

VISUALIZING COLONIAL BEAUTY:
FEMALE FIGURE PAINTINGS OF YI YU-TAE, 1943-1944

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of the History of Art and Architecture
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

September 2014

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Title: Visualizing Colonial Beauty: *Female Figure Paintings* of Yi Yu-tae, 1943-1944

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Degree awarded September 2014

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Department of the History of Art and Architecture

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This thesis aims to reexamine images of Korean women as signs that represent the intertwined imperial and patriarchal masculine desires as depicted in the *Female Figure Paintings* of Korean artist Yi Yu-tae (1916-1999): *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* (1943) and *A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research* (1944). Existing interpretations of both works are problematic because they see the depictions of women in the paintings as representative of Korean women in 1940s. By investigating the Pacific War time gender hegemonies, like the “Wise Mother, Good Wife” rhetoric that opposed that of the “New Woman,” and exploring Japanese Imperial *Orientalism* towards Korea, this study will provide an alternative reading of Yi’s two *Female Figure Paintings*. By demonstrating how male psyches were projected on women during this period of Korean history, this thesis aims to offer a feminist understanding of Yi’s images of women.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincerest appreciation to Professor Jenny Lin for her constant enthusiasm and patience regarding every part of this thesis project. Without her guidance, the writing of this thesis would not have been possible. In addition, special thanks are due to Professor Charles Lachman and Kate Mondloch, whose knowledge with the needs and ideas of this project breathed life into this thesis. I also thank Professor Akiko Walley and Younjung Oh who filled my arms with rich resources and encouragements. Also I thank Professor Donghoon Kim, who made a great contribution to my third chapter. This project was funded with generous help from the Maude Kerns Endowment Award.

To my mother, Kyung-soon Kim, for her unconditional love and support.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In July 2013 the city of Glendale in California unveiled the new public statue *Peace Monument* in its central park, memorializing as many as 200,000 Korean military sex slaves. Known as “comfort women,” these slaves were victimized by the Armed Forces of the Government of Imperial Japan throughout Japan’s colonial expansion, as during World War II. Marking one of the most brutal memories of sexual violence to women in modern history, this life-size bronze statue produced by Korean sculptors Kim Un-seong and Kim Seo-kyeong features a bob-haired teenage girl wearing the Colonial Period (1910-1945)’s *hanbok* (traditional Korean garb), sitting next to an empty chair and a stone plaque etched with the title, *I Was a Sex Slave of the Japanese Military*. Because of its realistic representation of a colonial girl/sex slave, the statue became the locus of emotional involvement for Koreans; many publications have pictured Korean visitors presenting their condolences to the victims by leaving flowers and tying scarves around the statue’s neck. This statue has also stirred acrimonious debates between Korean and Japanese immigrant communities in the United States as well as transnational conflicts among nations that share the memory of colonialism during WWII. While Koreans have planned to build more “comfort women” statues in Korea and abroad, conservative Japanese have petitioned for the removal of the statue from the park. These Japanese detractors condemn the statue for representing what they term “false propaganda” associated with an anti-Japanese sentiment that leads to the harassments of Japanese residents in the U.S. Some have accused Glendale’s city government of violating the

inherent supremacy of the U.S Constitution by exerting its power over federal governments to keep the statue.¹

Putting aside questions of political appropriateness in erecting monuments for “comfort women,” it is worth noting the fundamental motivation of the fierce post-colonial debate surrounding the Glendale statue, since it is the first and only statue that features a female figure among the five “comfort women” memorials erected in the U.S. since 2010. The statue’s portrayal of a Korean girl reminds us of the power of images, especially representations of women, and how they affect the human psyche. The statue is somewhat propagandistic in its blending of realism and idealism, and inclusion of a beautiful female figure that effectively creates popular sympathy for a tragic historical memory. The statue’s featuring of a young woman, a figure intended to be beautiful and vulnerable, appeals to the public’s sentimental side.

Today, women are objectified in images as expressions of power and markers of political territory. The representation of women exposes not only historical circumstances, but also serves a sign of the social desires at the level of both the conscious and the unconscious. The way of representing Korean women exemplified in the Glendale statue, where the female figure is propagandized to address ongoing political issues by appealing to spectators’ emotional involvements, is not a contemporary invention. Rather, this mode of representing women stands in succession to the practice of early twentieth-century *Female Figure Paintings (Yeoseonginmulwha)*², which marked

¹ Kirk Spitzer, “Japan’s Lawmakers Launch Campaign Against ‘Comfort Women’ Memorials,” *Times*, Feb 25, 2014, accessed June 5, 2014, <http://world.time.com/2014/02/25/japan-comfort-women-memorials>.

² *Female Figure Paintings* is a generic term referring to figurative paintings of women as practiced by Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese and Manchurian artists who were under the influence of Japanese painting tradition. As a translation of Korean term *Yeoseonginmulwha* (女性人物畫), *Female Figure Paintings* includes paintings of beauties, genre paintings, and paintings of historical tales consisting of female figures.

a new phase in Korean art history by objectifying women as images through the lens of modern masculinity. The woman portrayed in the Glendale statue is therefore not set in a peculiar or secluded site, but within a linear history of Korean *Female Figure Paintings*.

The Glendale statue draws a sharp parallel with the early twentieth century *Female Figure Paintings* by Korean artists seeking idealized representations of women with conventional styles and themes. These images often depicted women as “beautiful” and “good,” inline with the concurrent aesthetic values that corresponded to the political situation in colonial Korea. These *Female Figure Paintings* represent colonial Korean women in *hanbok* placed in staged scenarios, showing a rich sense of submission, sacrifice and slight discomfort. These paintings’ constructions of femininity and eroticism correspond strikingly with the Glendale statue because they all signify “Woman” as an ideal embodying the masculine desires of patriarchy and greater political ends.

After WWII, imperial colonizers sought to expand their territories, mostly in African, American, and Asian countries, projecting themselves as the masculine power that would save the stagnant femininity of the colonized. Under Japan’s colonial rule, Korea was feminized, subject to conquest and protection. Colonial women in Korea therefore represent a complicated and expugnable political site where two types of masculine power –Japan’s imperial power over colonial subjects and Korean men’s patriarchal control over Korean women – are distributed and contested. This thesis offers a feminist art historical analysis of Korea’s *Female Figure Paintings* of the Colonial Period, arguing that these paintings represent the intertwining of imperial and patriarchal masculine desires. In particular, I will focus on the paintings of Korean artist Yi Yu-tae (李惟台, 1916-1999), who, although renowned for his mastery of landscape paintings,

devoted his earlier career to the industry of *Female Figure Paintings* during the Colonial Period. Yi's series of *Female Figure Paintings* produced during WWII are a prime demonstration of how women became symbols of control and surveillance by imperial power and the nationalistic fascism of Korean male elites. Analyzing the depictions of women in Yi's *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* (1943) [Fig.1] and *A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research* (1944) [Fig. 5] as signs of social ideology and the unconscious of the artist, I will explore an array of reflections on and artistic representations of female bodies as sites for exerting patriarchal and imperial power.

My study on Yi Yu-tae is not only about Yi Yu-tae, but also about the figure of the colonial woman and the powers oppressing her as demonstrated in the *Female Figure Paintings*. Why do we continue to objectify women as images and perpetuate the myth of the ideal woman? Why do works depicting women as idealized and/or victimized, such as Glendale's *Peace Monument*, continue to cause such a stir? By looking to this particular art history of colonial Korea, I aim to illuminate some of the primary concerns facing contemporary figurative art and feminist discourse today.

How to Read Representations of Women and *Female Figure Paintings*

To what extent do representations of women echo the “reality” of women? This question concerns the very fundamental interrogation of the function of female images in a broader context. So far, many studies have investigated the artists who were highly active during the Colonial Period of Korea, but few studies have addressed how representations of women within these paintings, sculptures and photographs signified the symptomatic desires of colonial Korean society. Existing studies about *Female*

Figure Paintings have been limited to the level of biographic accounts of the artists and historical/nationalistic evaluation of the paintings. Since many *Female Figure Painting* painters, especially those associated with the “Kim Eun-ho School,”³ suddenly shifted away from this genre following the Liberation of Korea in 1945, there have been incompatible assessments of these paintings and their artists. Some studies have focused on the Japanese influence on *Female Figure Paintings*, both in terms of style and themes. This approach ultimately downgrades the paintings’ status with regard to nationalistic introspection vis-à-vis Japanese colonialism in Korean modern art.⁴ Other scholars have rejected the historical value of these paintings in Korean modern art, elevating instead only those works subsequently made by artists who came to occupy positions of authority in post-colonial Korean art education institutions and national art exhibitions.

Based on Michel Foucault’s theorization of power structures, art historian Ahn Hyun-jeong laid a critical groundwork by looking into colonial Korean art exhibitions as a modern visual form of control, whereby colonial artists’ artworks display an internalized social practice in response to the colonial disciplinary system, beyond individual peculiarities or collaborations with Japanese imperialists.⁵ Even though Ahn’s

³ The Kim Eun-ho School or *Idang hwasuk* refers to the group of artists who studied in Kim Eun-ho’s studio. This group dominated the Korean *Female Figure Paintings* in the Oriental Painting Section of the Joseon Art Exhibitions. Kim Eun-ho, designated as the sole Korean assistant jury in the Joseon Art Exhibitions, his disciples including Kim Ki-chang, Jang U-seong, Yi Yu-tae, and Oh Ju-whan had power over the selections and awards in the Oriental Painting Section. Although that they were the most frequently selected and awarded artists in the Joseon Art Exhibition, Kim Ki-Chang, Jang U-seong and Yi Yu-tae ceased their output of these works and started a new oeuvre after 1945, though they continued to hold authoritative positions in the Korean Art Exhibition (“Gukjeon”).

⁴ For example, art historian Kim Minsu and Cho Eun-jeong widely labeled the Kim Eun-ho School artists, such as Kim’s disciples Kim Ki-chang, Jang U-seong, and Yi Yu-tae, as anti-national pro-Japanese collaborators.

⁵ Hyun-jeong Ahn, *Geundae ui siseon, Joseon misul Jeonlamhoe* [Gaze of Modernity: A study on Joseon National Art Exhibition]. Seoul: Ihaksa, 2012.

study rendered a service to Korean art history by avoiding mere nationalism, her reading of female images rests on the surface, assuming representations of women are read as a reflection of reality. For instance, Ahn writes that Yi's painting *Research* (1944), which portrays a female scientist, symbolizes a growing interest in female professionals in the late Colonial Period. Ahn's reading omits the notion that Korean male artists such as Yi might have been acting as colonial agents of masculine desires by conforming to the broader disciplinary system of Japanese Empire. As feminist cultural critic Cora Kaplan commented, "Without an analysis of the structure of feeling, it is hard to get below the surface of sexual differentiation and subordination."⁶ Representations of women in early twentieth century Korean *Female Figure Paintings* are not simply portraits; these images occupy the very vulnerable position of defining femininity vis-à-vis the operations of imperial and Confucian patriarchal masculine desires.

In her famous essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*,⁷ feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey uses the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to interpret female characters' sexual difference in films in order to demonstrate cinema's unconscious. For Mulvey, fetish-like images of women in films made by and for men exist as "sign" in which woman "stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning."⁸ The masculine power that

⁶Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986), 4-5.

⁷ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Mulvey identifies as steering the production and voyeuristic consumption of images of women in Hollywood cinema parallels that found in the Korean *Female Figure Paintings*.

Another foundational study is feminist art historian Griselda Pollock's *Woman as Sign: Psychoanalytic Readings* in 1988. Using a psychoanalytic and Marxist lens to analyze nineteenth century British painter Gabriel Rossetti's paintings, Pollock argues that "the pleasure" offered by Rossetti's beautifully rendered women is "manufactured by the rhetorics and codes of drawing, of painting or photography,"⁹ whereby women are situated as signs that secure the privileged position of male hegemony across class and gender. Pollock further develops Mulvey's positioning of vision as occupying the realm of the unconscious in relation to female bodies in the idealized images of mother/lady, in which female images become not only objects of male desire, but channel the male pre-oedipal complex. To put it another way, the convergence of women and beauty in fantasy (whether or not the representation of them is realistic) is connected to male fetishism in which paintings of beauties symbolize males themselves rather than women.

Though it may seem strange to apply psychoanalytic theory to Korean *Female Figure Paintings* produced in the particular situation of colonial Korea, the scope of Mulvey and Pollock's studies are relevant to discussing the issue of subjectivity in dichotomous power structures such as class, gender, and ethnicity. In fact, except for Korea's colonial experience, the position of women in nineteenth century British society is analogous with that of Korean women in the early twentieth century, especially regarding women's roles in modern class divisions, and the emergence of a new womanhood that threatened male hegemony. As a Japanese colony, early twentieth

⁹ Griselda Pollock, "Woman as Sign: Psychoanalytic Readings," in *Vision and Difference: femininity, feminism, and histories of art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 122.

century Korea constituted a site of sexual metaphor, wherein women were double-layered “Other,” as both colonized subjects and through their sexual difference. Symbolizing castrated masculinity, colonized Korean men were not only subject to objectifying women but were themselves being subjected to objectification by the privileged masculine voyeur of Japanese Empire. The identity of Korean male artists as colonialized subjects means that they should be approached differently than European or Japanese male artists, and demands that my feminist psychoanalytic approach must account for the specific political and social conditions of colonialism.

Early twentieth century Korean *Female Figure Paintings*, especially the work of Yi Yu-tae that won him the most significant colonial art prizes of the Pacific War era, are situated in a unique locus of history and culture that exposes ambivalent masculinities and femininities. These paintings do not merely mirror artists’ personal idiosyncrasies or serve as straightforward representations of female realities. This study does not simply aim to position the artist Yi Yu-tae within Korean modern art history or merely assess the pro-Japanese propensity or nationalism in his art. Instead, I aim to contribute to both Korean and feminist art histories by interpreting the sign of “Woman” in Yi Yu-tae’s *Female Figure Paintings*, and ultimately reveal the complex operations of masculine desire, both imperial and patriarchal.

Yi Yu-tae and the Joseon Art Exhibition

Yi Yu-tae (also known by his penname, Hyeoncho), a member of one of the privileged Korean *Oriental Painting (dongyangwha)*¹⁰ groups, namely the Kim Eun-ho

¹⁰ The term *dongyangwha* or *tōyōga* (東洋畫) is a catch-all term coined in early twentieth century by Japanese artists in order to broadly categorize localized Japanese style paintings (*nihonga* 日本画) in the

School, was regarded as the group's most traditional painter because he carried on a legacy of classical techniques and leitmotifs in order to represent women and current customs. Submissive, *hanbok*-clad women with lifeless facial expressions seated in artificial poses constituted the conventional visual representations of beautiful women in *Oriental Paintings* of the Kim School. Continuing these conventional codes of representation, Yi's ideal beauty is a woman dressed up in a fine *hanbok* dress over her elongated body, with blushing cheeks and rose petal-like lips set in an egg-shaped face with a neatly done hairdo. She is defined first by her looks, looks that are based on her sexual difference. The painter also creates a sense of beauty by conflating lovely women and lovely situations, positioning women in charming scenes often depicted in genre paintings such as weddings, child rearing, and other feminine activities. In Yi's *Female Figure Paintings*, beauty in women is defined both by the figures' looks and suggested roles.

The beauty of women in Yi's *Female Figure Paintings* hovers between realism and idealism. Instead of using *mōrō* (朦朧), a murky or hazy color technique used in *nihonga*¹¹ and prevalent in Korean *Female Figure Paintings*, Yi creates more realistic and restrained representations of women by stressing the contour lines of figures and objects. Yet Yi's realistic mode of pictorial address is deployed in a fantasy about what

colonial exhibitions such as Joseon Art Exhibition ("Seonjeon") and Taiwan Art Exhibition ("Taiten") in order to distinguish *nihonga* from its counterparts in Japan's colonies. Since *nihonga* literally means "Japanese painting", it was necessary to invent a new term to refer to colonial paintings as a broader subgenre of *nihonga*. Even though the term *dongyangwha* could be used to refer to traditional Korean literati painting in terms of style, theme, and materials, it had a rich *nihonga* sensibility during the Colonial Period of Korea. After liberation, the term *hangukhwa* (Korean style paintings) was separated from *dongyangwha*, though it has often been used in mix with *dongyangwha*.

¹¹ Literally referring to "Japanese paintings," the term "*nihonga*" was coined in the mid-nineteenth century in order to distinguish paintings grounded in traditional conventions, techniques and materials from paintings using Western-style materials and techniques (*yōga*) painted by Japanese artists.

women should be, despite the fact that his scheme of representation is known to be based on sketching from exact observations of actual models.¹² His stylized depictions of faces and bodies show not only pure “Korean” physical identities, but also westernized and fictive identities. His *hanbok* dressed and mostly Korean coifed female figures are shown against simplified backgrounds, suggesting a sense of fantasy that renders them mythical. The imaginary women in his works are disguised as women from real life through illustrations of them roleplaying everyday situations. This dual realistic-idealistic mode of visual representation shows a two-fold attempt to control women; women become objects of pictorial manipulation by male producers and for predominantly male spectators, with the implication that real women should be as disciplined as the women in the paintings. The realistic illusion in these images secures male visual pleasure by exposing an unconscious desire toward and against female bodies, which will be explored in the case studies throughout Chapter II and Chapter III.

Some critics may question my assumption that the *Female Figure Paintings* in early twentieth century Korea were produced by and for middle class men, since colonial Korean *Female Figure Paintings* were created for nationwide art exhibitions which allowed women as well as lower-class colonial subjects in as spectators. In fact, Yi’s series of *Female Figure Paintings* in 1943 and 1944 were not market-driven products, but were ambitious entries aimed at winning annual awards given by the Governor General of Korea. To support my speculation about the male/female, producer/produced, and viewer/viewed relationships of Yi’s paintings, I will look to the peculiar salon system,

¹² In the retrospective interview with Samsung Art Archive, Yi mentioned that he sketched from real women for the female figure paintings, although he did not clearly reveal who they were. He also noted that his brother’s wife and other women in his household modeled for *Women* (1943) owing to the difficulty of hiring female models. Samsung Foundation, “Hyeoncho Yi Yu-tae: Saengaewa jakpum” [Hyeoncho Yi Yu-tae: His Life and Art], *Archives of Korea art journal* 6 (2009): 343.

features, and historical contexts of the Joseon Art Exhibitions (*Joseon misul jeonlamhoe*, hereafter referred to as “Seonjeon”¹³), which provided the exclusive stage of colonial art.

Instituted in 1922 and continuing until 1944, a year before the independence of Korea, “Seonjeon” played a significant role in shaping Korea’s colonial art world and was part of the colonial cultural campaign of the Japanese Governor General of Korea. “Seonjeon” were modeled after the judging regulations and administrative policies of Japanese official salon exhibitions (“Teiten”). They were controlled by Japanese bureaucrats and judges, and demonstrated a powerful censorship system in the guise of a pathway to success for artists. After the Calligraphy section was abolished in 1932 and replaced by the Craft and Sculpture section, “Seonjeon” consisted of three parts: Oriental Painting, Western Painting, and Sculpture and Craft. Only a limited number of selected works from each section received awards as part of the Special Selection, with the *Changdeok* Palace prize (the 1st prize) and the Governor’s prize (the 2nd Prize) designated as the most exclusive. Major Korean newspapers covered “Seonjeon” with related articles including overviews, commissioners’ speeches, a list of juries and selected artists, and interviews. On average the “Seonjeon” of the 1920s received about 25,000 visitors a month; students made up a huge part of visitors, and the number of

¹³ *Joseon misul jeonlamhoe* or *Chōsen bijutsu tenrankai* (朝鮮美術展覽會) is usually referred to as “Seonjeon” in Korean or “Senten” in Japanese which is an abbreviation of its full name, in which “*Seon*” refers to Korea (Joseon) and “*Jeon*” for exhibition (*jeonlamhoe*). Likewise, most of Japanese and colonies art exhibitions were referred to as abbreviations such as “Bunten” (*Monbushō bijutsu tenrankai*, or Ministry of Education Art Exhibition), “Teiten (*Teikoku bijutsuin tenrankai* or Imperial Art Academy Exhibition)”, and “Taiten (*Taiwan bijutsu tenrankai* or Taiwan Art Exhibition)”.

Japanese visitors surpassed that of Koreans.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, “Seonjeon” held an authoritative power in unifying and controlling art in Korea at the state level.

“Seonjeon” were gendered exhibitions in terms of the major themes of selected works and participant juries and artists. Over seventy-five percent of “Seonjeon” figure paintings were *Female Figure Paintings*, and among these works, images of women comprised seventy five percent, images of girls made up eighteen percent, and the rest were female nudes.¹⁵ The Oriental Section in particular was gendered, with about eighty percent of the entries being *Female Figure Paintings*, and about half of those paintings depicting women indoors.¹⁶ The Kim Eun-ho School, which Yi belonged to, and Japanese resident artists contributed to this tendency. Except for Bae Jung-rye, whose Female Figure Painting was included in a 1940’s “Seonjeon,” the Kim School consisted exclusively of male artists and maintained a huge influence in Korea’s colonial art world. Although some Japanese female resident artists such as Koi Eiko and Anbo Michiko participated in “Seonjeon” in the late 1930s to early 1940s, male artists far outnumbered their female counterparts. Juries were composed entirely of Japanese male artists who had already acquired prestige from Japanese official salons and teaching positions in Japanese universities.

Advanced research about “Seonjeon” tends to focus on the exhibitions’ function as a means of controlling Korea within the binary Japanese colonizer/Korean colonized

¹⁴ Jeong Ho-jin in his research of the “Seonjeon” system and its social influence analyzed a great number of magazines and newspapers published at the time. Ho-jin Jeong, “A Research on Joseon Art Exhibition: Focusing on the Oriental Section,” (PhD diss., Sungshin Women’s University, 1999).

¹⁵ Hyun-hwa Pak, “The Images of Woman in Korean Modern Painting: A Study Specialized on Works of Chosen Art Exhibition (1922-1940)”(master’s thesis, Mokpo University, 2002), 25.

¹⁶ Youn-kyoung Cheung, “A Study on the Women Portraits in Indoors of the Chosen Art Exhibition: Focusing on the Oriental Painting Sector”(master’s thesis, Ihwa Women’s University, 2001), 104.

relationship. In the early 2000s, with support from a democratic-government led project, *Research in Collaborationist Activist*, many studies about “Seonjeon” and participating artists have been published as part of a nationalist program intended to uncover pro-Japanese collaborators who took up privileged social positions after the liberation of Korea.¹⁷ Many of the studies point to the fierce resistance seen in Korea’s March First Movement in 1919 as a trigger for the establishment of “Seonjeon” as a form of control aimed at taming Korean subjects, one which, along with journalism and other cultural activities, would be perceived as softer than Japan’s strict militaristic rules.¹⁸ Scholar Jeong Ho-jin posits that, despite the Japanese commissioners’ assertion that “Seonjeon” were created to develop colonial Korean art, their true intention was to instill a colonial mentality of subordination to Japanese constructs as a mean of assimilation.¹⁹ Referred to as “the jewel in the crown of Cultural Rule,” art historian Kim Hyeshin also emphasizes “Seonjeon” as an effective surveillance system to direct Japan’s colonial policies in Korea using art. According to Kim, the exhibitions’ hierarchical promotion systems, including “Recommendation” and “Participation,” gave the Japanese a monopoly on

¹⁷ Started from a private organization ‘The Institute of Research in Antinationalism’ in 1991, ‘The Institute of Research in Collaborationist Activism’ was established in 1995 and launched a project named ‘A Dictionary of Pro-Japanese Activism’ in 2001, in engaging with democratic government’s pledge that claimed elimination of the remnant of colonialism and the military regime. This nationalistic campaign, however, can hardly avoid being criticized for its obscure and broad standards for what ‘collaborationist’ means, and it has had conflicts with conservative political groups.

¹⁸ According to Kim Hyeshin, “Under the new post-March First governing policies, the publication of magazines and the two national newspapers, the *Chōsen Ilbo* and the *Tonga Ilbo*, were allowed, and Keijō Imperial University (now Seoul National University) and technical colleges specializing in Korean traditional arts were established. But the real purpose of this so called Cultural Policy remained the disruption and weakening of the influence of national independence movements by getting people to focus on culture rather than their hopes for independence that were raised by the March First Movement.” Kim Hyeshin, “Images of Women in the National Art Exhibitions during the Korean Colonial Period,” in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 143.

¹⁹ Ho-jin Jeong, “A Research on Joseon Art Exhibition,” 68.

judging, which naturally nurtured a pro-Japanese propensity in colonial Korean art. This resulted in a self-Orientalized nativism by Korean artists. Jeong and Kim's speculations are important in post-colonial examinations, but they neglect to account for colonial Korea's ambivalent cultural geography beyond the binary relationship between colonizer and colonized.

Besides the political context, "Seonjeon" held an important economic function. Although "Seonjeon" played a significant role in instilling colonial subjects through colonial aesthetics and ideology and shaping Korean art as quasi- Japanese art, the exhibitions also created an art market for Japanese residents. Scholar Yi Jung-hee points out that today's "Seonjeon" researchers tend towards emotional rather than objective analyses, arguing that "Seonjeon" should be considered an institution primarily meant for satisfying the artistic and cultural demands of Japanese residents in Korea rather than a surveillance tool.²⁰ In light of the fact that in the 1920s and 1930s the number of Korean artists' entries fell far short of that of Japanese artists' and that "Seonjeon" were held between May and June in order to avoid overlapping with Japanese official salon periods, the primary beneficiary of "Seonjeon" can be easily assumed to be Japanese. Economic benefits undoubtedly encouraged artists. For instance, Japanese painter Takagi Haisui stated that he received better deals in Korea than Japan and the economic boom of Korea rendered the growth of the art market in 1930s.²¹ "Seonjeon" selections were sometimes printed as postcards and books for sale. Furthermore, the first prize works were usually collected by the Joseon Dynasty Museum, and the Governor-General of Korea often

²⁰ Jung-hee Yi, "Joseon misul jeonlamhoe changseol e daehayeo" [On Foundation of Joseon Art Exhibition], *Association of Korean Modern and Contemporary Art History* 3 (1996): 144-145.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

purchased the second prize works. For Korean artists, the mechanism that shaped their artistic tendencies seems not only to have been the administrative and regulatory systems of the colonial government, but also economic pressures. In this regard, Korean *Female Figure Paintings* were highly likely to have been produced to cater to the male dominated art market and juries.

In the last two “Seonjeon” competitions in 1943 and 1944, Yi won second prize (the Governor-General’s prize) for his three-panel painting, *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* (1943), and first prize (*Changdeok* Place prize) for *A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research* (1944). Earnestly following the conventions of *Female Figure Paintings* in the Oriental Sections of “Seonjeon,” these two artworks demonstrate what is orthodox in images of women. Even though he was granted highest honors in the exhibitions, reviews and criticism of Yi and his works were surprisingly limited. Except for art critic Yun Hui-sun, who praised the traditionalism in *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* as a small part of his total critique of the 1943 “Seonjeon,”²² and pseudonymous critic Pigaso’s condemnation of Yi’s *A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research* as simply vague and incomplete,²³ no contemporaneous reviews appeared regarding his works. What led Yi to become one of the most honored artists in the 1944 “Seonjeon” despite being marginalized by the critics? How did Yi depict women differently than Japanese artists? Do his depictions of beauty create pure visual pleasure for spectators? What is behind the sense of uneasiness in his two works? By interpreting *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* (1943) and *A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research* (1944), the following

²² Hui-sun Yun, “Seonjeon chongpyeong” [“Seonjeon” critiques], *Maeil Sinbo*, June 24, 1943.

²³ Mon Ami, “Seonjeon,” *Jogwang* 10 (1944) : 66-67.

chapters will illuminate possible answers to these questions, while raising further questions regarding images of women under colonial rule in the militaristic era.

Chapter II begins with a discussion of *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* (1943), in which images of women as a maiden, bride, and mother were deployed in the traditional manner. I will examine how traditional Korean beauty with *nihonga* sensibilities was established in Yi's art. While he depicts traditional Korean female beauty in *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment*, it is questionable to read the figures as purely Korean. In analyzing the painting, I explore the visualization of the traditional female beauty as a cultural marker flexing masculine imperial and patriarchal power. The *hanbok*-clad women who made up the biggest part of the "Seonjeon" Oriental Section and appeared in Yi's early oeuvre cannot be fully interpreted without speculations about colonial Korea's assimilation into Japanese culture and of Japan's corresponding assimilation of Western culture in a larger struggle for Asian cultural identity. Also, the traditional beauty of those women in Yi's *Women* not only reconstructs *Koreanness*,²⁴ but crystallizes the tense social discourse during the Pacific War. Embodying colonial metaphors, middle-class identity and masculine rhetoric, the female figures in *Women* exist as signs that eventually mirror men, including Yi, the juries, and the viewers.

Chapter III surveys another of Yi's symptomatic female figure paintings, *A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research*, which won him the first prize in the last "Seonjeon." Each panel portrays a *hanbok*-clad lady, one in a piano studio and the other in the science lab. This diptych painting employs the same middle-class Korean women as Yi's other works, but uniquely addresses the modernity of women. As the sole colonial painting portraying professional women, *A Pair of Figures* epitomizes the "New Woman" of

²⁴ The quality of being Korean, or Korean identity and nature.

Korea's 1920s-1930s social discourse. In the last half of Chapter III, I explore how this patriarchal social discourse was interrupted by the demands of propagandistic art using images of women under the urgency of war. This chapter's analysis of *A Pair of Figures* is an extension of the study on *Women*, which reveals the male artist's sexual desire, fear, moral consciousness and ambition vis-à-vis imperial power.

As cultural products in an era of lunacy and irrationality, Yi's *Female Figure Paintings* invite us to look into the intertwined problems of colonialism and patriarchal control that plagued Korean society during WWII. Korea's social woes often appear as codes; the figure of "Woman" needs to be deciphered by exploring not only wartime ideologies, but also the unconscious of Korean male artists. This thesis utilizes psychoanalytic feminist readings to investigate the universality of male desire, while attending to Korea's historic particularity. In doing so, I offer an alternative reading of Korean *Female Figure Paintings*, interpreting the artworks' irregular and illogical signs as agents of oppressive powers during WWII.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN: WISDOM, IMPRESSION, SENTIMENT (1943)

AND THE RE-INVENTION OF KOREAN BEAUTY WITHIN WARTIME

IDEOLOGY

Among Kim Eun-ho's students, Yi Yu-tae was a disciple who most faithfully inherited his teacher's art and learned the classical techniques immersed in the tradition. ... His paintings either in figures or in landscape dwell in the succession of tradition, but their base is in the present.

Yi Kyung-sung, "Pursuit of Sublimated Nature"²⁵

Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment (1943), won the Governor-General's Award in the Oriental Painting (*dongyangwha*) Section in the 22nd "Seonjeon," and marked latecomer "Seonjeon" artist Yi Yu-tae as one of the top painters in colonial Korea. From an interview with *Maeil Sinbo* (*Daily News*) during the exhibition that included a eulogy for his old master Kim Eun-ho, Yi stated that his motive for creating *Women* was to depict a woman's life in three parts: maidenhood (*Wisdom*) (Fig.2), wifhood (*Impression*) (Fig.3), and motherhood (*Sentiment*) (Fig.4).²⁶ In 1998, a year before he died at the age of 84, he reminisced about *Women* as an embodiment of his desire to portray "the beauty of womanhood in those days,"²⁷ during a retrospective

²⁵ Kyung-sung Yi, "Pursuit of Sublimated Nature," in *Yi Yu-tae/Kim Jeong-hyun*, ed. Yi Gu-yeol et al. (Seoul: Kumsung, 1990), 122.

²⁶ "All of this is attributed to my old master Kim Eun-ho who has advised me for ten years. The work is purely my perspective about a woman's life in three parts: *Ji* (*wisdom*) as a maiden, *Gam* (*impression*) as a bride, and *Jeong* (*sentiment*) as a mother." From "Yeonggwangui seonjeon teukseonjak" [The Glory of "Seonjeon" Special Selections], *Maeil Sinbo*, May 27, 1943.

²⁷ Since Yi was in bad health and the recording was of poor quality, there are a number of "*" marks for unintelligible parts. Complaining about some museological misunderstanding shown by displaying his *Women* as three separate paintings, he explained that the theme of this triptych was his perception of feminine beauty at the time it was painted. Samsung Foundation, "Hyeoncho Yi Yu-tae," 343.

interview about his body of work. It is generally agreed that *Women* is the heir of “Seonjeon” *Female Figure Paintings* as it represents a synthesis of the most frequently depicted themes and most often used styles. *Women* is frequently introduced as an example of *miinwha* (paintings of beautiful women), since Yi employs images of a *hanbok*-clad maiden, a bride, and a mother, to capture the ideal female beauty that can be seen during the different life stages of women.²⁸

On the one hand, the visual pleasure of looking at these women fundamentally comes from the bodily beauty of the figures, a beauty that signifies erotic connotations. These women were meant to be beauties by the standards of a masculine mode of representation. The main figures have stylized faces with white-burnished skin, blushing cheeks, and compressed cherry lips, and wear excessively wrinkled *hanbok* that stress the contours of the body to visually signify female sexuality. *Wisdom*, in particular, conjures the young women’s chaste and shy demeanor as she reveals her foot clad in *danghye* (women’s shoes made from leather and silk) from beneath the hem of her skirt in a suggestion of eroticism, alluding to the classic foot fetishism.²⁹

In *Sentiment*, the figure’s blushing cheeks and cherry lips set in her glowing face imply sexual possibilities. Offering an unimpeded gaze of her three-quarter turned face and body, she symbolizes a “woman,” an idealized object for visual pleasure. The

²⁸ For example, Jang Jeng-nan argues that the term *bijinga* (美人畫) was coined in 1915 to refer to artists who painted beautiful women for illustration magazines. *Miinwha* (美人畫) is the Korean pronunciation of Japanese *bijinga*. Jang used the term *miinwha* to refer to Yi Yu-tae’s *Female Figure Paintings*, since his painting techniques were mostly inherited his teacher Kim Eun-ho’s, who is regarded as the first adopted of *bijinga* in colonial Korea. See Jang Jeng-lan, “A Study on Beauty Drawings by Lee, You Tae and Pu, Bao Se: Centering around 1930s-40s,” *Dongak Art History* 4 (2013): 153-169.

²⁹ In East Asian culture, foot-fetishism appeared in various forms, including the Han Chinese penchant for foot-binding and the Joseon Dynasty’s “small shapely socks (*Oessibeoseon*),” which compacted women’s feet. The symbolism of feet as a sexual metaphor is observed in the early twentieth century Japanese literature as well; for instance, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s *Fumiko’s Leg* (1919).

paintings' erotic connotations are not expressed directly, but rather concealed within moral messages about what women should be.

Unlike typical genre paintings and archetypal *miinwha* that openly depict female eroticism and sexuality, what Yi expresses through his triptych seems to be rather subdued; feminine physicality is hidden behind traditional customs and pictorial settings. In addition, the women's unrealistically elongated proportions and strong facial features seem to be slightly exaggerated in comparison to the standard beauties seen in other Japanese and Korean *Female Figure Paintings*. Typically in these works, beautiful women were represented with soft, round faces, smaller frames with rounded shoulders and more realistic body proportions. They invite the gaze of spectators as amiable and readily accessible ideal lovers. Because Yi's depiction of beauty in comparison to other beauty paintings is atypical, it must have been other elements in *Women* that drew the attention of spectators.

In *Women*, female beauty is depicted using a mix of female corporeality and the roles the figures are performing in the painting. In the world of *Female Figure Paintings*, women are meant to look beautiful by all manner of means. However, the criteria that decide "beauty" and "non-beauty" in a social frame are not scientific or absolute confirmations, but the matter of collective tastes that corresponds to the cultural-historical and social-political situation. What else then makes the women in *Women* read as beautiful? What would have attracted the first spectators who witnessed or participated in the process of the 1943's "Seonjeon" selection to the female beauties in *Women*, and prized it with the second most honorable award?

Since only a limited number of critical reactions to Yi's *Women* remain, it is not easy to undertake an exploration of contemporaneous reactions to the work. Although it can be assumed that in the 1940s cultural criticism and reviews were not as prominent due to the war, the public reactions to Yi's work were not commensurate with his success in "Seonjeon."

Korean art critic Yun Hui-sun made relatively positive comments about the work as having "the least western-influenced style," considering Yi's qualities of "localism or traditionalism" to be on par with those of grand master painter, Kim Eun-ho.³⁰ It is generally agreed that *Women's* depiction of female beauty is based on its Korean traditional values in terms of painting techniques and application of traditional themes. Yun praised Yi's less murky color application and emphasis on lines.³¹ Although Yun did not directly praise Yi's depiction of women, Yun's strong penchant for traditional and historical Korean beauty was correlated to Yi's modes of depicting female figures.³² This traditional beauty is faithfully constructed in the theme of *Women*. The female sitter in *Wisdom* who looks off to the side in submissive response to the viewers' gaze, and ashamedly covers her white blouse with her hand, represents an ideal innocent lady. In *Impression*, the direction of the gazes of the bridal attendants towards the bride's *nokui hongsang* (a combination of green blouse and red skirt signifying a newlywed bride) and

³⁰ Hui-sun Yun, "Seonjeon chongpyeong" ["Seonjeon" critiques].

³¹ Since Yun's definition of localism and traditionalism is very vague and the *nihonga* sensibility in Yi's work is obvious, his criticism of Yi's *Women* requires more research. Despite Yun's reputation as a Korean nationalist art critic and his emphasis on traditionalism as being "true art," his definition of Korean identity is mixed up with Pan-Asianistic aesthetic. On the one hand Yun shows the significance of "Korean identity" in art as can be distinguished from *nihonga*, but on the other hand, he lacks clarity about specifically what is "Korean identity." Yet, the pan-Asiatic consciousness of Yun is beyond the scope of this study.

³² "Recall the Goguryeo mural paintings. Retrospect Silla stoned Buddha. From Goryeo celadon, Yi (Joseon) Dynasty's paintings and to the Southern school tradition in China, let us once again commemorate the classics. ... Now it seems obvious that our contemporary artists are facing the difficulties to learn this spirit of time." Hui-sun Yun, "Seonjeon chongpyeong" ["Seonjeon" critiques].

the bride's shy demeanor theatrically display a transitional moment in a woman's life. Picturing a mother embracing her young son in a refined traditional Korean interior, *Sentiment* conveys a sense of the sublimity of motherhood through the mother's elegant facial expression and the toned down colors of her *hanbok*. Yi's projection of ideal beauty seen in *Women* presents the virtues of Confucian morality that emphasize family relationships as the basic unit of society as a whole, a morality where women are expected to be chaste and submissive to men.

Yet, both Yi's and Yun's descriptions of *Women* as traditional are problematic as the painting does not fully depict 1940s Korean customs or Korean tradition, but rather an usual mixing of the two. A combined catalogue published in 1990 of the paintings of Yi Yu-tae and his contemporary Kim Jung-hyun (1915-1978) introduced *Women* as such: "In *Women*, Yi Yu-tae represented the lives of upper-class women in Korea. With his still and gentle manner and use of calm colors, he represented Korean customs, especially those found in upper-class Seoul, that he had carefully observed for his project."³³

Even though this introduction and even Yi himself stressed the sense of the present in the female figures' features, their traditional *hanbok* and hairstyles are too archaic to be from the 1940s. Since the 1920s, many upper and middle class women in Seoul had adopted Japanese and Western fashions and lifestyles. During the 1920s and 1930s, *hanbok* fashions were modified to be more practical and revealing. For example, shortened skirts that exposed the ankle and tightened blouses that were initially a uniform designed for female educational institutions came to be popular.³⁴ The long, wide, blue

³³ My translation. *Yi Yu-tae/Kim Jeong-hyun*, 100.

³⁴ Ui-sook Hwang, "Hanguk yeoseong jeontongboksikui byunwha yangsike deahan yeongu" [A study of stylistic change of Korean Traditional Female Attire], *Baewha Nonchong* 14 (1995): 289.

and green skirt in *Wisdom* and *Sentiment*, with slightly exposed *danghye* (traditional Korean colored shoes) evokes the antique beauty of married nobles and middle classes Korean women in the Joseon Dynasty, which is not in accord with Yi's desire to portray "the beauty of women's life in those days."

Yi's *Bridal Makeup* (1942) (Fig. 6), painted a year before *Women*, shares an identical theme with *Sentiment*, with four bridal attendants helping to finish up a bride's adornment at the center, and female figures dressed in more vividly colored and elaborate *hanbok*, with some wearing western influenced curled-up hairstyles that would have been popular at the time. Compared to *Bridal Makeup*, there is little in *Women* that reflects contemporaneous women in Seoul; the latter is more of a retrospective look at the feminine fashions of the Joseon Dynasty. There are also attributes signaling Goryeo (918-1392) antiques in *Women*: a celadon stool in *Wisdom* and an incense burner.

Furthermore, the women's bodies of Yi's triptych do not strictly adhere to Korean tradition. The bodies in *Women* are partially modeled on Western rather than Korean figures, obscuring a pure sense of Korean identity. The smaller faces and unnaturally elongated bodies with hourglass figures are closer to classical European standards than traditionally proportioned Korean female figures. For example, sketches and woodblock prints by Scottish female artist, Elizabeth Keith, who visited Korea during the 1920s, display anatomical depictions of Korean women, where the average ratio of Korean female bodies to head is 5:1. Yi's European-like bodies, interestingly enough, are adorned with Joseon fashions and Goryeo antiquities. By not embodying the typical physical characteristics of Korean women and conjuring Korea's past through antique

adornments and anachronistic dress, the figures in *Women* present a unique mixture of Korean and Western and traditional and modern styles and values.

The artist's construction of Korean tradition is not a historical truth but a myth fabricated from collective memories. This leads to two related questions. What makes us think of *Women* as a work that authentically displays traditional Korean female beauty? And how should we read the signs behind Korean tradition and beauty in *Women*? Yi's consideration of Korean beauty has been confused by the legacy of colonial rules that affected cultural activities, and the long-term patriarchal order that governed the images of women within the ideology of a male-oriented society by both contemporaneous critics and post-colonial generations of scholarship. In Yi's *Women*, cultural tradition and female beauty are combined together to become a layered rhetoric. Such issues must be examined within a larger discussion regarding representations of female beauty within the socio-political framework of colonial Korea.

How to Read Korean Beauties in *Women*

What is seen as beautiful about women is often enigmatic, and therefore problematic. Female beauty has been objectified to allow it to be observed, visualized, and consumed under the patriarchal mode of sight. In the process of constructing Korea's modern nation-state, women's beauty came to represent collective ideals rather than individual inclinations, becoming a cultural emblem to mark national identity in order to set boundaries between "us" and "them." According to feminist sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis' argument that "gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories,

markers and reproducers of the narratives of nation and other collectivities,”³⁵ women’s bodies and sexuality are often associated with beauty and reveal social discourses at the level of the nation-state. The beauty of women cannot be separated from the ideology of a specific era, since it is a politically charged rhetoric.

During its colonial experience from 1910-1945, Korean beauty as a part of cultural identity was dismantled and reconstructed by Japanese colonial policies. For Koreans, their ethnicity and traditions were rooted in an ambivalent identity narrative that fell somewhere between self-*Orientalism*³⁶ and Korean nationalism. Korean artists who studied or apprenticed in Japanese art academies or studios struggled with the tension between their nationalism and desire for success. The Japanese art academy tamed Korean artists’ nationalistic ambitions under the teachings of Japanese male artists. This cultural hierarchy was internalized in Korean works of the Colonial Period. As a prestigious cultural stage, state-sponsored “Seonjeon” played a significant role in shaping the colonial art tendencies led by Japanese juries and Japan-experienced artists.

In Korea, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century genre paintings with a theme of female figures fell out of favor by the end of the nineteenth century, and there were few examples representing commoners except for paintings of *gisaeng* (female

³⁵ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 39.

³⁶ Introduced in 1977, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* critically defined *Orientalism* “as a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of time) “the Occident,”” and “as a Western style for dominating restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” According to art historian Donald Rosenthal’s definition, *Orientalism* is “a mode for defining the presumed cultural inferiority of the Islamic Orient.” The Westerner’s notion of Orient that suggests that the Oriental world is timeless, changeless, and less civilized, corresponds to colonialism. In her essay *The Imagery Orient* (1983), Linda Nochlin introduces how Orientalist painters’ envisioned the Oriental world, such as in nineteenth century French painter Jean-Leon Gerome’s paintings, where the artist’s realistic mode of mythologizing the Oriental world deludes viewers into thinking that the pictorial representation is reality. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 10-11; Donald A. Rosenthal, *Orientalism, the Near East in French Painting, 1800-1880* (Rochester, N.Y.: Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, 1982), 8-9; Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient (French Orientalist Art)," *Art in America* 119 (1983): 119-133.

entertainers).³⁷ By the early twentieth century, Korean artists were basing *Female Figure Paintings* less on Joseon figure painting tradition than an adoption of Japanese *nihonga* painting.

Bijin and *miin* share the same Chinese characters 美人 (beautiful person) and the terms represent the Japanese and Korean pronunciation systems respectively. In the early twentieth century, *bijin* were explored by Japanese artists and intelligentsia not only in art, but as part of a larger cultural-political discourse. *Miin* was constructed under the shadows of *bijin* in *bijinga* (beauty paintings) and was not developed as an independent cultural discourse by Korean intelligentsia. *Miin*, images of Korean beauties created in the colonial context, indicate a more ambivalent notion because they are a constructed Korean identity created from ideals held by both Japanese colonizers and Korean male elites. To be *miin* female figures are required to have Korean particularities, but the genre of *miinwha* was inherently dependent of the standards of Japanese *bijinga*. Thus, female beauty in early twentieth century Korean *Female Figure Paintings* is a “colonial-modern”³⁸ invention that naturally shadows historical and political rhetoric exposing the masculine psyche during Korea’s colonial experience. Partially echoing the normative standards for representing beautiful women in *bijinga*, where women are mostly portrayed in traditional dress against a simplified background, Yi’s *Women* is the result of

³⁷ Among the few examples of genre paintings with female figures, Hyewon (1758-?)’s paintings show images of the life of female entertainers in a humorous way. Even though Hyewon’s so-called *Miindo* (paintings of a beauty) that picture a standing female entertainer in a *hanbok* using a Chinese “fine brush technique” show examples of Korean tradition of paintings of beautiful women, his legacy was not continued in the nineteenth century.

³⁸ Shin Gi-wook and Michael Robinson addressed “colonial modernity” in their explanation of the history of early twentieth century Korea when colonial rules, modernization, and nationalism were intertwined. Although there have been nationalistic arguments that colonialism impeded modernization, Shin and Robinson insisted that the two concepts did not contradict each other but intersected in post-colonial Korean society. See Gi-Wook Shin and Michael E. Robinson, *Colonial modernity in Korea* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999).

a transformation that mixes tradition with Korea's ambiguous local identity. *Women* re-invents *miin* as images of beautiful women with distinctly colonial identities.

The female beauty in *Women* is rife with mixed metaphors of *Orientalism*, colonialism, militarism and nationalism, all placed on women by imperial and patriarchal masculinities. Beautifully and neatly depicted women in traditional settings and costumes that also combine oblique erotic images also contain ambiguous signs that evoke a sense of foreignness, remoteness, depression and fear through their representation. The upright or standing posture of the women in Yi's paintings, with unnaturally long bodies, restrained poses, blank downcast gazes, and a sense of estrangement between multiple figures create an uncanny tension. Yi's image of the beauty of womanhood within the three scenes in *Wisdom*, *Impression*, and *Sentiment* simultaneously offers visual pleasure and a sense of discomfort that might disclose the psyche of colonial authorship and spectatorship. Colonized Korean men acted as an oppressive power over women in their own society. Colonized women were at the bottom of this imperial hierarchy, and the images of women in Yi's *Women* symbolize their historically repressive treatment.

The ambiguous sense of pleasure and discomfort in Yi's *Women* not only reveals Yi's psyche but also corresponds to the male spectators' consciousness. In order to identify the masculine agencies and receptions that influenced Yi's artistic production, it is necessary to investigate how long-term colonial rules and wartime ideology influenced the realm of fine arts. Within his stylistic and thematic practice, Yi's reinvention of Korean traditional beauty echoes *Orientalism*, militarism, nationalism, and other "-isms" that usually represent masculine power in history. More specifically, the anachronistic representation of Korean beauty within *Women* functioned as a mark of society that was

devised by both Japan's colonial *Orientalism* and Korea's self-*Orientalism* crystalized in wartime aesthetics and social discourses.

Wisdom can be interpreted as the prime example of how colonial women's sexuality was represented because it is the most straightforward embodiment of conventional *miinwha*. The sociopolitical discourse referred to as "wise mother, good wife" (Korean: *hyeonmo yangcheo*), or "good wife, wise mother" (Japanese: *ryōsai kenbo*),³⁹ which intertwined imperialist and modern patriarchal hegemony under Japan's wartime campaign of nationalism, permeates *Impression* and *Sentiment*.

Although Yi composed idealistic images of Korean women, ironically the signs in those images end up reflecting the masculinity that governed social discourses about colonial womanhood. The colonial experience is a figurative castration of a country. *Women* caters to Japanese juries with connotations of *Orientalism* and militarism, while reassuring Korean male-based spectators with themes that are seemingly safe and conventional.

The Hanbok-Clad Beauty and Oriental-Orientalism

Yi's visual re-invention of Korean tradition through cultural markers such as *hanbok* and Korean antiquities should be investigated using Kikuchi Yuko's theory of "Oriental-Orientalism." In *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism*,⁴⁰ Kikuchi defined "Oriental-Orientalism" as an

³⁹ This modern gender ideology was respectively called as "wise mother, good wife" in Korea and "good wife, wise mother" in Japan.

⁴⁰ Yuko Kikuchi, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

ideological modality appropriated from Western *Orientalism* towards the East that can be applied to Japan's privileged cultural involvement in its colonies and semi-colonies including Korea, Taiwan and some parts of China.⁴¹ In Kikuchi's study, colonialism and *Orientalism* are interlinked concepts that create a cultural hierarchy. I expand her term "*Oriental-Orientalism*" to the cultural indicators that were invented to represent colonial identities.

The *hanbok*-clad figures in *Women* result from a modernized way of seeing that makes women the major subject of its gaze. After the fad of *gisaeng* (female entertainers) paintings in the late eighteenth century, Korean women were not exposed to the gaze until the foreign intervention period in the 1890s. In the eyes of foreign travelers and emissaries, particularly the Japanese, *hanbok*-clad Korean women were symbols of Korea's exoticism. In Barton Holmes's book of voyeuristic observations, *Travelogues*, Korean women were described as mysterious and exotic beings because of the way their layered *hanbok* covered over their bodies.⁴² During Japan's huge travel boom to Korea and Manchuria in the 1910s, Korean women were depicted in images that were a mix of fantasy and reality. Troupes of male Japanese tourists, full of their recently recreated nationalistic samurai spirit, created an image of Korea's comparative backwardness through their focus on antiquities from newly excavated sites and the more modern

⁴¹ Placing the ideological position of Yanagi Muneyoshi's *Mingei* (Japanese folk art) movement within Pacific War politics, Kikuchi posits that Japan's "*Oriental-Orientalism*" represents the cultural nationalism that resulted from Japan's sudden modernization through its international relations campaigns along with the artist's conscious self-promotion among Japanese intellectuals. Like the penchant for collecting oriental antiquities that was used as evidence of Europe's cultural superiority, Japan's new admiration of Korea's Joseon ceramics is evidence of Japan's self-separation from the rest of Asia and its nascent superiority complex.

⁴² Burton Holmes, *Travelogues, Vol. 10, Seoul, Capital of Korea, Japan, the Country, Japan, the Cities* (Breinigsville, Pa.: Nabu Press, 2012), 23-27.

charms of the professional female entertainers, *gisaeng*, with whom they engaged.⁴³

Popularly consumed images of Korean women in *hanbok* as described in Japanese travel books, advertisements, postcards, magazine illustrations, and paintings implied Japanese male sexual experience with exotic colonial women. Transitioning from everyday costumes to signs of economic and political hierarchy in Korean society, *hanbok* became symbolic of an erotic invitation to the newly opened hermit country, an emblem of territory to be conquered.

Japanese male interest in Korean women was often incorporated into *nihonga* genre paintings that were produced for government-sponsored art exhibitions including “Bunten” (*Monbushō bijutsu tenrankai*, Ministry of Education Art Exhibition) and “Teiten” (*Teikoku bijutsuin tenrankai*, Imperial Art Academy Exhibition). In “Teiten,” Tsuchida Baukusen’s *A Wooden Bed* (1923) (Fig.7) and Hayabarashi Shuun’s *Hair* (1923) fossilized *gisaeng* into lethargic and debauched antiquities with monochromatic color and simplified outlines. A number of Japanese artists residing in Korea portrayed the old-fashioned eroticism of *gisaeng* in their “Seonjeon” entries, as seen in Kato Kenkichi’s *Black Fan* (1925), Okumura Kentaro’s *Spring Parrot* (1923), and Otsuka Yoshi’s *Gisaeng* (1933) (Fig.8). Along with paintings of *gisaeng*, these artists also frequently depicted everyday Korean women in various settings, such as fields, interior spaces and gardens. Okamoto Shuo’s *A Nap* (1913), for instance, suggests the defenseless status of the colonized through the image of a *hanbok*-clad woman leaning her body on a windowsill napping.

⁴³ Seung-Min Han, “Colonial Subject as Other: An Analysis of Late Meiji Travelogues of Korea,” in *New Directions in the Study of Meiji Japan*, ed. Helen Hardacre et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 670.

Some *Female Figure Paintings* depicting *hanbok*-clad women have a rich sense of sorrowful melancholy, such as Fukuda Hisaya's *Senset* (1922) that depicts a Korean woman carrying her baby on her back. Many female images that contained elements of so-called "local colors"⁴⁴ or "nativism" were promoted in Japan as part of the larger climate of Japan's exoticization and eroticization of Korea's archaism. These works led to an extensive discourse about the agency of Korean locality. For instance, Japanese *yōga* artist Fujishima Takeji described *hanbok*-clad women as "a hand scroll from the Heian period in Japan,"⁴⁵ which suggests the Japanese artists' perception of *hanbok* as something old that recalls Japan's medieval period. *Hanbok* implied Korea's innate archaism and oriental exoticism, and became a direct metaphor for Korean women that reflected the imperialistic gaze on women in the conquered land. *Hanbok*-clad Korean women were subsequently seen and pictured as exotic and erotic objects of the colonized land, a metaphor for colonial Korea itself rather than individual existence.⁴⁶

The historical roots of depicting Korean women in traditional attire in *Female Figure Paintings* can be traced back to images of Japanese women shown wearing *kimono*. Japanese women were first portrayed in modern figure paintings referred to as "Kimono beauties" throughout Europe and Japan. "Kimono beauties" became part of the artistic trend of "Japonisme" in Europe, and Kimono-clad women became regarded as

⁴⁴ The term "Local Color" is a general translation from "*hyangto saek*" (郷土色) a term referred to by Japanese juries in a "Seonjeon" exhibition review. Since the juries did not clarify the term and Korean artists and art critics adopted the term without theoretical consideration, "local color" was vaguely used in appreciating Korean art. Since Japanese juries preferred works in a Japanese-style that maintained something innately Korean, "local color" was arbitrarily applied in different cases.

⁴⁵ Kojima Kaoru, "Japanese Images of Asian Women in 'Traditional' Clothes in the Age of Empire," in *Visualizing Beauty: Gender and Ideology in Modern East Asia*, ed. Aida Yuen Wong et al. (Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 103-104.

⁴⁶ Kim Youngna, "Lee In-song's 'Local Colors': Nationalism or Colonialism?" *Oriental Arts* 46 (2000): 115.

artistic objects symbolizing exoticism and eroticism by an *Orientalist* gaze. It was the elaborately dressed *geisha* with all her ornaments, *kimono* and coiffeur, who was regarded as representing Japan, her costume taking precedence over her corporeality. Within the gendered structure of the relationship between Europe and Japan, images of *kimono*-clad women signaled *geisha* to viewers and evoked sexual fantasies in European males.⁴⁷ When Japanese artists who studied at European art academies came back to Japan, they imported this Western mode of viewing Japanese women. Artists including Kuroda Seiki and Wada Eisaku experienced artistic solidarity with western male artists through their introduction to life studies with nude European female models, so they started painting Japanese women in *kimono* through their newly Westernized gaze.⁴⁸ It can be reasoned that they considered themselves men of modernity, subjects characterized by hyper-masculinity modeled after the bygone era of samurai warriors. The notion of *kimono*-clad women constituted an ambivalent “Other.” In the West, *kimonos* symbolized Japan as an oriental “Other,” and in Japan they represented a feminine and traditional “Other” to be held up in contrast to the modern Japanese male with his purportedly superior Westernized gaze. In the rest of Asia, *kimonos* became a marker of Japanese influence in the pan-Asian⁴⁹ context, with *kimono*-clad women

⁴⁷ Kojima Kaoru, “The Woman in *Kimono*: An Ambivalent Image of Modern Japanese Identity,” 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁹ Okakura Kakuzō’s *Ideals of the East* (1904) is generally regarded as the original source of the cultural ideology of Pan-Asianism in Japan. Okakura’s position is that Japan was the only successor of Asian culture, and this concept became the cornerstone of Japanese imperialism. By declaring, “Asia is one,” he legitimized Japan’s goal of unifying Asia under its Empire. His unified understanding of Asia made Japan look back towards the antiquities of Japan, India, China, and Korea as part of efforts to find a universal connection. His pan-Asiatic framework gave ethnic validity to Japan’s expansionism, and was the ideological rationale for political policies after 1930s. See Kakuzō Okakura, *The Ideals of the East: with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1905) and John Clark, “Okakura Tenshin and Aesthetic Nationalism,” in *Since Meiji: perspectives on the Japanese visual arts, 1868-2000*, ed. Rimer, J. Thomas (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 238.

shifting from objects of visual pleasure to images that, through their hyper-femininity, created a contrasting sign system that reinforced masculine political and social power.

Some may question the highly gendered political symbolism of *kimono*, since upper class women began wearing westernized clothing in the early twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, “*moga*”, an abbreviation of Modern Girls (*modan garu*), were well known for their Western fashions. The characteristics of “*moga*” were often depicted in magazines, commercial posters, and paintings. According to Kon Wajiro’s statistical analysis, namely “Modernology” (*Kōgengaku*, 古現學) that researched the lifestyles of urbanites in 1920s Ginza, Tokyo, the percentage of women who wore western attire as opposed to *kimono* was only one percent, whereas the percentage of men who wore western clothing was sixty-eight percent.⁵⁰ This shows that a comparatively large number of Japanese men preferred wearing western suits as a symbol of modernity, while the patriarchal order expected women to adhere to tradition. It is not far-fetched to interpret women wearing *kimono* in *bijinga* as a political signifier, as a constructed image created by Japan’s internalization of Western power structures during its imperialistic transition period.

Although there are no certain statistical records about Korean women’s fashion during the colonial period, it is highly likely that the percentage of women who wore western fashion was much smaller than that of men. Even though *gisaeng* and working women in Korea were generally known for their westernized clothing during the 1920s

⁵⁰ Shinobu Ikeda, “Modernism, gender, and Imperialism: women images in 1920s-1930s,” *Misul sok ui yoeoseong : hanguk gwa ilbon ui geunhyoundae misul* [Women in Art: Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea and Japan], ed. Ihwa yeoja daehakgyo bangmulgwan (Seoul: Ihwa Women’s University Press, 2003), 96.

and 1930s, the actual number of those women was still extremely limited.⁵¹ While most educated Korean women, except the limited number of working women, such as elevator or bus girls and highly educated women who had studied abroad, wore *hanbok*, whereas most of Korean elite males preferred to wear Western suits.⁵² Beside the gendered connotation, *hanbok* also inherited a double structure that divided men into classes based on their modern education, by representing rural farm workers or the older generation wearing traditional Korean clothing.

Hanbok became a symbol of both Korea's vernacularism as a Japanese colony and its nationalism, inheriting the *kimono*'s gendered connotations within colonial *Oriental-Orientalism*. Compared to the bold patterns and bright colors of *kimono* that are a celebration of imperialism and modernity, the *hanbok* that appeared in *nihonga* and the "Seonjeon" Oriental Painting Section represent a sorrowful femininity that is stuck in the past. Paintings of beauties in *hanbok* did not emerge as an independent Korean tradition, but were imported from Japan, based on depictions of women in *kimono* in *nihonga*.⁵³ *Hanbok* were a less exotic theme for Korean artists, but Korean painters competitively produced these paintings. Women in traditional Korean dress were the most favored

⁵¹By the 1930s, the population ratio of Japanese to Koreans in colonial Seoul reached 1:3, and much of this migrant population was occupied in business, industry and civil works. The number of Japanese working women in Seoul outnumbered that of Korean working women. For example, Su-jin Kim noted that there were total 99 Korean and 834 Japanese white-collar working women in 1930. Su-jin Kim, *Sinyeoseong, geundae ui gwaing: singminji Joseon ui sinyeoseong damnon gwa jendeo jeongchi, 1920-1934* [New Woman, Excess of the modernity: the new woman and gender politics in colonial Korea, 1920-1934] (Seoul: Somyung, 2009), 86-87.

⁵² Jewook Kong, "The Making of 'the National Citizen' and the Regulation Clothes in Korea Under Japanese Imperial Rule: The Oppression of *Baekui* (White Robes) and the Promotion of the *Kukminbok* (National Suit)," *Society and History* 67 (2005): 44-45.

⁵³ Hyun-sook Kim, "Joseon misul jeonlamhoe ui gwanjeon yangsik: dongyangwhabu leul jungsim euro" [Joseon Art Exhibition: the Oriental Painting section], *Journal of Korean Association of Art History* 15 (2005): 42.

subject matter in both the Western Painting Section and the Oriental Painting Section of “Seonjeon.” Kim Hyeslin pointed out that much like the fact that the Japanese modeled their *Orientalism* towards the rest of Asia on Western *Orientalism*, Korean artists influenced by their time traveling in Japan and participation in the “Seonjeon” system turned a self-*Orientalizing* gaze on Korean women.⁵⁴ The fact that there were few examples of women not dressed in *hanbok* in the Oriental Section of “Seonjeon” suggests that *hanbok* no longer existed as fashion items, but had instead become a rhetorical device oscillating between colonialism and nationalism. The depiction of women in *Hanbok* suggest that Korean artists internalized the gaze of Japanese male artists, which they in turn used to observe Korean women as inferior in order to project themselves as superior subjects. In this way, male *Female Figure Painting* artists internalized Japan’s *Oriental-Orientalism* through their revision of Korean traditions.

Given the inherent imperialist and orientalist connotations found in all *hanbok*-clad *Female Figure Paintings*, the women in Yi’s *Women* set the tone for “ultra-*Orientalism*” with a pan-Asianistic perspective created by the combination of anachronistic *hanbok* and a mix of historical attributes from the Joseon and Goryeo Dynasties. *Women* seems to be more oriented towards the past than the works of Yi’s master Kim Eun-ho, and his colleagues such as Kim Ki-chang, Oh Ju-hwan, and Jang U-seong, who all received several “Seonjeon” Special Selections during the 1930s for their paintings of *hanbok*-clad women. The past seen in *Women* does not tell a purely Korean or Japanese history, but rather articulates a hybrid identity brought about by Japan’s later years of imperialism. While Yi explained *Women* “represents of the beauty of Korean

⁵⁴ Hyeslin Kim, “Images of Women in National Art Exhibitions during the Korean Colonial Period,” in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow et al. (Honolulu; University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 153.

women of the time,” the painting is actually an anachronistic mix; this contradiction suggests a loss of identity by Koreans resulting from long-term colonial rule. Yi’s claim that his painting corresponds to the present shows his conformity to colonial social ideologies in his representation of traditional beauty. During this period when wartime tensions were heightened, images of women were highly likely to be used as propaganda, either directly or indirectly, and Yi could hardly ignore Japan’s “Thought War” campaign.⁵⁵

The sense of pan-Asianism, or a unified image of Asian culture, in Yi’s *Women* is hinted at not only by the outdated *hanbok*, but by the insertion of medieval Korean antiquities. A celadon incense burner placed on the dresser in the background of *Sentiment* and porcelain stool in *Wisdom* create a strange chronological disjunction. The antiquities of the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) had been forgotten by Joseon elites until they began to be gathered by Japanese archeologists and art collectors.⁵⁶ Discovering, collecting and curating colonial antiquities were an instrumental part of Japan’s notion of *Orientalism* and were used to contextualize its colonies. Celadon incense burners and porcelain garden stools were rarely seen in Korean homes in the twentieth century, and this suggests Yi is proposing a traditionalism that was rewritten and disseminated as part of Japan’s new pan-Asiatic version of history. The Joseon Dynasty was considered to be

⁵⁵ The “Thought War” was a 15-year war effort conducted from 1931-1945, during which Japan developed a new two-part war plan. The economic side was called “Total War” and the ideological side was called “Holy War.” This was meant reinforced the war efforts during the later years of the Japanese Empire with the mission of protecting the whole of Asia from the threat of Western imperialism. “Thought War” was the slogan to urge mainstream culture to serve the country by creating propaganda. Japanese authorship and art creation was censored to serve the “Holy War” idea in Japan and its colonies.

⁵⁶ The Japanese colonial government put a great deal of effort into the discovery and conservation of ancient heritage of Korea, as Korean was hardly aware of prehistoric objects or ancient sites before Japan’s archeological excavations. See Hyung-il Pai, “Tracing Japan's Antiquity: Photography, Archaeology and Representations of Kyōngju” in *Questioning Oriental Aesthetics and Thinking: Conflicting Visions of "Asia" under the Colonial Empires*, ed. Inaga Shigemi et al. (Kyoto: International Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, 2010), 289-316.

an inferior and stagnant period, while the antiquities from earlier Korean dynasties such as the Unified Silla and the Goryeo were celebrated. That the lady in *Wisdom* is shown choosing a porcelain garden stool over a western cane chair sets a tone for Yi's historical consciousness. The women were subjected to be part the past, to be a part of antiquity.⁵⁷ In depicting Korean antiquities, Yi is showing how Korean elites had come to be indoctrinated by Japan's pan-Asian view of history, a view that was used as justification for its expansionism.

While the imperialistic symbolism of the *hanbok* that represents Korea as an inert and feminized territory saturates *Women*, *Wisdom* is the most erotic section of the triptych. *Wisdom* displays an unmarried lady sitting in front of a blooming peony garden. Though *Wisdom* follows most of the conventions of early twentieth century *Female Figure Paintings*, the work does depart from the previous paintings of the genre produced by the Kim School artists in some important ways. Yi's colleague Bae Jeong-rye, the first and only female apprentice in the Kim School, was selected for inclusion in the 1940 "Seonjeon" (three years prior to the selection of Yi's *Women*) for her work *Garden* (1940)(Fig. 9), a painting with an almost identical composition and theme. Both works place the female figures on a chair with peony blossoms, a symbol of feminine beauty, wealth and honor, in the background. In pre-colonial Korea, monochrome ink paintings of peonies represented the wealth and honor of the literati. The intellectual qualities of such works were replaced by formal qualities such as composition and colors under the

⁵⁷ The icon of a woman who sits on a porcelain garden stool or "garden beauty" is widely discovered in Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean state-sponsored art exhibitions during the early twentieth century. In "Bunten" and "Teinten," Japanese artists often painted Manchurian and Han Chinese women who sit on a garden stool, suggesting an antique beauty. The images of Chinese antiqueness came to expand to the female images in Korea through "Seonjeon" exhibitions, whereby *qipao* (Chinese traditional dress) replaced by Korea's counterparts, *hanbok*.

“Seonjeon” system and influence of Japanese artists.⁵⁸ It seems valid to see peonies in both Yi’s *Wisdom* and Bae’s *Garden* as a metonymy of the young and beautiful female figures’ sexuality. The blooming flowers of late spring constitute a classic symbol of female sexuality, and also signal the transformation from girl to a woman. The figure in *Wisdom* also has the traditional Joseon braid that was a symbol of virginity. Compared to the woman in Bae’s work, who has a westernized hairdo and sits loosely with a sense of lassitude, the figure in *Wisdom* exerts a sense of self-control through her traditional *hanbok*, hairdo, and upright posture.

Unlike Bae’s female sitter who represents a *gisaeng*, *Wisdom*’s figure resembles a commoner’s daughter who keeps her purity. However, there are signs that she recognizes her female sexuality and allows it to be under the spectators’ gaze. Her hands are placed on her chest, drawing the viewer’s gaze to her torso and her breast, which then naturally follows the wrinkles on the skirt that slightly follow the contours of her leg and stops at her foot. In opposition to her shy posture, her face is bright with a slight smile and her foot sticks out from the hem of her skirt. Yi offers the viewer a voyeuristic experience, inviting him to look at a commoner maiden as if she were a *gisaeng*. This representation of an unmarried woman oscillates between a virgin and a *gisaeng*.

The subtle eroticism in *Wisdom* is often found in paintings of *maiko*, the apprentice *geisha*, and a popular subject in orthodox *bijinga*. *Maiko*, who are usually between fifteen and eighteen years of age, are usually pictured wearing traditional Japanese costumes and hairstyles. These girls symbolize the period of female sexuality that exists between virginity and becoming a *geisha*, containing a temporal purity

⁵⁸ Eun-A Kang, “Developmental Aspects of Peony Paintings in the Modern Period Focusing on the Chosun Arts Exhibition,” *The Association of Art History* 26 (2012): 259.

combined with the expectation of sexual possibilities on becoming *geisha*. Remarkably, the figure in *Wisdom* is seated in a three-quarter view that is closely associated with Japanese painter Tsuchida Bakusen's iconic *Maiko in Garden* (Fig. 10). Yi's painting *Wisdom* thus implies a subtle erotic connotation, drawing a parallel between a middle-class colonial maiden and a *maiko*. To some degree, Yi might have also internalized the gaze of the Japanese artists towards Korea through images of *gisaeng* that he witnessed and participated during his experience in Japan. The subtle erotic expectation behind the chasteness in *Wisdom* sets the tone for expecting virtue in colonial Korean women during the later years of militarism. *Wisdom*'s uptight pose and excessively spread peony blossoms create a feeling of tension.

In 1943, as part of the escalating wartime conditions, many innocent Korean girls were drafted to support military units as so-called "comfort women." According to a study of Korean comfort women, "representations of women in Japanese popular media during World War II centered around the good wife and wise mother or 'maid-in-waiting' struggling to remain cheerful as she sent her men off to war, stoically accepting the death of a loved one in battle, or contributing to the war efforts at home, on the farm, or in the factory."⁵⁹ As second-class imperial subjects, colonial women were asked to "comfort and sexually service Japanese men in the homeland, in overseas territories, and on or near the front lines."⁶⁰ Keeping herself chaste but being willing to serve up her body, the body of colonial maiden was read through wartime ideology as a symbol of the traditions that were being defended. It is hard to think that Yi directly intended to connote this sexual

⁵⁹ Eleanor. H. Kerkham, "Pleading for the body: Tamura Taijirō's 1947 Korean comfort woman story, Biography of a prostitute," in *War, occupation, and creativity: Japan and East Asia, 1920-1960*, ed. Marlene Mayo et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 310.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 310.

violence and victimization in *Wisdom*, but in light of the fact that “Seonjeon” were publicly promoted during the 1940s as educational wartime exhibitions,⁶¹ this subtle connotation might have earned the appreciation of juries and lead his work to win second prize. In a 1998 interview, Yi reminisced about that era of madness and irrationality, during which he witnessed many unmarried women and men being dragged to the battlefields as comfort women and soldiers.⁶² Perhaps the lady *Wisdom*’s hands are placed on her chest to defend the traditional virtue of women. Such a gesture might betray a subtle tension arising from the colonial artist’s nationalistic unease regarding Japan’s wartime violence towards Korean female subjects who were once under the sole ownership of now colonized Korean men.

Wise Mother and Good Wife

Yi’s Korean artist peers’ *Female Figure Painting* of the 1920-30s were typified by soft, feather-like delineations of rounded bodies and facial expressions, such as Kim Eun-ho’s *Gaze* (1923) (Fig. 11) and Kim Ki-chang’s *Listening Quietly* (1936) (Fig. 12). The prizewinning *Female Figure Painting* works of the 1943 “Seonjeon” show more distinctive expressions on their female subjects. A sense of mellow and pitiable atmosphere seen in the earlier works was replaced by accentuated outlines and a sense of tension and discipline. Jang U-seong won the first prize in the Oriental Painting Section of the 1943 “Seonjeon” for his work *Studio* (1943) (Fig. 13), a cerebral portrait of his wife. Both artists who successfully competed in the 1943 “Seonjeon” have similar qualities, accentuating stiff outlines over misty colors and posing the women to express a

⁶¹ “Seongjeoneul wihayeo” [For the Holy War], *Maeil Sinbo*, June 24, 1943.

⁶² Samsung Foundation, “Hyeoncho Yi Yu-tae,” 349.

sense of control. The female sitters thoroughly belong to the patriarchal order in the modern family system, especially Yi's *Women*, which feature an honorable chronology of a woman's life and imply the completion of womanhood in marriage and the bearing of sons.

I wish to emphasize how the iconography of marriage and childbearing in *Impression* and *Sentiments* is repeated in Korean, Taiwanese and Japanese official exhibitions, and how these images shadow the militaristic ideology of the late 1930s and early 1940s. It is a deeply rooted belief held by Yi's contemporaries and even some Koreans today that a woman's role in the family system is that which has been handed down from Korean ancestors as a mother and wife. Though *Women* seemingly portrays the traditional Confucian family values that Yi and his critics took for granted when interpreting the work, this interpretation should be reinvestigated within specific masculine powers framing colonial society.

The motif of weddings and bridal dressing is one of the most common and preferred themes for the "Seonjeon" artists and juries. *Impression*, illustrating a bride being dressed by multiple female figures, represents one of the most repetitive themes practiced by the Kim School painters in their "Seonjeon" entries. By repainting his *Bridal Makeup* (1942) as *Impression* in the 1943 "Seonjeon," Yi repeated the same wedding theme.⁶³ Other examples that appeared before Yi's works are *Wedding day* (1929) by Kim Eun-ho, *Wedding day* (1930) by Kim Ki-chang, and *Wedding Makeup* (1937) (fig.14)

⁶³ His initial motive for composing a painting on a wedding theme seems to be influenced by Kim Eun-ho and his colleagues who won the Special Selections in "Seonjeon." As a late coming competitor, Yi might have researched the trend and followed it. Even though his 1942 work *I* was selected as the Special Selection, he repainted the same theme in same composition for *Impression in Women*. In the interview in 1998, he mentioned that he became somewhat ashamed when juries recognized *Bridal Makeup* and identified him as Kim Eun-ho's student. He implied that this made him decide to draw something better than that. This makes it seem that he was helped by his master Kim to be selected in "Seonjeon", and explain how the "Seonjeon" system was network-based.

by Jang U-seong. These genre *Female Figure Paintings* were introduced in Japanese salons, following *ukiyo-e iro-naoshi* (dressing the bride with colored clothes) paintings. Unlike Korean art where genre paintings of women were rare in the late Joseon period, Japanese *ukiyo-e* paintings during the same period widely produced images of *iro-naoshi*. In the “Teiten” exhibition, for instance, Wada Shunko’s *Wedding Night* (1929), portraying a Japanese bride and her maid, is associated with *ukiyo-e* genre painting prints. Miki Suizan’s *Her Sister’s Wedding Day* (1932), depicting a bride who is adorned with a Western wedding dress and her kimono-clad sister, shows a hybrid cultural identity between the West and Japan. In the “Bunten” exhibition, Yamamoto Gyoho’s *Wedding Makeup* (1914), depicting a Korean woman’s wedding customs, shows the growing interest of Japanese artists in Korean customs. Weddings were an emblematic moment in a women’s life when she officially enters the patriarchal family system, became a major iconographic motif in early twentieth century East Asian art.⁶⁴

Although Yi’s repetition of the popular wedding makeup theme seems to be chiefly influenced by Japanese paintings and Korean cultural precedents, there are a few distinguishable features in Yi’s representation of preparations for the wedding ceremony. For example, Kim Eun-ho, Jang U-seong and Kim Ki-chang focus on decorative features in their depictions of Korean customs when illustrating *wonsam*, a garment based on a royal lady’s skirt that a commoner could wear only in her wedding and the *samheojang*, a three-color layered gown used for the wedding ceremony. In contrast, Yi’s *Impression*

⁶⁴ It was not only Korean paintings that adopted Japanese *orientalism* toward the multicultural features of Japanese protectorates and colonies. Taiwanese artist Chen Jin’s *Wedding Makeup* (1937) portrayed Chinese wedding attire in a Chinese-style setting. In colonial Taiwan’s case, the conflicts between Taiwanese aboriginal people and Mainland Chinese-Taiwanese throughout its history also add an additional ethnic struggle within the layered colonial rhetoric. Chen Jin’s ethnic background is Han, and most artists active in the Taiwan Art Exhibition during colonial period were of either Mainland Chinese heritage or Japanese. Chen Jin’s works should be understood as representing a doubled colonial identity, although this investigation is outside the scope of this study.

replaces the typical wedding gown with everyday dress, combining a green blouse and a red skirt used to indicate a newlywed bride. This dressed-down wedding ceremony is also seen in Yi's *Bridal Makeup* of 1942. The wedding scenes by Jang U-seong and Kim Ki-chang represent a bride and an assistant, presumably the bride's mother, exclusively in an indoor space, focusing on the bride's mixed emotions in preparing for her wedding. In contrast, *Impression* shows the four bridal assistants around the bride in an unidentified space, giving a sense of openness. Rather than focusing on the decorative features of her costume and expression of emotion in the figures, Yi's wedding makeup scene presents the idea of unity and collectiveness. All the figures are standing, their stiffly posed elongated female bodies giving a sense of order.

Portraying groups of women was part of a more general tendency seen in the later period of "Seonjeon" *Female Figure Paintings*. Amidst wartime in the late 1930s-early 1940s, themes such as women's associations, seasonal customs, large families, rearing children, weddings, and other types of ceremonial gatherings were increasing created for the exhibition. Women in these images appear to encourage loyalty to the nation, confidence in the war, and assurance of social stability.⁶⁵ A sense of solidarity set the tone for Japan's wartime propaganda, in which women were considered the physical embodiment of the home front that would economically and spiritually support the imperial soldiers on the battlefield. Under the total "Thought War" system in the late Japanese Imperial period, fine art became utilized as propaganda. The number of group figure paintings selected for inclusion in "Seonjeon" from 1937 to 1940 reached twenty-

⁶⁵ Youn-kyoung Cheung, "A study on the Women's Portraits in Indoors of the Chosen Art Exhibition: Focusing on the Oriental Painting Sector" (master's thesis, Ihwa Women's University, 2000), 113.

six, while the number of single figure paintings was only twelve.⁶⁶ Superficially, it seemed that “Seonjeon” retained their initial function as a stage for displaying pure fine art, or art for art’s sake, since the exhibitions didn’t include many artworks that directly depicted scenes of war. There were several war-related art exhibitions both in Japan and Korea such as the “Total Mobilization” and “Army Art” exhibitions; for the most part, the same artists who gained renown in “Seonjeon” participated in those exhibitions. However, many works in “Seonjeon” appeared to be “rear spirits,” pieces that subtly supported the Japanese imperial “Thought War.” This soft propaganda had an advantage as it would be unconsciously absorbed by colonial subjects, and would not damage the legitimacy of fine art. Even though Korean oil painter Sim Hyung-gu was selected in the Western Painting Section in the 1940 “Seonjeon” for *Protecting Great East Asia with the rich voice of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*, specialists in *Female Figure Paintings* preferred to eschew war messages and stick to images of female beauty.⁶⁷ In this way, Kim Ki-chang’s *Gathering* (1943) (fig. 15) and Anbo Michiko’s *The Rear* (1940) represent *Female Figure Painting*’s circuitous propaganda, in which gatherings of patriotic women to support Japanese imperial soldiers were encouraged. Yi’s use of multiple women to depict a wedding day can be read as an extension of these soft propaganda paintings.

Images of nurturing children also appeared in great numbers in Korean, Taiwanese and Japanese official exhibitions. In line with Japan’s strong penchant for

⁶⁶ Sun-mi Hong, “A Study on Korean Modern Figure Painting in the Section of Oriental Painting in Joseon Art Exhibition,” (master’s thesis, Hongik University, 2006), 37.

⁶⁷ According to Kim Hyeslin’s study on pro-Japanese painters during the war, Sim Hyunggu, Kim Inseung, and Kim Eunho exemplify how “Seonjeon” artists cooperated with the political situation through their war propagandistic art works. See Kim Hye-shin, “Visual Representation of War in Korea, 1947-1945, *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire 1931-1960*, ed. Ikeda Asato et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

promoting multiculturalism in Japan and its colonies, images of older sisters and younger brothers, mother and daughters or sons, and grandmother and grandson made up almost all of the remaining rest of the “Seonjeon” Oriental Paintings Section after *Female Figure Paintings*. Even though the female figures in these paintings were not directly depicted as beauties, many of these works still focused on female characters. Yi’s *Sentiment* displaying a beautiful mother holding her son in her arms represents the completion of a virtuous women’s life. On the one hand, composing the mother’s beauty as a woman by depicting her with a glowing white face, arched eyebrows, cherry lips and blushing cheeks, the figure in *Sentiment* becomes an object of male visual pleasure along with the lady in *Wisdom* and the bride in *Impression*. On the other hand, her female beauty seems also neutralized by the theme, as holding her son turns her into an iconographically ideal mother. Yi’s catalogue introduced *Sentiment* as an illustration of “a mature woman as a mother of a son” fulfilling “the destiny of a Korean woman”, which implies that women’s fecundity, particularly with regard to bearing sons, and domestic duties are the virtues of womanhood.⁶⁸ Part of the Joseon divorce system dictated that a woman’s inability to bear a son was a valid reason to judge a woman as “bad,” and proceed with divorce. Since Confucian ideology demanded a woman’s loyalty to her husband’s family by undertaking the weighty mission of “carrying on a family line,” *Sentiment*’s mother image has been interpreted as representing the Confucian ideal of virtuous womanhood.

Conversely, *moja* (母子, mother and son) images were not commonly represented until the late 19th century. Even though Yi and the critics believed its claims of Korean

⁶⁸ Gu-yeol Yi, *Yi Yu-tae/Kim Jeong-hyun*, 100.

identity, the very notion of motherhood in *Sentiment* is a modern invention premised on the imperial masculinities that were adopted by the patriarchal orthodoxy. Some might raise a question about whether the virtuosity in *Sentiment* can be traced back to Confucian teachings such as *Samganghangsildo* (三綱行實圖), a collection of the stories and illustrations about loyalty, filial duties, and virtuous women, published throughout the Joseon Dynasty as woodblock prints with text and image in order to educate and inform upper-class women.⁶⁹ In the section *Naeobeop* (來外法, Law of Men and Women), a guide details the distinct roles of men and women, and a woman's duty to keep her fidelity to her husband was strongly emphasized. The section *Yulnyeo* (烈女, Virtuous Women) instructed women to be completely obedient through illustrative stories about women who kept their chastity even under the threat of their own deaths or served their husband and parents-in-laws by sacrificing their own lives.

Samganghangsildo never stressed women's role as "good mother." Rather, Confucian teachings during the Joseon period emphasized women's sacrifice and submission to their own parents, male siblings, husband, husband's family, and their own sons after the death of their husband. In Joseon Confucian order, there was a "wise wife", but no "good mother." So, where does our deep-rooted belief in "wise mother, good wife" that governed Yi's productions originate? According to art historian Ahn Hyun-jeong, the image of motherhood in *Sentiment* is more closely linked to the colonial policy.⁷⁰ Even though both the Confucian family order and the Japanese Imperialist family system share

⁶⁹ Kyung-won Cho, "Overcoming Confucian Barriers: Changing Educational Opportunities for Women," in *Women of Japan and Korea: continuity and change*, ed. Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 209.

⁷⁰ Hyun-jeong Ahn, "Study on Visual Media under Occupation Period of Japanese Imperialism and Joseon Art Exhibition Focused on Modern Visual Subject and Discipline Authorities" (PhD diss., Sungkyunkwan University, 2009), 199.

the idea of the family as the basic unit of society, Confucian family order emphasized the mother's role to nurture children in the family less than the relationship between a wife and a husband and her reproductive function. Stressing being a good mother for the imperial nation, thus, should be investigated as symbolic of modern masculine powers controlling women with an intertwined patriarchal and imperial system.

Yi's *Sentiment* portrays a beautiful mother stiffly holding her son who looks like miniature adult. It reminds viewers of the image of the holy family in Christian iconography. However, unlike many modern European paintings of mother and son where the emotional connection between the two is the focus, the mother and son in *Sentiment* show a sense of rupture in between the two figures through their empty gazes. Seated *seiza* (Japanese way of sitting) without expressions, the mother in *Sentiment* is not a symbol of mercy but austerity. *Sentiment* echoes the "wise mother, good wife" hegemony highlighted in Korea during the late colonial period. The mother here symbolizes an imperial subject meant to train her son as a soldier for the "holy war."

The didactic message of "wise mother, good wife" in Yi's *Sentiment* represents how the two masculine powers, imperial and patriarchal, were intertwined. In fact *Sentiment*'s propagandistic feature is in collusion with how *samganghangsildo* was disseminated to Joseon subjects. The lessons that stress a woman's fidelity to her husband and his family that stand out among the other family orders in *samganghangsildo* are often understood as the result of the war between Joseon and Tokugawa Japan in 1592-1598. The high casualty rate and total destruction of social structures threatened the very root of Confucian Joseon society. In the process of post war reconstruction, Confucian Law was recodified based on family units, causing women to be severely controlled for

the sake of the restoration of masculine authority. The hegemonic “wise mother, good wife” that expanded the role of women to mother is closely connected to Japan’s colonial rule and its struggles with the Fifteen-year War.⁷¹ The imperial and patriarchal masculinity could easily be intersected as a unified dogma, since the nexus of traditional and modern control was based on Confucian hierarchies.

The “wise mother, good wife” images in Korea stemmed from the “good wife, wise mother” hegemony in Japan. Even though this new role for mothers was discussed in pre-colonial Korea during the enlightenment period (1887-1910), the idea was not widely accepted until the annexation of Korea by Japan that brought about Japan’s modernization campaign for Korea.⁷² The term motherhood in Korea was invented largely in response to Japan’s imperialism.⁷³ In Japan, the view of the role of woman embodied in “good wife, wise mother” had originated in the Meiji period as part of the development of the nation-state.⁷⁴ It was following the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895) that the primary function of “wise mother” was to validate the establishment of a number of new schools for women, whereby women were integrated into “the citizenry

⁷¹ After the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Japan finally broke the interwar period and entered the total war system. This ultra-nationalistic period of militarism that lasted from 1931 to 1945 is called as Fifteen-year War period.

⁷² Jiweon Shin, “Social construction of idealized images of women in colonial Korea: the “new woman” versus “motherhood”,” *Women and the colonial gaze*, ed. Tamara L. Hunt and Micheline R. Lessard (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 162.

⁷³ Ueno Chizuko points out that people’s belief that motherhood is perpetual and natural are mere myth. She posits that “mother” is a cultural representation that only appeared in a visible way with the advent of the modern nation. Japan’s state control on the motherhood was enhanced during its Imperial expansion period. Chizuko Ueno, *Naesyeonallijeum gwa jendeo* [Nationalism and Gender] (Seoul: Park Jong-cheol Chulpansa, 1999), 19-22.

⁷⁴ See introduction in Shizuko Koyama, *Ryosai Kenbo The Educational Ideal of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ in Modern Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

of the nation-state” and held publicly responsible for raising future citizens.⁷⁵ Through the discovery of “mother,” the role of “good wife, wise mother” was promoted as the new manager of the home who operates the household in a “scientific way.”⁷⁶ For organizing more efficient and hygienic living space, the promotion of scientific homemaking is suggestive of the war preparation in which the family was not only a microcosm of society but also a practical reserve unit to support the soldiers. In the 1930s and 1940s, “good wife, wise mother” was dogmatized as a criterion for tolerable women and the home that was once a private realm became a very public realm, which was subjected to being monitored and controlled. Focusing on wartime gender politics, feminist historian Ueno Chizuko argues that the Japanese government realized the needs for female labors as rear support for the battles that were inevitably necessary to avoid early all-out war. She suggests that the segregation policy in the war system, in which men could be soldiers and women supported them as homemakers or factory workers, stimulated women to become “a mother of *yasukuni*” (protector of the country), instead of being an actual war hero in the battlefields.⁷⁷ As the hegemony of a fascist nation, “good wife, wise mother” focuses on motherhood within the clear division between man and woman, which seems to parallel traditional patriarchal order. Ueno notes that women’s being asked to be sacred mothers during the militaristic era is closely related to the rise of *Pietà*-like mother and son images in Japan, which depict the holy mother returning her

⁷⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁶ Hyaewol Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 10.

⁷⁷ Chizuko Ueno, *Naesyeonallijeum gwa jendeo*, 28.

child to god.⁷⁸ In “Shin Buntan,” the mothers in Fujii Chizuru’s *Commemorating the Mother and Son* (1939) and Mukai Kyuman’s *The Birth of a Son* (1941) (Fig. 16) show the sublimity of motherhood coupled with a sense of religious beauty.

Japan’s “good wife, wise mother” was imported into Korea as the reversed ordered “wise mother, good wife” and integrated into various subjects in primary schools. Since the concept was blurred with Confucianism, the notion was absorbed without resistance. Also, educating women as a good mother was regarded as a solution for the colonized country’s independence by Korean nationalist elites. The iconographic image of mother and son in *Sentiment* can be understood as both the militarist mother who serves the Japanese Empire as well as the strong mother who can save Korea. This new iconography implores women to support the family and the nation with her sacrifices. Amidst the total war efforts of Japanese Empire in the first half of the 1940s, “Seonjeon,” the only official fine art exhibition during the Japanese occupation in Korea, naturally shadowed Japanese war propaganda. Even though the juries serving “Seonjeon” shunned entries by Korean artists that directly depicted war scenes, since the late 1930s there were several state-sponsored propaganda art exhibitions in Korea, with entries that were required to represent “the current situation.” In the late period of official exhibitions, nuanced works supporting the war with images of nurturing children, rather than direct depictions of battles, became the most promising themes. In Korea, family scenes of seasonal customs were more prevalent than mother and son iconography. Kim Ki-chang’s *Old Stories* (1937) and Kim Jeong-young’s *New Year Greeting* (1940) both portray a friendly grandmother and a mother who is standing as a head of household in her husband’s absence. In Taiwan, Cai Yun-yen’s *My Day* (1943) depicts a mother in

⁷⁸ Ibid., 28.

Taiwanese dress playing with a model airplane with her son, and in the background, two Chinese characters referring to “praying military” is embroidered on the tablecloth.⁷⁹ As a political symbol, the mother is depicted as an educator for her son and one who prays for her soldier husband, and perhaps her son. The fact that Japan, Korea and Taiwan shared a similar tendency in theme suggests that Japan’s “Total War” system came to affect the cultural productions in inland Japan and its colonies through state-sponsored art exhibitions.

Accordingly, Yi’s propagandistic use of the mother and son icon was likely influenced by Japanese salon trends, such as the mother and son images of Mukai Kyuman and Fujii Chizuru. The mother in *Sentiment*’s sense of severity, the two figures’ disconnected emotions, and the adult-like son together symbolize imperial propaganda. Yi is also forwarding a sense of Korean identity based on Joseon and Goryeo antiquity through the figures and indoor decorations. This suggests Yi’s nostalgia for the past, and hope for the restoration of the Confucian masculine power that characterized pre-colonial Korea.

Yi’s *Women*, in sum, closely corresponds to wartime ideology. As both an imperial subject and a colonial artist, Yi likely intended to conform to the juries’ taste, and at the same time, desire to construct an image of the traditional beauty of Korea. Yi’s *Women* can be read as a means of empowering a colonial male artist, both by assuring imperialistic demands for a propagandistic message, and satisfying his own and his spectators’ desire to see an ideal Korean woman. Yi also recalled memories of turmoil in the last few years of Japanese occupation and war, where he witnessed that many young men and women were drafted to the war sites as soldiers, factory workers and comfort

⁷⁹ Mingchu Lai, “The Sign Mother in Taiwanese Art History,” *Misulsa Nonchong* 35 (2012): 163.

women. In this regard, the agency of his work should be understood in multiple ways.

The mother in *Sentiment* promoted the image of colonial mother in the Empire as well as pre-colonial Confucian Korean womanhood.

The promotion of virtuous women with idealized female beauty in early twentieth century *Female Figure Paintings* in fact did little to support actual women in real life. Yi, as a male artist who internalized the Japanese artists' gaze towards colonial woman, to see them as observable, malleable objects, separated a woman's life into three parts. Gender ideologies surrounding maidenhood, wifedom and motherhood in Yi's image of traditional Korean women in *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* thus can be seen in the context of the intensive reinvention of Korean traditional womanhood within the militaristic period. His operation reflects not only his conformity to the social attitudes of Japanese imperialism but also represents a powerful superiority complex towards women in his own society. Although *Women* is not a painting that directly proposes female eroticism and sexuality, the female figures' telltale sexual difference from men exposes the male artist Yi's desire. In his language, unlike most of the Kim School's *Female Figure Painting* artists, the European-influenced facial structure and body proportion of the figures' bodies make them physically strong and healthy. Yi's way of employing "traditionalism" in *Women* was in fact the result of what Japan reinvented in Korea as tradition and his idealizing female faces and bodies are highly westernized. He has composed a female beauty that is in between Japanization and Westernization, and thus does not represent real Korean women.

Yi's gaze toward the female figures, which represent the righteous women of Korea, does not seem affectionate or loving. Rather, he strictly controls the women in

their sense of foreignness. All are standing or sit upright in an attitude of discipline and anxiety. Perhaps Yi is portraying the female bodies in a way that echoes not only his wartime anxiety, but also his discomfort regarding Korean women. The women's elongated and rigid bodies may need more psychoanalytic readings in order to reveal Yi's and the male spectators' psyches. Perhaps, these images in *Women* reveal Yi's unconscious that is interconnected with the metaphoric fear of castration from his colonial experience and a castration complex toward female bodies. Following the logic of cultural historian Ian Buruma, who posits that "women are divided roughly into the two roles they traditionally play in so many important societies: the mother and the prostitute,"⁸⁰ images of women in Korea were either women who are qualified to be mothers or women who have deviated in the patriarchal moral sense. Unlike Japanese mother images that were often mixed with eternal mother or religious characters such as *kannon*, the bodhisattva of mercy, to encourage Japanese soldiers to sacrifice their lives for the Empire, Korean mothers were regarded as two-fold symbols: the pre-colonial old motherland, the flaw that caused the failure of a nation, and the nation's fate as a colony. Yi's images of Korean women who are "qualified to be mothers" show his mixed feelings toward Korean women. His pictorial language signifies that Korean males unconsciously equating themselves with women in the colonial country (colonization was often read as metaphoric castration), revealing that these males' inconsistent psyches simultaneously deny and regard with nostalgia Korea's "Old Women." This is perhaps the mirror of Yi's dual feeling toward the "New Woman" in Korea who threatened the conventional role of males, and asked to be educated in order to bear the burden of saving the lost nation. The artist's ambivalent regard for the "New Woman," or modern women,

⁸⁰ Ian Buruma, *A Japanese Mirror: Heroes and Villains of Japanese Culture* (London: Cape, 1984), 6.

permeated his 1944 “Seonjeon” winning work, *A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research*, the primary subject of my third chapter.

CHAPTER III

A PAIR OF FIGURES: RHYME AND RESEARCH (1944)

AND ENVISIONING THE NEW WOMAN UNDER MILITARISM

Now every culture and warfront in the world is mobilizing women.

-Kim Gwang-seop, "Agony of Modern Women"⁸¹

A Contemporary Reading of *A Pair of Figures* and Its Problems

Casting her eyes down towards flamboyant peony blossoms with her chin resting on her hands, a charmingly portrayed young woman sits still in contemplation at a western-style table decorated with lace tablecloth. With arched eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes, a sharp nose and cherry lips set in an egg-shaped face, her features are reminiscent of the beauties that appeared in Korean magazines, commercials and films during the 1930s. Her coiffure is neither arranged in traditional braids with *daenggi*, a hair ribbon worn by unmarried women, nor the traditional bun with *binyeo*, an ornamented hairpin worn by married women, but instead is loosely bobbed and combed back in the Western style. In the background, there is a grand piano with unfolded sheet music, suggesting that she just finished playing the piano. The female figure's traditionally styled *hanbok* marks her Korean identity in the midst of a Westernized setting that reflects the interiors that were widely desired as part of a "modern life style" in early twentieth century Korea. This painting is subtitled *Rhyme*, and it makes up the right wing of Yi Yu-tae's diptych, *A Pair of Figures* (1944).

On the left side, the female figure in *Research* completes Yi's composition representing the intellectual and sophisticated beauty of womanhood in "Western-

⁸¹ My translation. Kim Gwang-seop, "*Hyeondaeyeoseongui gomin*" [Agony of Modern Women], *Yeoseong* 4 (1940): 32.

modernity.”⁸² The female figure in a lab coat over her customized *hanbok* suggests that she is a biologist or pharmacologist, surrounded by miscellaneous scientific objects that are realistically represented, including a microscope, flasks, a distiller and two living lab rabbits in the cages. The woman’s *hanbok chima* (skirt) that peeks out from the bottom of her lab coat is made of a stripe-patterned cloth that suggests Japanese influence and is modified for practicality to be narrower and shorter than the *hanbok* in *Rhyme*. Wearing leather slippers on her feet and exposing her crossed legs, the female figure in *Research* sits with a very Western-influenced demeanor. Gazing frontally as if she is meeting the spectators’ gaze, the woman is depicted with her symmetrical full face, which is very rare in *Female Figure Paintings*. The identically portrayed faces and bodies of the female figures in *Research* and *Rhyme* suggest that they are the same person in different spaces. Even though it also employs *hanbok*-clad women, *A Pair of Figures* marks a sudden change from Yi’s work, *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* from the previous year. He *A Pair of Figures* to visualize the intelligent beauty of women in Korea, while offering a rich sense of western modernization.

A Pair of Figures stands out from Yi’s other major works, and has been treated as his representative work in the Korean museums. *A Pair of Figures* has gained renown as the first and only “Seonjeon” work that illustrates images of professional woman with higher educational backgrounds during the colonial period. In particular, *Research* has

⁸² Western-modernity is one main pattern of modernity. It stemmed from Western civilization and spread throughout Africa, America and Asia as part of cultural Imperialism. Beginning in 1894 and ending in 1896, the King Gojong of the Joseon dynasty drove a series of sweeping modern reforms in which conservative Confucian customs such as early marriage, prohibition of remarriage for women, and the collective punishment system were all abolished. The reforms failed to succeed since Korea was experiencing interventions from Russia, the U.S and Japan. Korea’s modernization is thus closely related to Western culture that was introduced during the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. Before 1910, Western Christian missionaries introduced Western culture to Korea, and after the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, Western-modernity was implemented on a large scale under Japan’s colonial rule.

been counted as Yi's *magnum opus*, and thus has been repeatedly exhibited in Korea over the last ten years at exhibitions including "Modern Color Figure Paintings" at the Incheon Metropolitan City Museum in 2011, "Collection Highlights" at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in 2009, at the National Museum of Art, Deoksugung, in "Masterpieces in Korean Modern Art: Asking about the Modern" in 2008, "Modern Girl" in 2006, "Promenade of Korean Modern Art" in 2003, and "Another Art History: Reinvention of Femininity" at the Ewha Women's University Museum in 2002. Though it received less attention than *Research, Rhyme* has also often been displayed in the aforementioned exhibitions alongside its twin work, and was exhibited singly in "Yesterday and Today" at the National Museum of Art, Deoksugung in 2014. In these exhibitions that envision Korea in the first half of the twentieth century, Yi's *A Pair of Figures* has become tremendously popular, surpassing his series of landscapes that earned him the title of master in traditional-style Korean painting.

These recent exhibitions displaying either the full or partial versions of *A Pair of Figures*, as well as studies examining the work tend to reminisce about Korea's modernity in the early twentieth century, especially emphasizing the term "modern"⁸³ that was grandly addressed. The discovery of Yi's 1940s images of women who can play the grand piano, compose music and work in a science lab became sensational, which is perhaps because they satisfy our expectations about modern images of Korea during the

⁸³ The notion of modern is not a reflection of how culturally and technologically advanced a society is, but is a rhetoric that connotes socio-political dynamics, in which images of modernity are decided upon through collective agreement. In the early twentieth century Korea, there was implicit understanding that what was modern stood for what was Western or Western-Japanese, masculine and advanced, while tradition was identified as Oriental, feminine and outdated. After the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, cultural activities in Japan and its colonies were rapidly transformed by conservative and totalitarian social policies, and modernity became a less important social standard. That is to say, our current awareness of what is modern in Korean art as represented by contemporary exhibitions might be quite different from the modernity conceptualized by artists and critics in the 1940s.

early twentieth century. For example, in the exhibition “Masterpieces in Korean Modern Art: Asking about the Modern” of 2008, *A Pair of Figures* was displayed in the second section, “Everyday Life of Modern Man,” as the epitome of how lifestyle changed and new professions were made available through the introduction of innovative technologies and educational systems in Korea.⁸⁴ These exhibitions also utilized an important term, the “New Woman,” to refer to the female figures in the work. For instance, the exhibition catalogue for “*Masterpieces in Korean Modern Art: Asking about the Modern*,” introduces *A Pair of Figures* as such:

This series of works represents the New Woman (sin yeoseong, 新女性), her everyday life both in her workplace and home. ... This work can be interpreted as the ideal beauty of a modern woman who broke from the traditional roles for women and started participating in social activities such as science research.⁸⁵

The New Woman generally referred to the new persona for women who participated in public social and economic activities. The term stemmed from the rebellious feminist figures of 1880s-1890s British fictions called the New Woman novels, and it further developed as a social commentary, connoting larger cultural and social debates.⁸⁶ As a movement, the New Woman emerged in late 19th century Europe and the United States and spread as a universal phenomenon along with urban expansion that

⁸⁴ The exhibition consists of five sections: “Modern Man,” “Everyday Life of Modern Man,” “Landscape of Modern Man,” “Dream of Modern Man,” and “Restoration of Modern Man.” The exhibition director Young-lan Park commented that the exhibition focused on various features of modernity, instead of discussing the dialogue between modern and historical momenta. She added that the exhibition is designed to enable contemporary viewers to reminisce about the foundation of their modernity through the artwork by focusing on modern man’s consciousness, characteristics, and living conditions. The National Museum of Art, “Formation of Modernity and Korean Modern Art,” *Masterpieces of Korean Modern Art: Asking about the Modern* (Seoul: the National Museum of Art, Deoksugung, 2008), 1-4.

⁸⁵ My translation, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, *Masterpieces of Korean Modern Art: Asking about the Modern: exhibition catalogue* (Seoul: the National Museum of Art, 2008), 26.

⁸⁶ Devereux, Cecily. “New Woman, New World: Maternal Feminism and the New Imperialism in the White Settler Colonies,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 2 (1999): 175.

required women's labors outside the domestic realm.⁸⁷ These women criticized the conventional system of marriage and relationships and pursued self-realization. They differentiated themselves from traditional women through not only their feminist philosophies but with outward signs such as unconventional behaviors and fashions.

Many studies about *Female Figure Paintings* interpret *A Pair of Figures*, particularly *Research*, as a reflection of the increasing desire and interest during the 1940s in modern professional women who entered the realm that used to belong to only men. The studies, that variously interpret the work as “the most confident image of the New Woman,”⁸⁸ “reflecting Yi’s interest in the New Woman’s modern life at the time,”⁸⁹ and “growing desires and interests vis-à-vis professional women,”⁹⁰ consistently apply the label of the New Woman to the female figures in Yi’s *A Pair of Figures*. This label is not only confined to the women in *A Pair of Figures*, but also to many other “Seonjeon” paintings that depict women who read or hold a book, play a western musical instrument, or wear a Western hairstyle or shoes, such as the painter’s wife in *Studio* by Jang U-seong. On the one hand, this reading seems fair since the title New Woman is used to refer to women who received a public education and wore new fashions to distinguish themselves from Korea’s “Old Woman,”⁹¹ or traditional women in the early twentieth

⁸⁷ Young-na Kim, “Modernity in Debate: Representing ‘New Woman’ in modern Korea,” *Art History and Visual Culture* 2 (2003): 18.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁹ Jeng-lan Jang, “A Study on Beauty Drawings by Lee, You Tae and Pu, Bao Se,” 164-165.

⁹⁰ Youn-kyoung Cheung, “Female Images by Japanese Artists in the Joseon Art Exhibition: Focusing on the Oriental Painting,” *Association of Korean Modern Art* 18 (2007): 64.

⁹¹ “Old Woman(舊女性)” is a notional term used to refer to women who were not considered to be included under the designation New Woman. Just as the term New Woman, the definition of the Old Woman was arbitrary and incompletely agreed upon. Their fashion, such as traditional hanbok and coifs,

century. It could be generally said that Yi's vision of the beauty of womanhood in *A Pair of Figures* is apparently different from that of his previous *Female Figure Paintings* in terms of the women he depicts acting out new personas influenced by Western modernization that seem to align with the New Woman identity.

However, this is not the only way to read Yi's *A Pair of Figures*. Today's designation of the female figures as New Women seems problematic since the term is used too broadly and vaguely, turning the New Woman into an empty sign that is indiscriminately used at will by contemporary spectators. Even though the definition of New Woman has not been agreed upon since its inception, the term itself has been consumed without critical speculation with regard to its use in reviewing Korean modern art. In this account, the female images of the early twentieth century are recycled as icons all called the New Woman by contemporary visions of modern Korea. Who were the New Woman and how has perception regarding this type of woman changed? How and why did artists represent images of women that are now known as the New Woman in *Female Figure Paintings*?

Today's reading of *A Pair of Figures* as representing the New Woman's everyday life does not fully explain the subtle disturbance that the painting creates, where the combination of the figure and setting gives a strong sense of artificiality, as if the figure is thrown in the center of the setting as a mere still life. In *Research*, the discordance between the female figure's legs that are read as a symbol of confidence and femininity and her uneasy torso with closed arms combined with her blank gaze, suggests a sense of stiffness and anxiety that is at odds with her identification as "the most confident New

their roles as mother and daughter and their traditional domestic education were attributes used to separate them from the New Woman.

Woman.” There is a sense of subtle incompatibility between the sleek and shiny modern objects (microscope, distiller, piano, and etc.) and the passive face and self-conscious body language that emphasizes the female figure’s fragility, leaving us room for alternate readings of the painting.

The painting needs to be examined as something other than picturing the everyday life of the New Woman, since *Female Figure Paintings* were approved socio-political productions that revealed the male-oriented psyche in colonial Korean society. After the Sino-Japanese War broke in 1937, Japan advocated full-fledged war support to prepare for the Second World War. The Japanese Governor-General of Korea reinforced an Assimilation Policy that aimed to transform colonial people into Imperial subjects, who would mobilize war labor and procure resources. In 1940, after the Japanese Foreign Minister announced Japan’s model of ultranationalist war, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, which included Japan, Korea, and its other colonies, completely shifted to a military-oriented society.

At the practical level, under the hegemonic policies of “serve the nation with your professions” (*myulsabonggong*) and “sacrifice one’s interest to public good” (*jigeopbonggong*), the range of artistic creation was restricted to promote the so-called holy war. In this regard, the existing readings of *A Pair of Figures* need to be modified in terms of Yi’s true agency in creating this ideal modern woman through the mechanism of what we call modern. The painting can be seen as a reflection of the total war institution that struck all levels of society not only the Japanese mainland but also its colonies. More conservative imperial society means reinforcing the masculine order to control “Others,” a category that includes colonial subjects and women. Amidst this rightwing shift, Yi’s

sudden move towards depicting a new type of woman after his success with more traditional images of submissive beauty in *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* cannot be discussed without regards to Yi's consciousness as a male artist and colonial subject. In this chapter, I argue that *A Pair of Figures* is an example of soft propaganda made to cater to juries and reassure male-oriented authorship and spectatorship, revealing Yi's patriarchal desire vis-à-vis womanhood.

Art historian Hong Sun-pyo interprets the modernity in *A Pair of Figures* vis-à-vis the notion of a patriarchy that objectifies women as ideal lovers, which suggests a significant framework through which to read the images of Korean women in *Female Figure Paintings*.⁹² In Hong's argument, *Research* and *Rhyme* each represent science and art, or reason and sensibility, and suggest how dominant male vision imposes a representative idealized sense of duty on womanhood. The masculinity that governed images of colonial Korean women as beautiful and ideal not only came from patriarchal society but imperial ideology, which cultivated the aesthetics of the artists as well as their desires for promotion in the colonial art exhibitions. In this chapter, I attempt to verify my critical reading of how Yi's innovative thematic change in *A Pair of Figures* reflects a vision of masculine-oriented society in the late colonial state, especially during the militaristic period, when modern women became the focus of social desire and hatred. Modern women came to be merged with other icons in the patriarchal hegemony such as "good mother wise wife" and "fallen women," or "non-mother," and sometimes combined with Imperial models of womanhood, or "rear spirits," who serve the Empire

⁹² Sun-pyo Hong, "Representation of Women in Modern Korean Art: Desexualization and Sexualization of Women," *Misul sok ui yoeoseong : hanguk gwa ilbon ui gueunhyoundae misul* [Women in Art: Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea and Japan], ed. Ihwa yeoja daehakgyo bangmulgwan (Seoul: Ihwa Women's University Press, 2003), 31.

with their intelligence and professionalism. To what extent did Yi accept and use the figure of the New Woman in his work? To answer this question, *A Pair of Figures* has to be decoded in relation to the discourse regarding modern womanhood that prevailed within Korean journalism during the early twentieth century, while acknowledging the gap between women as social construct and women as reality.

The New Woman in Debates and *Female Figure Paintings*

Reactions to *A Pair of Figures* in the 1944 “Seonjeon” exhibition were not as overtly enthusiastic as in more recent exhibitions of the 2000s. After submitting six works to the “Seonjeon” exhibitions, Yi won second prize (the Governor-General’s prize) for his *Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* in 1943 and finally won first prize (the Changdeok Palace Prize) for *A Pair of Figures* in 1944. Coverage of this first prize work, however, was surprisingly limited in newspapers and magazines in comparison to Yi’s privileged promotion by the juries. The art critic Yun Hui-sun, who wrote under the pseudonym Mon Ami, only briefly mentioned Yi’s name along with other artists in one column, and another critic, who went by the pseudonym Pigaso, condemned *A Pair of Figures* simply as vague and incomplete.⁹³ This lack of reviews for *A Pair of Figures* could be partially due to the fact that art criticism gradually decreased year after year during the 1940s due to the Pacific War, and many articles about “Seonjeon” artworks focused on the exhibition’s social function rather than art. Even so, *A Pair of Figures* seemed to fail to receive any accolades from Yi’s contemporary critics, especially when compared to the relatively detailed reviews for other artists such as Yi In-seong, who was

⁹³ My translation. “이유태는 무조건(無條件)하고 불결(不結)하고,” Pigaso, “Seonjeon,” *Jogwang* 10 (1944) : 66-67.

included in the Western Painting Section, Yi's teacher Kim Eun-ho and colleague Kim Ki-chang. What was the true extent of this discrepancy between juries who promoted Yi as the top colonial artist in the 1944 "Seonjeon" and critics who marginalized Yi's work in their reviews?

Even though *A Pair of Figures* is counted today as one of the most modern female images exhibited in "Seonjeon"'s Oriental Painting Section, it was not the only example of *Female Figure Paintings* that employed images of modern Korean women. Although the images of modern Korean women made up only a small portion of "Seonjeon" compared to images of traditional women or *gisaeng*, images of modernized *hanbok*-clad women reading and engaging with western musical instruments were highlighted in the 1930s. Some examples include: *Indoor* (1932) (Fig. 17) by Oh Ju-hwan, *Spring* (1935) by Cho Yong-seung, *A Quite Day* (1937) (Fig. 18) by Noh Jin-sik, *Women* (1933) and *Listening Quietly* (1934) by Kim Ki-chang. These works show many similarities in their compositions and depictions of female figures as well as in their arrangements of Western objects such as the sofa, the table and chair, and the lamp. Wearing mostly modified *hanbok* and western shoes or slippers, with western hairstyles such as the ponytail, the bob cut, the curl-up or the chignon, these less traditional female figures appear fashion-conscious. The female figures appeared in *Female Figure Paintings* in the 1920s to 1930s are often accompanied by books or magazines (*Indoor*, *Spring*, *A Quite Day*, and *Women*), Western musical instruments like the mandolin (*Women*), and new technologies, like the phonograph (*Listening Quietly*).

Yet, Western objects are not always necessary to define them as the New Woman. For example, art historian Young-na Kim introduced *Gaze* (1923) by Kim Eun-ho as one

of the earliest Korean New Woman images that portrays a female figure in the Western-influenced fashion in the “Seonjeon” Oriental Painting Section.⁹⁴ The figure’s look is a sign that identifies her as the New Woman: she wears a lace shawl over her see-through *hanbok* blouse, shortened skirt, white pumps, and her hair in a chignon. The female figure allows the voyeuristic gaze over her body as she exposed in the open air rather than be placed in a Western-influenced indoor or an urban space. Because of the romantic eroticism created as she invites viewers into a private moment, the painting is often understood as an image of *gisaeng*.⁹⁵ While most of Western-influenced female figure paintings in “Seonjeon” *Female Figure Paintings* are placed in indoor settings, some works including *Gaze* show women in outdoor spaces. For example, the female figures in *Street* (1932) and *Outing* (1939)(Fig.19) by Cho Yong-seung, and *Outing* (1940) by Kim Eun-ho suggest woman as a new spectacle in public areas, and their identities are mixed with the identities of *gisaeng*, to become objects of sexual fantasy for males.

The images of the women in aforementioned *Female Figure Paintings* are shown taking on obvious outward signs of modernity, both with their fashion and in their behavior, in these examples taking an outing, reading and listening and playing music. Some female figures are clearly labeled as the New Woman, while others are considered as *gisaeng* or something else entirely. What we consider to represent the concept of the New Woman in *Female Figures Paintings* is fluid and arbitrary, since the meaning of the New Woman is often inconsistent, contradictory, or irrelevant to the actual identity of the

⁹⁴ Young-na Kim “Modernity in Debate,” 20.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 18.

women as images.⁹⁶ Though the female figure in *Rhyme* wear a traditional *hanbok* that seems identical to the figure of *Wisdom*'s white *jeogori* and blue *chima*, suggesting a conventional female identity, the female figure in *Rhyme* has been read as a New Woman. This is mostly because of her bobbed hair and her placement in a Western living room with a table, chair and grand piano, which were perceived as signs of a New Woman from a contemporary perspective. Even so, the modern attributes of the figure in *Rhyme* that label her as a New Woman are less obvious than that of other previous *Female Figure Paintings*. It is possible that Yi's *A Pair of Figures*, which in contemporary exhibitions is considered as one of the most modern works, was from the perspective of 1944 not meant to be modern but something else entirely. What is the Korean New Woman and how had this idea been depicted in the *A Pair of Figures* and other *Female Figure Paintings*?

Although Western theory of natural right and Christian philosophy first introduced the women's rights into Korea through Western missionaries,⁹⁷ it was not until the early 1920s that the term New Woman was used in cultural and social debates. It is unclear that how the term *sin yeoseong* (New Woman) was settled in Korea, but it is generally agreed that Japanese New Woman (*atarashii onna*) and the "Bluestocking movement"⁹⁸ directly influenced Korean New Woman movement.⁹⁹ Unlike the New

⁹⁶ Kim Su jin, *Sinyeoseong, Geundae ui gwaing* [New Women as Modern Excess] (Seoul: Somyung, 2009), 30-31.

⁹⁷ Kyeong-il Kim, *Yeoseong ui geundae, geundae ui yeoseong* [Women's Modern, Women of Modern] (Seoul: Pureun Yeoksa, 2004), 38.

⁹⁸ Japanese first feminist magazine published between 1911 and 1916 led by Hiratsuka Raichō'.

⁹⁹ The notion of New Woman landed in Japan in the 1910s, literally translated as *atarashi onna* (New Woman). In Japan, a theatrical production of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* became an immediate sensation in Tokyo, which ignited the first debate over what is the true New Woman in Japan. What

Woman movement in the West and Japan where women fought against patriarchal customs and for equal rights, the Korean New Woman movement focused on a woman's right to receive equal educational opportunities in order to overcome the colonized situation, and elite women partially collaborated with male elites at the initial stage of its introduction to the country.

While privileged women such as Nah Hye-seok or Kim Won-ju who wrote for the first magazine for women, *Sinyeoja* (新女子, New Woman), argued that the awakening of woman as independent subjects and increasing gender equality were positive steps, male journalists often brought up the debate on the definition of the New Woman and the Old Woman mostly based on skepticism over women in general. A male writer Yi Gwang-su celebrated the educated women's modern homemaking abilities, but he also criticized female students' frivolous interest in fashion and other behaviors that were regarded as representing non-maternal qualities.¹⁰⁰ Another male writer Yum Sang-sup saw modern women as erotic objects for his visual pleasure, commenting that "when I see a female student passing by me, I am made to feel giddy by their silk umbrella, piggy hair, long blouse, dizzying high heels and powdered faces."¹⁰¹ While for some men, the qualifying conditions of being a New Woman required education, competent skills as a mother and youth (no older than her thirties), others defined the New Woman as a body

constituted the New Woman was not completely agreed upon. Generally the New Woman in Japan demands equal legal, educational, and social rights and state's protection of motherhood. Starting as modern philosophy, Japan's New Woman was merged with another new Japanese female persona in the 1920s, the Modern Girls or "moga" who differed from them with their indulgent urban life and western fashion that was similar to the American flapper look. Unlike Japanese *atarashi onna* refers to only the certain womanhood in the 1920s to the 1930s, Korean New Woman covers broader and linear womanhood who broke from the tradition life style.

¹⁰⁰ Hyaeweol Choi, *New Women in Colonial Korea: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2013), 55.

¹⁰¹ Sang-seop Yum, *Neohuineun mueoseul eodeotneunya*[what have you received] (Seoul: Mineumsa; 1974), 214.

clad in western fashion elements with exposed legs as an index of modernity.¹⁰² This suggests that there were two standards for the New Woman: mother or *gisaeng*; the former were to be exclusively consumed by one man and the latter were public goods for male consumption. Even though the discussion surrounding the New Woman started from the Korean nationalist gender movement accompanied by cooperation from male and female elites, the term came to be defined in opposite terms by the two genders. For women, the New Woman connotes a Westernized, stylish and superior culture, and thus is an advanced class.¹⁰³ On the contrary, for men the New Woman signaled a necessary evil, something uncomfortable and dangerous, but sexually attractive.

The New Woman was thus a product mostly produced and consumed by males from male-oriented social debates and cultural activities. Although women editors published the magazine *Sinyeoja*, more than two-third of the writers were male and men led the debates about the New Woman and the Old Woman, female students and the “Modern Girl.”¹⁰⁴ Major newspapers such as *Dong-a* and *Joseon Daily* also participated in shaping the image of modern womanhood. Satirical cartoons by Ahn Seok-ju entitled *What If There Comes a Time When Women Can Advertise Who They Are and What They Want* (1930) (Fig. 20) and *Looking at Legs is Better Than Looking at Flowers* (1934) in *Joseon Daily* exemplify the fact that New Women (also sometimes called modern women

¹⁰² “Sin yeoseong gwa gu yeoseong ui haenglo” [The path of life of the New Woman and the Old Woman], *Sin Yeoseong* 7 (1933): 32-35.

¹⁰³ Yeon-ok Song, “Joseon ‘shin yeoseong’ ui nationalism and gender” [Korean New Woman’s nationalism and gender], in *Sin Yeoseong* ed. Ok-pho Mun (Seoul: Cheongnyeonsa, 2003), 95.

¹⁰⁴ The Modern Girl, the negative side of the New Woman imported from Japan’s “*moga*,” became a popular journalistic motif in the 1930s. In newspaper articles and satirical cartoons, the Modern Girl usually referred to those women who had public professions such as café waitresses, telephone operators, department store clerks, or bus attendants. They were often described as vulgar, incompetent mothers and daughters, hysterical, lavish, and frivolous, and they were denounced in various public outcries, more repudiated than New Women.

in the cartoons) were consumed as physical spectacles as well as objects of social contempt with regards to the moral decadence and superficiality they represented with their westernized fashion and body exposure. Ahn Seok-ju illustrated voluminous satirical cartoons about New Women and earned great popularity with the public, especially among middle-class males. Ahn's exaggerated descriptions of New Women as decadent, prostitutes, extravagant, and shameless seem to correspond to collective males' collective anger and disdain for these women. Male journalists agreed to educate women in hygiene, nutrition and exercise to improve family life, but by categorizing modern womanhood on the basis of women's looks, they objectified the New Women as "Others."

Universally, the male-oriented discourse regarding the New Women was linked with maternity. This was not only because of women's actual reproductive function but also because of the symbolism of women as the bearer of culture and the nation. The Korean public was warned about the New Woman's dark face, the "fallen women" or the "unqualified mother" as they were seen as a national crisis. In Korea, motherhood connoted not only idealism but also negativism, since the nation (motherland)'s cultural and political backwardness allowed the subjects (her children) to be colonized. Unlike the Western New Woman, which emerged as a rebellious character to fight against patriarchal oppression, the Korean New Woman implies a colonial specificity, since the Old Woman connotes the obsolescence and torpid order of the fallen Joseon. The Korean New Woman was born with the Old Woman, and the New Woman represents civilization and foreign influence at the same time that the Old Woman's symbolizes barbarism and tradition.¹⁰⁵ The Korean New Woman did not necessarily confront the patriarchal order as a whole but did upset the "old," pre-colonial patriarchal order. Korean New Woman

¹⁰⁵ Su-jin Kim, *Sinyeoseong, geundae ui gwaing*, 460-470.

was the locus of the male intelligentsia's ambivalence, a place where male desire and modern identity was projected, and at the same time, the New Woman symbolized the rupture between the past and the present.¹⁰⁶ New Woman debates in Korea were populated by male voices, and they reveal larger social symptoms resulting from the traumatic historical experience of colonization.

Female Figure Paintings were a conservative arena where artists competed to prove their ability to embody the beauty of women that would then be judged by the male-centric viewers in the "Seonjeon." *Female Figure Paintings* polish the features of women into ideal images creating a hybrid between the western-modern and the traditional. By creating images of modern women confined in domestic spaces, being submissive but delicate and intelligent, the New Woman images created in *Female Figure Paintings* were a way to visually overcome the threats of both the modern that connoted Imperialist oppression from Japan and the West and the modern women who signified a crisis of masculinity. The New Woman symbolized the enemy of Korean males coming both from outside and inside the country. In Korea, the colonized male longed for modern to save the country, but it was not something they wanted to equally share with women. The ambivalent patriarchal desire toward modern is compounded in images of the New Woman created during the 1930s. Most of the *Female Figure Paintings*, including those by the Kim school, the modern woman was shaped as white, round, soft, feeble and amiable, always in a hanbok, either traditional in style or modified to fit new fashions.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 461-462.

Female painter Yi Ok-soon's *Outing* (1933), where a woman is dressed up for an excursion in a colorful hanbok and a fox fur muffler, exemplifies the male-centered modern consciousness in 1930s. Art critic Yi Gab-gi commented:

This work portrays a bourgeois dilettante's woman who is looking at her reflection in the mirror after she finished dressing up for an outing. The fox-fur muffler and golden lined glamorous attire tells that she is only good for a millionaire's second or third wife The figure's pose and composition reminds me of "Teiten" or "Bunten"'s bourgeois' genre paintings, and the painting is just like female artist' painting that is plain and tedious.¹⁰⁷

The title "second wife" or "third wife" was understood to refer to professional women or female students in the social debates and satirical cartoons in magazines and newspapers. Although female artist Yi Ok-soon's composition of a modern woman was not extreme compared to more conventional *Female Figure Paintings* in which a moderate level of modern is seen in conjunction with tradition, the fox fur muffler over the colorful hanbok in *Outing* disturbed the male critic's aesthetic and moral beliefs about *Female Figure Painting*. The critic's anger toward the figure in *Outing* shows a striking parallel to Ahn Suk-ju's satirical cartoon *Age of Fur* (1932) where a line of women with fox fur mufflers over *hanbok* coats are mockingly depicted. The theme outing had also negative connotation that both referred to the New Woman and *gisaeng*. For example, compared to the *hanbok*-clad figure placed beside her, the female figure dressed in fully Western style clothing in *Outing* by Cho Young-seong is portrayed in an exaggerated manner like a doll or clown. *Outing* by Kim Eun-ho zooms in on the face of modern woman type and emphasizes the figure's lips wearing, on which she wears red lipstick, and her seductive gaze, setting the tone for the identification of the figure as a *gisaeng* or a fallen woman.

¹⁰⁷ Gab-gi Yi, "Je sipyihoe Seonjeon hoogi" [The 12th "Seonjeon" Review], *Joseon Ilbo*, May 24-27, 1933.

In light of the fact that Yi Gab-gi degraded Yi Ok-soon's painting as mere woman's work, the New Woman both in the painting and reality, the female artist herself, seemed to be a spectacle for men. Although the male artist Kim Eun-ho painted two female figures with luxurious fox fur mufflers in *Spring Cold* (1941), his work did not receive any negative comments from critics.

Yi's *A pair of Figures* is anachronistic from the perspective of the discourse surrounding the New Woman because by the time it appeared in the "Seonjeon," Korean *Female Figure Paintings* had shifted thematic priority to motherhood, historical paintings, war propaganda, group figures and families. Yi's use of the icon of the female pianist can be echoes works by European modernists, such as Renoir, as well as Japanese paintings, such as Nakamura Daizaburô's *Piano* (1926) (Fig. 21) and Koi Eiko's *Piano* (1939) (Fig.22).¹⁰⁸ By the time *Rhyme* was created, the image of a woman with a western musical instrument had already become a canonized "Seonjeon" theme by Yi's colleagues, Oh Ju-whan, Cho Yong-seung, and Kim Ki-chang.

Even though, by composing a woman sit in a Western-modern space, Yi's *Rhyme* follows out the conventional theme of *Female Figure Paintings*, the figure shows a clear difference from his master and colleagues' rarified New Woman images. Instead of a bird-like depiction of small, round women in modernized *hanbok*, the women in *Rhyme* are more European, with strong faces and bodily structures. The figure in *Rhyme* represents a woman who is strong enough to support her family while her husband is absent. After the New Woman discourse expired in Korea, Western settings and bodies

¹⁰⁸ The theme of a female amateur pianist stemmed from European modernist painters such as Renoir, Cassatt, and Monet, and was popularized in Japan. Nakamura Daizaburô's *Piano* creates a Japanized pianist images that is also a kimono-clad beauty, and Japanese artists Koi Eiko who lived in Korea created a painting with a similar theme in "Seonjeon."

left only a façade of the New Woman, and the identity of those women were controlled by masculinity. The female figure is a generally ambivalent image: she represents a quasi-husband to support the family, but by being juxtaposed with splendid peony blossoms that are a sign of spring and prosperity, the woman also represents a qualified mother and a cerebral lover for men. In both cases the woman belongs tightly to a family.

The notable thing is the subtitle of this painting, *Rhyme*, a response to existing melodies or lines. Although contemporary readings of this painting misunderstood the central figure as a composer, the title suggests that the female figure is an obedient and docile woman who follows the guidelines set before her. The figure is a riotous woman who supports family, pleases her husband and docile Korean woman rather than a personification of the New Woman. In *Female Figure Paintings*, women are meant to be beautiful, which constructs the fundamental difference between men and women along the patriarchal track, as well as providing the means to control women. The consumption of submissive images of women is the manifestation of male visual pleasure by satisfying their fetishism. Yi's *Rhyme* is therefore a result of the interplay of a male artist's desire for and use of the female body. However, by projecting Yi's uneasy psyche on female body that is not so conventionally beautiful, which might not attract the male viewer's interests, the figure in *Rhyme* is also a memory of wartime trauma itself.

In *Research*, Yi creates a unique composition by placing the female figure in the center of the frame fully facing the viewer. Even though the figure returns the viewer's gaze, which is unconventional in *Female Figure Paintings* and regarded as audacious behavior, the gaze of this woman differs completely from the direct and seductive gaze of

female figures in the 1920s-1930s paintings of “*moga*” in Japan.¹⁰⁹ Following her gaze, the spectator finds that the painted figure’s eye is not actually responding to him or her. The female figure in *Research* looks back with a blank and remote gaze, suggesting a sense of loss and fear. Her lips are firmly closed, making her facial expression rigid as if she knows a secret that she can never let out. The figure’s body language, in which she grabs her left hand with her right hand and folds her arms, is a universal sign of protection and defense. She crosses her legs and exposes her calves, not signaling erotic temptation, but instead emphasizing her drawn-in body. These signs of uneasiness in the female figure in *Research* reflect Yi’s uncomfortable psyche about women in the professional realm.

Unlike the figure in *Rhyme*, however, the figure in *Research* reads as a non-mother, or perhaps even a non-woman. Her elongated body with square and wide shoulders is masculine, especially when compared with the figure’s sophisticatedly described feminine face. Her square-framed body seems breastless, which can be read as signifying a “lost object,” as introduced by Freud.¹¹⁰ Lacanian’s theories of male desire and the imaginary, explaining a function of painted images of women as a door of “visual

¹⁰⁹ For example, Kobayakawa Kiyoshi’s *Tipsy* (1930) reveals negativism regarding “*moga* (Japanese abbreviation of the Modern Girl)” who were perceived as debaucheries and inverted the “good wife, wise mother” hegemony. The female figure wears the latest Western trend with her curl-edged bobbed hair, red lipstick, polka dot patterned western dress and cigarette, representing a wanton beauty. The woman’s intoxicated eyes and her teeth greedily exposed between her red lips that respond to the viewer’s gaze suggest her identity as a sexual object. Kendall H. Brown, *Taishō Chic: Japanese Modernity, Nostalgia, and Deco* (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2001), 34.

¹¹⁰ According to Freud, the loss of the object occurred in the process in which the subject is constructed. The breast of mother is lost, which is the source of earliest satisfaction for the infant’s sexual instinct. The loss of object is incorporated with sexual fantasy to restore what was lost, whereas it can create anxiety or perversion. See Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” in *The Freud Reader* ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 288-290.

access to the lost object,”¹¹¹ hints at the inconsistent sexuality of the figure in *Research*.¹¹² Unlike painted figures in the *Female Figure Paintings* of the 1920s and 30s’ in which female figures appear as ideal mothers and ladies that conciliate male desire for the lost object, the female figure in *Research* expressively reveals what he lost. The masculine signs projected on the figure’s bodies in *Research* creates a sense of asexuality that exposes the colonial artist’s schizoid self-consciousness. The painting represents the women who imply the colonized male’s symbolic castration and who serve as the scapegoats for their evasion of nationalistic tasks. The painting also reveals the colonized male’s self-identification with the female, namely the motherland – the desired object that will restore his masculinity. Whether the female figure is modern or traditional is not an important matter in Yi’s *A Pair of Figures*. The female image oscillates between beauty and non-beauty, strong and submissive, and mother and non-mother with an overall sense of affection and discomfort that corresponds to male self-projection on female bodies.

In this sense, Yi’s *A Pair of Figures* filled the empty shell of the New Woman with the uneasy and anxious colonial male ego. While the peony is an attribute of the fertile woman in front of a piano in *Rhyme*, the rabbits in cages as white as the researcher’s lab coat are juxtaposed with the tamed figure in *Research*, waiting to be dissected by a device of optical surveillance, the microscope. After the expiry of the New Woman debates in the late 1930s, the modern woman became not so much modern, but

¹¹¹ Pollock, “Women as Sign,” 147.

¹¹² Griselda Pollock explains that images of women appeared as beautiful objects, and “...beautification functioned as the means to manage the threat and loss upon which sexual difference is constructed.” For this reason, female images often appear as inconsistent characters hovering between “woman as threat” and “woman as a fantasy of male desire.” This fundamental contradiction of looking at women is attributed to the infant’s transition from the pre-oedipal stage, entering the world of phallus in which the infant’s realization of the sexual difference of his mother signifies both his subjectivity and loss. *Ibid.*, 147-8.

came to be utilized as a theme of soft propaganda to better serve the Empire. It is also possible that the façade of the New Woman in *A Pair of Figures* fit the social circumstances in 1944 and appealed to the juries in the “Seonjeon.”

Woman, Propaganda and Fine Art

Japan’s total war system started operating after 1937, with the Pearl Harbor incident in 1941 serving as a prelude to the tragic history of WWII. Under fascist state power, all Japanese citizens and colonized subjects were expected to server as soldiers in battle or on home fronts to support the frontline. As a part of the Assimilation Policy in colonial Korea, colonial subjects were categorized as Avant-guard (young men who would be Imperial soldiers), Rear-guard (women who support the war as a mothers and wives or as factory workers) or the home front, and Second Generation (children).¹¹³ While those three groups represented Imperial subjects, intelligentsia and the New Woman were regarded as unpatriotic persons who became outcasts in the Empire. The wives that represented the Rear-guard were admired as fundamentally and truly Asiatic, those who resisted the West, whereas the New Woman identity was denounced as liberal, individualistic, decadent and unproductive.¹¹⁴ Though the active social discourse of the New Woman lost its validity in the late 1930s, they were not completely void as images and were solidified as a monumental symbol of war circumstance in the form of both commercial and propaganda paintings. I posit that Yi’s *A Pair of Figures*, designated as the most important work in the last “Seonjeon,” is an example of this. It is generally

¹¹³ Kwon Myung-A, “The Women in the Rear Guard (Chong Hoo Buin), the New Women (Shin Yeosung), and the Spy,” *Sanghur Hakbo-The Journal of Korean Modern Literature* 12 (2004): 258.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 258.

agreed that the paintings of the 1940s were shaped to conform to the political situation. Yet most of Korean artists' work lacked any representation of or direct connotation regarding the ongoing social situation compared to works by Japanese artists.

In the study of paintings by pro-Japanese (*chinit*) Korean artists and Japanese resident artists from 1937 to 1945 by Kim Hye-shin, most of the applicable “Seonjeon” examples that show direct war messages were produced by Japanese residents.¹¹⁵ Eguchi Keishirō's *Soldier* (1940), for instance, depicts a group of Japanese soldiers standing in a circle. Anbo Michiko's *Home Front* (1940) portrays a mixed group of Korean and Japanese women who gather to make a contribution on a so-called “a thousand-stitch belt” as a lucky charm for soldiers in battlefields. Tanaka Fumiko's *Young Soldier* (1939) portrays a peaceful Korean family on the traditional Korean veranda but the work suggests that the young boy in the family soon will become an Imperial soldier. Even though Japanese juries still required “local color” in colonial artists' entries, it seems unlikely that the wartime state slogan, “the duty of serving the nation with the job,” exempted Korean artists. In fact, many Korean artists were forced or willing to paint propaganda or submit entries to the war art exhibitions held around Korea. In order to mobilize people as imperial subjects for the war effort, propaganda emerged as a mainstream culture led by *Monbushō* (The Ministry of Education of Japan)¹¹⁶ throughout Japan and its colonies. In this atmosphere, even Korean nationalist art critic Yun Hui-sun who once underscored the Korean spirit in art started catering to imperial authorities:

¹¹⁵ Kim Hye-shin, “Visual Representation of War in Korea, 1947-1945, ed. Ikeda Asato et al. *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire, 1931-1960* (Leiden: Brill, 2013.), 325-334.

¹¹⁶ *Monbushō* also sponsored the Japanese salon exhibitions “Bunten,” “Teiten,” and “Shin Bunten.”

The art of sublimity has not always necessarily been limited to a realistic representation of the situation for the Holy War Art or Rear-guard Art Exhibition or any other war paintings. Symbolic expression can make it. It is also deceived with romantic methods.¹¹⁷

Artists' indirect implication of war support is perhaps due to the uncertain nature of the assimilation policy. Korean artists were still regarded as second-class subjects and Japanese juries preferred that they keep the "local color." The scope of soft propaganda could be broadly understood, depending on judgments of Japanese juries. Yi's old master Kim Eun-ho's "Seonjeon" entry *Harmony* (1944) (Fig.23), which depicts a family delightfully playing a harmonica and singing, was once rejected for inclusion in the exhibition, but later accepted because of a favor from Japanese sculptor Miki Hiroshi who came to Kim's defense.¹¹⁸ Kim's image of a happy family was initially received as unrelated to the circumstances of war, but later reinterpreted as representing strong and robust rear spirits who cheer for victory. This suggests that soft propaganda is sometimes a matter of subjective interpretation by Japanese viewers. At the practical level, under the hegemony of 'serve the nation with professions' and 'sacrifice one's interest to public good,' artistic creation was highly likely to be restricted to the scope of propaganda.

In Korean *Female Figure Paintings* made in the late the 1930s to 1940s, which are for the most part less saturated with images of modern women and focus more on traditional images, Yi's *A Pair of Figures*, especially *Research*, shows a clear distinction

¹¹⁷ Yun Hui-sun, "Olhaeui misul" [Art of This Year], *Chunchu* December (1943): 131.

¹¹⁸ Yi Gyu-il, *Duijibo eo bon hanguk misul* [Uncovered Stories Behind Pro-Japanese Artists] (Seoul: Sigongsa, 1990), 186.

as an example of colonial propaganda, if not “*machine-ist* paintings.”¹¹⁹ It portrays the taming of the New Woman through spatial composition and technological objects.

In *Research*, there is a sense of systematic control surrounding the figure from the surveillance of the policing gaze. The symmetrical face with an equally proportioned hairline along the side with lined flasks behind her torso show the lab as a space of discipline and order. Two white rabbits captured in the cages reinforce the tension of a monitored space. Unlike a more realistic lab, the table is full of scientific tools as if it shows off every potential of this place. Most problematically, there is a sleek and glossy microscope at the center of frame.¹²⁰ How the microscope is located is unusual, since it is slightly turned for the viewer’s appreciation. The color work on the microscope is distinctive from Yi’s other paintings. The metallic gold and black colors, the interplay of optical technology and the modern beauty of the woman over turn the genre of the painting, as if the true modern beauty here is not the researcher but the microscope. In fact, the microscope seems to monitor the woman. The body of the microscope is slightly turned towards the female figure and the lens points at her face.

¹¹⁹ The recent publication *Modern Girls and Militarism: Japanese-Style Machine-ist Painting, 1935-1940*, Ikeda Asato provides significant groundwork for identifying the relationship between militarism and images of modern women around the Sino-Japanese War and WWII, in which rebellious images of “*moga*” were tamed and turned into symbols of the new political protocols. The writer questions the conventionally agreed upon mode in early Shōwa’s art that celebrates modernism in *bijinga*. The study offers another reading of “*moga*” and New Woman images in terms of how these images “executed patriotic duties and participated in the militarist national agenda.” Going beyond the ostensible signifiers, in the *bijinga* of modern women that she refers to as *machine-ist* paintings the writer found a sense of tension, coldness, and austerity in the way the female figures are placed with orderly geometry along with the inclusion of the latest technology. One of the *machine-ist* examples, Shibata Shuiha’s *Biwa Concert* (1930s), portrays a female entertainer who plays a military song with her *biwa* (Japanese lute) in front of the microphone, which accentuates the contrast between the organic beauty of a kimono-clad woman and the plastic beauty of technology, a combination that suggest a nationalistic, militaristic voice. Asato Ikeda “Modern Girls and Militarism: Japanese-Style *Machine-ist* Paintings, 1935-1940”, *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire, 1931-1960*, ed. Ikeda Asato, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 91-109.

¹²⁰ The metallic sleekness and the streamlined design is not only limited to the optical devices. In fact, the fluid, smooth metallic design referred to as streamlined represents a major modern design shift after WWI that was popularly used in industrial manufacturing. Represented as Fordism or assembly line production, the streamline design connotes a totalitarian image to control individuals and efficiency.

A growing interest in science can be seen in “Seonjeon” works and commercial images serving as part of the state health and science policy during the war. In the first issue of the magazine *Jokwang* in 1935, an advertisement for syphilis medicine features a female researcher with bobbed hair wearing a modern *qipao* (Chinese traditional dress) and looking through the lens of a microscope. In 1940 “Seonjeon” Goto Miyoko’s *Specimen* (1940) (Fig. 24) portrays a panel consisting of a microscope, a heating lamp, a dead butterfly and grasshopper, a fish sample in a bottle of sanitizer, a set of messes and scissors, and uncannily, a *haniwa* soldier (Japanese ancient terracotta clay figure), creating an eccentric still life with objects that represent wartime consciousness. During WWII, Japan made several major medical breakthroughs, and medicine and science are directly connected to military capability on the battlefield. Although it belonged to the Western Painting Section, Danaka Kunari’s *Science Lab* (1940) offers a similar sense by depicting various tools in the science lab of a girls’ school. As the Rear-guard, girls in science and medicine seemed to be significant sources of labor. This also seems connected to the issue of health and birth control, which been growing in both Japan and Korea since the mid-1930s. As the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese war was extended into the “total war” social structure,¹²¹ a ‘new system of science and technology’ was used in order to maximize natural and human resources to supply shortages caused by the

¹²¹ “Total War” is Japanese war slogan from the late 1930s that emphasized the economic and material side of war whereby Japan tried to solve the economic dilemma of the shortage of materials such as steel, oil, tungsten, and coal. While defending Manchuria and Korea, Japan advanced to the South East Asian countries. Under the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere system that mapped the Japanese colonies as war units, heavy material supplied from Manchuria and natural resources such as trees from Taiwan were sent to Korea for manufacturing. Carter Eckert, “Total War, Industrialization, and Social Change in Late Colonial Korea,” in *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931-1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

continuous wars.¹²² Science, industry and militarism were concepts of mutual supplementation during the “total war.”

Science existed as a means of control over the female. The discourse of the New Woman was closely related to science from the mid-1920s as a measurement of modernity at the domestic level. The mandatory education system for girls was based on home economics in order to teach them to operate a household effectively and to teach them to raise healthy imperial subjects, rather than to encourage women’s social participation as professional workers.¹²³ In the later period of the war, women were expected to work on the home front or be engaged to work in factories in place of male laborers that were mobilized to the front. The artificial science used to produce the industrial and military products metaphorically coincided with producing imperial subjects. A 1944 cover illustration of the women’s magazine *Sinyeosong* pictures how women in science became an image of the home front and rear-guard in the last year of the Pacific War. The woman wears wartime work clothes that urban women were encouraged to wear and looks into a test tube. The accompanying text reads, “Victory in everyday life!” This illustration illuminates the way scientific imagery was used as propaganda in Yi’s *Research*.

The relationship between New Woman and militarism in Yi’s work shows a great parallel with Ōta Chōu’s two problematic works: *Vaccination* (1934) (Fig. 25) and *Women Observing the Stars* (1936) (Fig. 26). Portraying *kimono*-clad female scientists and a female doctor, Ōta figured images of high status, professional women rarely seen in

¹²² Han Min-ju, “The Era of the War on Science, ‘A Woman in the Real Guard’ and the Imagination of Artificial,” *Journal of Korean Literature* 42 (2012): 181.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 187.

1930s-40s Japanese painting. In *Vaccination*, a female doctor who wears a *haiku* (white gown over *kimono*) inoculates a female patient. Similarly, *Women Observing the Stars* portrays typical kimono-clad beauties standing around a colossal telescope. There is a sense of discordance between the juxtaposition of the scientific objects and the traditionally dressed female figures. In particular, the use of optical devices, namely telescope and a microscope, accentuates the sense of a cold, inhumane and monitoring gaze. The juxtaposition of images of traditional stargazers, the New Woman, and the latest optical technology makes the women seem even more feeble and submissive. Art historian Ikeda Asato states that “The woman’s active looking through the modern optical technology is nevertheless undermined by the soft black shadows in the upper left and bottom right of the painting that frame her; it looks as if we, the viewers, are also looking at the women through a telescope, but without her knowledge, subjecting her to the tool’s visual control.”¹²⁴ Compared to this unawareness of the gaze monitoring them, the figure in Yi’s *Research* completely recognizes the gaze outside of the frame. With the reflection of closed space on the flasks behind her and the caged rabbits there is still a rich sense of confinement in *Research*, which implies direct visual control. While Ōta’s image of Japanese women capturing the universe with their eyes stands as a striking symbol for Japanese expansionism, Yi’s microscope represents the severe surveillance of the late colonial period, when secret police activity increased in an effort to arrest young nationalist activists.

The degree to which Yi cooperated with Japanese imperialists with his artistic output is unclear. Unlike Yi’s master Kim Eun-ho who created a propaganda painting titled *The Offering of Gold Hair Accessories* (1937) or Yi’s old colleague and rival Kim

¹²⁴ Asato Ikeda “Modern Girls and Militarism,” 102.

Ki-chang who was awarded the First Prize at the Decisive Battle Art Exhibition (*gyeoljeon misuljeon*), Yi does not seem to have been a major contributor to the pro-Japanese art movement.¹²⁵ It is highly likely that most of the “Seonjeon” beneficiaries were forced or encouraged to join propaganda art exhibitions. In this social atmosphere, the implications of war in Yi’s work can hardly be refuted.

Yi’s *A Pair of Figures* has been read as representative of the everyday life of Korea’s New Woman and a celebration of modernity in national-level exhibitions and studies regarding “Seonjeon”’s *Female Figure Paintings*. Such readings, however, neglect to account for the historical context and masculine agency that shaped the discourse regarding the New Woman and their images in fine art, cartoons, and illustration. As a concept, the New Woman stemmed from the discourse of modernity within the rapid urbanization of colonial Seoul. The New Woman became objects consumed as spectacles by male desire and anxiety, and terminated by the militaristic social shift. Since modernity and the New Woman were signs rather than the status quo, the two concepts represent the desire and psyche of those who participated in the discursive arena. In Korea, the definition of the New Woman is interconnected with European female pioneers, American icon makers, Japanese intelligentsia and Korean nationalists. Through “Seonjeon” images of women, male artists in the 1920s-30s show repetitive styles and themes that suggest the male artists’ collective agreement about what is tolerable and ideal in modern women who can reassure male identity. By placing

¹²⁵ Even though Yi did not stand out as a wartime pro-Japanese artist, there is a record to show his submission of an entry *Beat the Enemy* (1944) for the Decisive Battle Art Exhibition. Minjok Munje Yeonguso [Research Center of National Issue], *Sinkminji Joseon gwa jeonjaeng misul: Jeonsi cheje wa joseon minjung ui sam* [Colonial Korea and War Art] (Seoul: Minjok Munje Yeonguso, 2004), 211.

female figures in a submissive atmosphere, these paintings represent how men overcame the menace of New Women and protected patriarchal power.

Since late 1930s, as the figure of the New Woman took on negative connotations as a fallen woman, unqualified mother, or menace to the Empire, totalitarian patriarchal and imperial orders started controlling New Women as Imperial subjects: as a mother and the Rear-guard. Although Yi's *A Pair of Figures* seemingly employs typical modern beauty, it shows strikingly symbolic images of women as Imperial subjects in which women at home (*Rhyme*) represent the Imperial mother who is qualified to rear Imperial soldiers and women at work (*Research*) a Rear-guard who increases the material productivity of the empire. Yi's *A Pair of Figures*, especially *Research*, shows a rich sense of control and surveillance through the female figures and spatial composition, setting the tone for soft propaganda created to serve the militaristic era. In both images, women were expected to be "producers" of Imperial subjects, culture, sex and war resources. *A Pair of Figures* mirrors males' mixed psyche towards the modern women who were responsible for the nation's future as well as its decadence. Yi's pictorial language reveals the anxiety, fear, discomfort, protection, and submission of the colonized male, while his helplessness is projected onto the female body. It is a sad reality that Korea's colonized elites yearned to escape the emasculated motherland, while at the same time realizing that the motherland was themselves.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Japan's colonial rule, which coincided with and largely dictated Korea's modernization, brought great social change, in which the expanding public role of women posed a threat to colonized males' masculinity. By pictorially depicting women as beautiful, docile, and preservers of traditional values, Korean *Female Figure Painting* artists represented the crises that arose from shifting notions of nationhood and masculinity. Under Japanese military control in the late 1930s and early 1940s, numerous Korean artists responded to the imperialist demand for wartime propaganda paintings by using female figures to extoll certain virtuous roles outlined by colonialist and patriarchal ideology. Within the "Seonjeon" exhibitions' absorption of *nihonga*, the highly gendered *Female Figure Painting* artists came to internalize Japan's *Oriental-Orientalism*, as a mode of seeing colonial subjects as embodied Korean female figures. In *Female Figure Paintings*, *hanbok*-clad beauties are canonized in various staged scenarios, from very traditional to modern, becoming a ubiquitous symbol of submission by imperial and patriarchal ownership. Even though *hanbok*-clad female figures' features do not realistically represent those of preexisting Korean women, the *Female Figure Paintings* function as a kind of mirror reflecting male-oriented social ideology as well as imperial oppression. To put it another way, *Female Figure Paintings* stand as the artists' self-portraits, inviting us to look into the psyche of these colonized male painters.

Among the elite Kim School members, Yi Yu-tae's *Female Figure Paintings* are striking examples that show colonial male desires and anxieties during Korea's wartime milieu. Yi's paintings embody the canonical, male-dominated gaze toward women. In

Yi's Female Figure Paintings, sexual differences are perpetually highlighted in the bright faces, big, elongated eyes, sharply trimmed eyebrows, higher noses, and rose-petal lips of the figures. At the same time, Yi depicted female figures in a way that did not directly correspond to typical Korean beauties.¹²⁶ Although Yi constructed images of recognizable female beauty in *Women: Wisdom, Impression Sentiment* and *A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research*, these paintings do more than simply adhere to the conventions of concurrent *Female Figure Paintings*.

This thesis first explored Yi's reinvention of classical Korean leitmotifs in which Korean tradition and the 1940s present are unusually mixed, revealing the liminal identity of Koreans under the decades of colonial rule. Under the force of imperialism, the illogical arrangement of Korean tradition and the rich sense of *self-Orientalism* in Yi's *Women: Wisdom, Impression Sentiment* come to symbolize emasculated masculine identity. Yi's consciousness of the colonial circumstance is further echoed in his female figures. As if returning to the Joseon period, the female figures in *Women* seem to be fossilized with antiquities surrounding them. The female figures of this timeless world, in fact, are the products of wartime propaganda, through which Yi displays the imperial-patriarchal masculine hegemonic ideals of the "wise mother, good wife" and "home front women" using leitmotifs in *Women* that show a close affinity with Japanese wartime *nihonga* paintings. However, unlike the painterly depictions of sacred, merciful Japanese mothers found in the more ubiquitous *nihonga* of the late 1930s and early 1940s, Yi's wife and mother figures seem lifeless, loveless, and rigid.

¹²⁶ For example, the winner of the 1940's "Miss Joseon" competition, an early precursor for contemporary beauty pageant, *gisaeng* Park On-sil had a round-framed body and classical Korean face with pert features: narrow, elongated eyes, with a small nose and lips. See Modan Nihonsha. *Ilbon japji modeon ilbon gwa Joseon 1940: Wanyoeok "Modoeon Ilbon" Joseon pan 1940-nyoen* [Japanese Magazine "Modern Japan" and Joseon 1940] (Seoul: Omunhaksa, 2009), 46-47.

This suggests Korean male anxiety caused by the emergence of the “New Woman,” a new categorization of female modernity that made males take more voyeuristic approach to interacting with women. *A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research*, often discussed as a portrayal of the everyday life of the “New Woman” and celebrated as an example of Korean modernity, also symbolically indicates how the “New Woman” was categorized and tamed by masculine modes of vision. The patriarchal pictorial victory over modern womanhood was further reinforced in wartime *nihonga* and Korean *Female Figure Paintings*. The female figure’s social role in *Research* suggests a mobilization of women under totalitarian social circumstances.

I have further argued that Yi’s *Female Figure Paintings*, with their long, stiff and vertical bodies, represent the colonized males’ collective psyche. A mixed sense of nostalgia and rejection, condescension and compassion, and control and fear, revealed throughout Yi’s female figures, hovers between visual pleasure and schizoid self-awareness. Lacan’s theory of the “mirror stage” provides a possible reading of the disillusioned and deluded self-awareness that Yi projected onto the subjects of his paintings. According to Lacan, man’s ego is formed in infancy through looking at his reflection in the mirror and recognizing the external image of the body as the ‘ideal I’ or ‘imago,’¹²⁷ after the stage of viewing “the body in bits and pieces.”¹²⁸ The process of creating the self as subject from the ideal image that separates the “I” from others such as his mother is a narcissistic experience, and the subject also inherits a sense of loss and

¹²⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits : The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W.W. Norton &, 2006), 95.

¹²⁸ Jane Gallop, "Lacan's "Mirror Stage": Where to Begin," *SubStance* vol.11/12 (1982/1983): 121-122.

desire because of his estrangement from others.¹²⁹ Lacan's "mirror stage" can be symbolically interpreted with the artist as infant and the painting the artist creates as the idealized image of the self. Yi's self-projection into his *Female Figure Paintings* appears in the vertical, elongated female bodies that suggest a sense of masculinity through their phallic silhouettes.

Published in 1933, Korean poet Yi Sang's Dadaist poem *The Mirror* offers a striking parallel to Yi's illogical composition of female figures, and the paradoxical *Othering* of/self-identification with women.

There is no sound in the mirror/No other World so still.

In the mirror I do have ears/Two pitiful ears that don't grasp my words!

The I in the mirror is left-handed/Who can neither accept nor know my
handshake.

I can't touch the I in the mirror because of the mirror,

But without the mirror, how could we have met?

Now I've no mirror, but the I in the mirror is always there.

He must be absorbed in some sinister venture.

The I in the mirror – my other self – looks like me.

Regretfully I can't worry about him or examine him.¹³⁰

Yi Sang's fragmented self, revealed through his poem, is closely connected to his disillusionment with women. Literary historian Peter Lee argues that the mirror is a metaphor for a woman, who Yi Sang desires but who makes him experience "betrayal

¹²⁹ The mirror stage provides man a unified image of self, narcissism. Yet the totalitarian body image is an illusion, "the belief in a projected image" inherits the retroactive fantasy of the stage in which the body is perceived in bits and pieces. Jane Gallop, "Lacan's "Mirror Stage," 121-122.

¹³⁰ Peter H. Lee, *A History of Korean Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 367.

and anxiety of abandonment.”¹³¹ Yi Sang’s sexual desire for and fear of women is also expressed in his novel *The Wing* (1936), in which the first-person narrator, an incompetent unemployed husband, finds out that his beautiful and strong wife works as a prostitute. The mirror, the image, and paintings reflect the male ego, and in Yi’s paintings the male ego appears to be damaged by the threat of women. Freudian “Oedipus complex,” in which a child enters the phallus and fear of castration,¹³² combined with the Lacanian mirror stage, might offer an answer. According to Pollock, women are linguistically fixed as two images: “the pre-oedipal mother, still all-powerful, phallic” and “*the femme fatale*” who is symbol of castration.¹³³ The fear of castration that signifies a threat to narcissism is at the same time a symbol of a fetishization of the (m)other. Yi combines the maiden, wife, mother and New Woman into an ambiguous sign that reveals the mixed feeling of men toward women. In 1930s Korea, the tropes of the “New Woman” and “Modern Girl” evoked males’ traumatic loss as they stood in opposition to the ideal of the Korean mother, although under colonialism, the Korean mother could no longer represent wholeness. Rather she became a metaphor for inferior Other, and the failure of nation. Yi’s female figures in the mixed sense between femininity and masculinity can be understood in this regard.

After the liberation of Korea in 1945 following Japan’s surrender to the U.S and the Allied Forces, Yi, along with his peers, stopped painting *Female Figure Paintings*. Yi

¹³¹ Ibid.,367.

¹³² According to Freud the fear of castration does not mean the loss of the sexual organ, but instead represents a threat to man’s narcissistic identification with a complete body image. Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” in *The Freud Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 288-299.

¹³³ Griselda Pollock, “Women as Sign,” 138-139.

shifted his specialty to classic landscapes.¹³⁴ The “Seonjeon” exhibition changed its name to “Gukjeon” (*Daehanmingook misul jeonlamheo* or Korean Art Exhibition), and the Kim School artists became important judges for these annual exhibitions. Commissioned by the Bank of Korea in 1974, Yi drew the portrait of Yi Hwang (1501-1570) that graced the 1,000 won (the currency of Korea) note (Fig. 27).¹³⁵ Interestingly, the portrait of this historical figure bears a striking likeness to the artist (Fig. 28).¹³⁶ Again, this example of Yi’s self-projection in his paintings suggest to us an alternate reading of *Female Figure Paintings* as products of the socio-political and cultural circumstances of Korea’s colonial period that reveal women's vulnerable status.

¹³⁴ Kim Ki-chang further shifted his specialty to abstract landscapes, and Jang U-seong returned to literati-style paintings.

¹³⁵ Kim Ki-chang was also commissioned to draw the portrait of King Sejong (1397-1450) for the 10,000 won note, and Jang U-seong took in charge of the portrait of Yi Soon-sin (1545-1598) for 100 won note.

¹³⁶ Korean art theorist Kim Min-su argues that Yi’s *Portrait of Yi Hwang* is problematic, because Yi worked as a pro-Japanese artist and lacked historical and nationalist consciousness. Min-su Kim, “Portraits in the Korean Currencies and the Death of Memory,” *Association of Korean Modern Art* 17 (2006): 218-219.

APPENDIX

FIGURES



Figure 1

Yi Yu-tae

Women: Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment, 1943

Color on paper, 142 x 198cm, 169 x 215cm, 142 x 198cm

Seoul, Samsung Museum Leeum

(image from *Lee Yu-tae*, 1,4,5)



Figure 2
Wisdom



Figure 3
Impression



Figure 4
Sentiment



Figure 5
Yi Yu-tae
A Pair of Figures: Rhyme and Research, 1944
Color on paper, each 210 x 151cm
Seoul, The National Museum of Contemporary Art
(image from *Lee Yu-tae*, 9-10)



Figure 6
Yi Yu-tae
Bridal Makeup, 1942
Color on paper, 215 x 179cm
(image from *Hyuncho Lee Yu-Tae*, 348)



Figure 7
Tsuchida Bakusen
Wooden Bed, 1933
Color on silk, 153 x 179cm
Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art
(image from *Painting Circles*, 228)



Figure 8
Otsuka Yoshi
Gisaeng, 1933
(image from *Chōsen Bijutsu
Tenrankai Zuroku* vol.12, 10)



Figure 9
Bae Jeong-rye
Garden, 1940
(image from *Chōsen Bijutsu
Tenrankai Zuroku* vol. 19, 30)



Figure 10
Tsuchida Bakusen
Maiko in Garden, 1924
Color on silk, 217.7 x 102cm
Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art
(image from *Painting Circles*, 201)



Figure 11
Kim Eun-ho
Gaze, 1923
Color on paper, 130 x 140cm
(image from *Idang Kim Eun-ho*, 59)



Figure 12
Kim Ki-chang
Listening Quietly, 1934
Color on paper, 193 x 140cm
(image from *Hanguk Misul 100-nyeon*, 227)



Figure 13
Jang U-seong
Studio, 1943
Color on paper, 167 x 210.5cm
Seoul, Samsung Museum Leeum
(image from *Masterpieces of Korean Modern Art*, 32)



Figure 14
Jang U-seong
Wedding Makeup, 1937
(image from *Chōsen Bijutsu Tenrankai Zuroku* vol. 16, 7)



Figure 15
Kim Ki-chang
Gathering, 1943
Color on paper, 262 x 182cm
(image from Mu:Um)



Figure 16
Mukai Kuman
The Birth of a Son, 1941
Color on paper, 223.5 x 184cm
Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art
(image from *Art in Wartime Japan, 1937-45*, 28)



Figure 17
Oh Ju-whan
Indoor, 1932
(image from *Chōsen Bijutsu Tenrankai Zuroku* vol. 11, 23)



Figure 18
Noh Jin-sik
A Quite Day, 1933
(image from *Chōsen Bijutsu Tenrankai Zuroku* vol. 12, 30)



Figure 19
Cho Youg-seung
Outing, 1939
(image from *Chōsen Bijutsu Tenrankai Zuroku* vol. 18, 19)



Figure 20
 Ahn Seok-ju
What If There Comes a Time When Women Can Advertise Who They Are and What They Want, 1932
 (image from *New Women in Colonial Korea*, 86)



Figure 21
 Nakamura Daizaburô
Piano, 1926
 Pigment on silk, 164.5 x 302 cm
 Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art
 (image from *Nihon No Zuzō*, 266)



Figure 22
Koi Eiko
Piano, 1939
(image from *Chōsen Bijutsu Tenrankai Zuroku* vol. 18, 16)



Figure 23
Kim Eun-ho
Harmony, 1944
Color on paper, 102 x 123.7cm
(image from *Idang Kim Eun-ho*, 35)



Figure 24
Goto Miyoko
Specimen, 1940
(image from *Chōsen Bijutsu Tenrankai Zuroku* vol. 19, 17)



Figure 25
Ōta Chō
Vaccination, 1934
Color on paper, 199.5 x 119cm
Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art
(image from *Modern Boy, Modern Girl*, 58)



Figure 26
Ōta Chō
Women Observing the Stars, 1936
Color on paper, 273 x 206cm
Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art
(image from *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire*, 102)



Figure 27
Yi Yu-tae
Portrait of Yi Hwang, 1974
Color on paper, 72 x 60cm
The Bank of Korea
(image from *Lee Yu-tae*, 11)



Figure 28
Yi Yu-tae
(image from The National
Academy of Arts of Korea)

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