spectators still enjoyed their act. Instead of simply attending movies, these so-called "high-class movie fans (*kogŭp p'aen*)" distinguished themselves by "memorizing names of movie directors and actors and read carefully the critics printed in newspapers and magazines to show off their knowledge in cinema itself."²⁹⁰ Chŏng Ch'ungsil's 2018 study draws attention to the establishment of upmarket movie halls in Nishi Ginza, Tokyo, and the emergence of the young and well-educated movie fans in the early 1930s.²⁹¹ This development directly influenced Seoul's movie industry as the Japanese investors quickly adopted this upmarket strategy and built luxurious movie theaters for Seoul's Japanese settlers.²⁹² Roh and Chŏng commonly underline that the introduction of talkie movies accelerated the division between educated movie fans who could read subtitles or understand foreign languages and those who needed film narrators' explanation to watch foreign movies.²⁹³

Stills and detailed synopses in women's magazines had, therefore, a twofold function. For operators of movie theaters and movie fans, these were a marketing tool. However, for women who did not watch movies, these articles helped them to keep up with peers who distinguished themselves through knowledge of movies. The pieces of knowledge they gained through reading women's magazines could have even been crucial cultural capital to find the *right match*, achieving the goal of eugenic marriage by appropriat-

hŭi left short sentences to Hollywood stars in the September 1938 issue of *Chogwang* as well. See Roh, "Colonial Female Audiences," 18.

286 "Chisang Yŏnghwa: CHŎLMŪN YŎJA ŬI ILSAENG [Movies on the Page: SANDY]," *Changhan* (January 1927), 38–39.

287 See L.M.N., "Chisang Yŏnghwa: William Fox Chakp'um CHŎNGJO CH'AP'YO [Movie On-Paper: William Fox's THE YELLOW TICKET]," *Yŏin* (September 1932), 74–75; "Yŏnghwaran [Movie Section]," *Shin Yösŏng* (December 1932), 66–67; Sambosaeng, "Chisang Yŏnghwa: PŬLONDŬ PINŎSŬ [Movie On-Paper: BLOND VENUS]," *SK* (February 1933), 122–26.

288 Roh, *Others at Cinema*, 69.

289 Ibid.

290 Ibid., 96–97.

291 Chŏng, *Watching Movies*, 99–117.

292 Ibid., 177.

293 Roh, *Others at Cinema*, 102; Chŏng, *Watching Movies*, 195.

ing the medium that eugenicists disagreed with the most. Because knowledge of movies was helpful to refashion oneself as “high and noble,”²⁹⁴ as a contemporary characterized the young moviegoers of the 1930s.

The fashion pictorials of Hollywood stars in women's magazines also prove that educated Korean women were familiar with Western movies in the 1930s.²⁹⁵ Remarkably, they adopted the hairdos and makeup of Hollywood actresses. For example, cutting bangs like the ones Katharine Hepburn wore in a movie was a trend among young Korean women in the spring of 1935.²⁹⁶ Explaining what factors can boost a woman's attractiveness, the women's magazine *Shin Kajŏng* cited a Hollywood expert who claimed that “the balance of body, cheerful voice, and proper sports”²⁹⁷ might be essential. In one rare case, a girl sent a fan letter to a Korean actress and asked her for advice on how to become an actress, which was answered by the actress Kim Yönsil personally.²⁹⁸

While eugenicists accentuated the dichotomy of cinema and marriage, the youth of the 1930s saw little problem in combining both. In his 1933 comics titled “Become a Husband Like This!” Ch'oe Yöngsu advised men to spend their leisure time with their wives: “[A husband] Should not enjoy hobbies and leisure time alone. Aren't Korean housewives feeling sick at heart because they are not getting the same benefits as their husbands?”²⁹⁹ To accompany his suggestion, Ch'oe illustrated a married couple that happily watches a movie together (see figure 12). Likewise, the popular magazine *Samchöll'i*'s anonymous survey of Seoul's female students revealed that many of them expected their future husbands to enjoy watching movies as their hobby, right next to “reading literary works” and “listening to music.”³⁰⁰ The magazine concluded that “it is not unreasonable to have such a desire, as watching motion pictures has become an essential part of the lifestyle of young men and women today.”³⁰¹

Young intellectual couples used cinematic vocabularies and imageries to represent a new marital relationship based on love, too. Shim Hun, the aspiring novelist and movie director, offered a glimpse into his marriage life by publishing a part of his diary in *Samchöll'i*. He wrote that, to soothe his angry wife, he gave her “a diary and a women's

294 Sük'ürin Ppalchwi, “Kogüp Yöngghwa P'aen Tönün Pigyöl Shipch'ik [Ten Secret Tips to Become a High-Class Movie Fan],” *PG* (June 1930), 118. The author wrote the term “high and noble” in English alphabet.

295 For instance, *Shin Kajŏng* introduced Greta Garbo as the fashion icon from the Europe. “Chön Segye rül P'ungmi Hanün Kkret'a Kkalbijüm [Greta Garbism Conquers the World],” *SK* (November 1933), 78. Even after Japan entered the Pacific War and women's magazines propagated frugality in women's magazines, they introduced Hollywood stars' fashion to Korean readers. “Höll'iudü Süt'a'il [Hollywood Style],” *Yösöng* (January 1940), 10–11.

296 “Yuhaeng Hwajang [Trendy Makeup],” *SK* (May 1935), 132–34; see 132.

297 “Miin i Toeryamyön [How to Become a Beauty],” *SK* (September 1935), 75.

298 See Cho, “Fan Letter,” 20–21.

299 “Irön Namp'yön i Toera! [Be a Husband Like This!],” *SK* (December 1933), 134–35; see 135.

300 Various Authors, “Naega Isang hanün Shillang hu Chogön: Soul Mo Yöja Kobo Choröp Pan Kyusu Chean [My Conditions of the Ideal Husband: Suggestions by Senior Students of a Certain Women's Secondary School],” *SL* (January 1935), 131–35; refer to 133.

301 Various Authors, “Conditions of Ideal Husband,” 133.

magazine” and “a hail of kisses on her nose”³⁰² as a gift. Shim thanked his wife Ahn Chŏng’ok for preparing the meal, which would have been taken for granted by older generations, and “kissed her on the forehead” as she “buried her head in his chest,”³⁰³ which was reminiscent of love scenes in Western movies, often summarized as kisses and hugs. To depict how lovely Ahn seemed to him as he came home drunk, Shim borrowed a technical term from screenplays and wrote that her face looked “blurred with a soft focus to my drunken eyes,”³⁰⁴ inviting readers to imagine their everyday life as a scene in a movie. His diary exemplified that the young generation of Koreans, who enjoyed Western education and pursued modern marriage life, adopted the marriage lifestyle from Western movies, embodied modern love, and used the language of cinema.

Figure 12: Ch’oe Yongsu’s illustration of a married couple watching a movie together.



Source: *Shin Kajong* (December 1933). Courtesy of Hyundam Mun'go.

Nevertheless, speaking publicly about their love for movies was still an act of courage for Korean women even by the close of the 1930s. No Ch'ŏnmyŏng, a renowned poet, confessed her reluctance to publicly speak out about her preferences in actors after being humiliated once when she did. Asked by the popular magazine *Samch'ŏlli* in 1938 about her favorite movie star, she answered:

Once I answered [to the same question] Robert Taylor for a newspaper's entertainment section, [which the newspaper] required of me. However, due to the exaggerated title that the editor gave [to my answer], I appeared as if I fell in love with the

302 Shim Hun and Ahn Chŏng'ok, "Shillang Shinbu ūi Shinhon Kongdong Ilgi [The Joint Diary of a Groom and a Bride]," *SL* (February 1931), 54.

303 Shim and Ahn, "Joint Diary," 58.

304 *Ibid.*, 54.

Western entertainer and received many insults, which bothered me for a few days. Since then, I have not only hated Robert Taylor, but also, I cannot like any actor anymore.³⁰⁵

No Ch'ŏnmyŏng's story indicates that the stigmatization of women's interest in movies and movie stars since the 1920s had a lasting impact on the conception of female movie fans in colonial Korea. Women's silence detected in the colonial Korean discourse of movies was very likely the result of the judgment female moviegoers faced during this time. This hypothesis can be substantiated by the broad spectrum of topics about which Korean women of the era publicly spoke through newspapers and magazines. They voiced their opinions not only on issues such as women's school education, which received wide support due to its contribution to *larger* political issues (for instance, achieving Korea's independence from Japan by enhancing the level of education or the assimilation of colonized Koreans into the Japanese Empire); they also did not shy away from representing their interests in discussions on *yŏnae*, marriage, divorce, chastity, birth control, fashion, and socialism.³⁰⁶ They might have chosen to remain silent about their theater- and moviegoing experiences since they had to carefully consider the necessity of public utterance; the danger of losing their legitimacy in the colonial media landscape might have outweighed the urgency and benefit of risking their reputation.

The boom of foreign movies resulted from the colonial policies that restricted Korean investors' involvement in the cinema business. While rejecting Japanese movies, Korean audiences developed a preference for Western action films during the 1910s and consumed romantic movies in the early 1920s. The pre-code era Hollywood movies often entailed graphic representations of sexual intimacy, such as kissing scenes and hugging scenes. These movies deeply impacted the colonial Korean audience of the time. In particular, the public display of erotic images, the usage of close-ups, and the collective watching made moviegoing an unprecedented experience. Although colonial censors also considered Western movies a medium of sexuality and eroticism, the censorship practice itself was arbitrary even after the standardization of movie censorship in 1926. Therefore, Korean audiences, including young female students, could consume these powerful images of intimacy in public spaces. The gaze of young women upon these scenes created a moment of colonial publicness. Their pursuit of entertainment and fulfillment of sexuality stood in striking contrast to manifold expectations for them to become Wise Mothers, Good Wives and patriotic elites of the nation.

Furthermore, female students' consumption of Western romantic movies and pursuit of casual relationships contradicted the ideal of eugenic marriage. Korean eugenicists of the late 1920s, who organized themselves under the direct influence from the United States, Germany, and Japan, claimed STD prevention and the so-called eugenic marriage as suitable biopolitical means for *improving* the Korean race. As there was no eugenic law in colonial Korea, Korean eugenicists' efforts were focused on public campaigns targeting the modification of people's everyday behavior and educating them on the importance of STD prevention, mainly when they chose spouses. Due to the high STD infec-

305 No Ch'ŏnmyŏng, "Naega Choa Hanŭn Nambaeu [My Favorite Actor]," *SL* (October 1938), 151.

306 See Choi, *Sourcebook*.

tion rate among men, Korean eugenicists focused on protecting women's health, adding more social pressure and obligations on them. Eugenicists such as Yi Kapsu regarded moviegoing as a cause of sexual depravity, redefined kisses as a means of syphilis infection, and advised pregnant women to avoid theaters for the sake of mental hygiene. As a place where women could consume romantic movies and even meet strangers for *yōnae*, movie theaters posed a threat to the eugenic biopolitics. In this way, the public discourse of female audiences since the early 1920s was closely related to the gender politics aimed at reforming sexuality and gender relations. Notably, women's moviegoing was rebuffed due to traditional concepts of chastity as well as new medical knowledge and biopolitics, which required the restriction of women's sexuality. Watching foreign movies became a means of social distinction among the younger generation during the 1930s, yet female audiences seldom spoke about their cinema experiences publicly because of its stigmatization.