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In *Gender Politics at Home and Abroad*, Hyaeweol Choi explores the nature of the ideal conception of modern Korean womanhood that emerged in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Korea. According to Choi, this ideal image emerged from the strong influence of Western Protestantism and its global organizations. Even after Korea fell under Japanese colonial rule, the Western ideal of modern womanhood that was disseminated through the Protestant missionary organizations continued to enjoy cultural hegemony in the modernization process of Korea. This was especially true for the elite Korean women, who were the first recipients of these ideals, and who lived, studied, and worked under the “omnipresence of Protestant Christian influence” (14). The transformation of these women into modern women had global dimensions due to their use of the global network of missionaries that enabled them to go abroad to acquire first-hand Western knowledge and then take it back home. As such, the story of the emergence of modern womanhood in Korea is a fresh narration viewed through the lens of religious organizations and global mobility. In Choi’s words, “the formation of modern gender relations in Korea, [was] shaped by the competing forces of Korean nation-building, Japanese colonial imperatives, and global evangelical ambition in the interwar period” (14).

The chapter layout reflects the spatial movement of Western ideas of modernity and the women who carried these ideas to and from Korea. In Chapter One, the author examines how the Protestant ideal of womanhood traveled to Korea and resulted in the formation of the ideology of the “Wise Mother, Good Wife.” While the existing scholarship on the ideology emphasizes the influence of traditional Confucian prescriptions and the Meiji Japanese rendition of that ideology, Choi emphasizes the influence of “conservative Western gender ideology” (39) that was disseminated by the Protestant missionaries. Rather than being a simple remnant of the past, the ideology was a “transcultural modern construct” (41) with ambivalent progressiveness. With this emphasis, Choi dispels the association between Western missionaries and their image as “pioneers of modern womanhood” (39). Still, with its connection to the missionaries and their educational work, the ideology of Wise Mother, Good Wife “evolved into a marker of middle-class women” (50) and became an aspirational goal for modern educated women.

Chapter Two examines the formation of the “modern house and home” ideal in Korea, and how it became “a key point of convergence for national, colonial, and missionary projects” (75). Again, Choi highlights the primacy of Western ideals and materiality in this new ideal image. She notes that even though Korea was a Japanese colony, Japan was merely a mediator of the primarily Western ideals of home and family. Choi also emphasizes the role of the institutions that underpinned the influx of these ideals, such as missionary schools, the homes of missionaries, which functioned as a kind of “contact zone,” (81) and the missionary networks that sent Korean women to study in the United States and other Western countries. These women then brought back to Korea a particular kind of knowledge about home and family that they had acquired in the United States. The flow of ideas was not always unilateral: the Korean students adapted what they had learned to the particular conditions of family life in Korea, and after interacting with the Korean students, Western educators in Korea and the United States adjusted their understanding of Korean family life.

In Chapter Three, Choi follows the journey of a number of Korean women whose educational paths took them to the United States and Europe. The networks of Christian missionary organizations that provided them with financial and moral support are at the center of this story, as they very much enabled these women, who were mostly from modest backgrounds, to embark on the privileged path of overseas studies, and “experience the world beyond the boundaries of colonial rule and develop new perspectives on selfhood, nation, and the world” (110). Through their first-hand experience of Western society, the women students became keenly aware of the devastating socio-economic conditions in Korea. In Choi’s words, “their direct exposure to Western society sharpened their sense of locality, which, in turn, shaped their vision for social reforms that were locally grounded while also informed by theories and practices developed in foreign nations” (30). This realization led many of the women to devote themselves to the national reform movement, especially in rural areas, after they had completed their studies.

Chapter Four follows the New Women back to Korea after they had finished their overseas education. Most of them worked for rural development, and they educated women in basic literacy and home management. Even after these women returned to Korea, their ties to the global missionary network continued, as some received ongoing support from missionary organizations, exemplified by the Esther Circle, a group formed by members of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in Scranton, Pennsylvania that assisted Hwang Aedök’s rural development project (152). International organizations, such as the YWCA, the YMCA, and missionary schools, formed a solid institutional foundation that also supported the Protestant New Women. This institutional support enabled the women to continue carrying out their rural reform projects despite the increasingly hostile environment under Japanese colonial rule in the 1930s.

Through rich details about the lives and work of the women, Choi brings forth an intimate, wholistic picture of the Korean New Women. Rather than depicting them as passive recipients of Western ideas, Choi shows the women as active agents who astutely understood, edited, and modified Western ideas to make them optimally applicable to Korean social conditions. Choi brings out the agency of the Korean women with her thorough understanding of the interiority of these women, which is most aptly shown in the insightful depictions of the encounters between the Korean and Western women, societies, and cultures. Particularly poignant is the scene in Chapter Two of the Korean women’s visit to Western missionary homes and the amazement they felt over the materiality of the Western style homes. Examples like this also illustrate what Choi hopes to capture: the fleeting yet defining moments through which the women’s lasting desires and aspirations were created. In Chapter Three, the author details the lives of the female students in the United States where they gained unique perspectives on American family life through their work as nannies and housekeepers, demonstrating Choi’s commitment to telling the stories of these women from their perspective. The particular and concrete details of their lives—what they studied, how they supported themselves, and what they thought about their fellow American students—expose the particularities and limitations of their experiences; yet because of them, the readers come to a deeper, more intimate understanding of these women. Countless numbers of such intimate details are successfully marshalled by the author to depict how the women acquired their particular ideals of modern Korean womanhood and their vision for national development.

By foregrounding the global networks of Christian missionaries and organizations, the book places colonial Korea in the midst of global connections outside the Japanese empire. Choi sees religion and religious institutions at the forefront of the modernizing process (“protestant modernity”) in Korea (15). Although the presence of the missionaries and their role in spreading Western culture in Korea is well known,¹ Choi brings new significance to their Protestant affiliation as a global network through which the missionaries operated. Choi notes, “These Christian institutions created a pipeline for Koreans to gain experience with foreign languages and culture” (2). When the 1924 Immigration Act constrained overseas students’ access to education in the United States, Christian scholarships like the Barbour Scholarship were used to actively recruit overseas women to attend missionary colleges in the United States (130-137). Through the examination of the Korean New

¹ Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea: Education, Labor, and Health, 1910-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Hyaeweol Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Sung-Deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religion, 1876-1910* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013).

Women and their global trajectories, readers gain a new perspective about Korea's place in the world beyond the Japanese empire. Also, intriguing is Choi's highlighting of the way the Korean women built connections with different countries through the global Christian network. Choi shows how a number of the New Women actively sought models for Korean development in countries other than the United States or Japan, such as Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. These new connections that the Korean New Women made with countries outside of the Japanese empire show the complex global network of peoples and ideas that existed in the early twentieth century, and the dynamic, diverse channels through which those ideas flowed.²

In this narrative, while the presence of the colonial state is acknowledged, it plays a tangential role. In her attempt to move the narrative away from the New Women's collaboration with the colonial state in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Choi downplays the role of that state in the 1920s. In so doing, the book revives an old chronological convention in the field, in which the colonial state retreated into the background under the Cultural Rule policy, while "colonial modernity" flourished.³ For example, although Choi acknowledges the similarities between the New Women's rural reform projects and the state-sponsored Rural Revitalization Campaign, the book does not interrogate the relationship between the two. Instead, she repeatedly characterizes the women's activities as "consciously apolitical" (154). As a result, one wonders why these women later chose to collaborate with the colonial state during wartime. The truncation of the timeline that ends at 1937 leads to a missed opportunity for the author to engage with these women's activities after 1945—a time when their close relationship with the Western countries, especially the United States, would have been a great advantage due to the emergence of the United States as the supreme political power in South Korea. One wonders how much the post-1945 political dynamic contributed to the continuing cultural hegemony of Western modernity in South Korea and, perhaps more importantly, to the prominence of the American-educated New Women in Korean history at large.

Gender Politics at Home and Abroad is a valuable addition to the scholarship on Korean women's history focusing on the colonial period.⁴ The field will be hard pressed to find a work better at traversing the boundaries between Korea, the United States, and Europe with such grace and insight. The author's unique transnational sensibilities bring to life the intimate inner world of the New Women in their encounter with the West and their dedication to rural reform. Moreover, the clear, accessible prose enhanced by interesting historical details not only makes the book an engaging read but also an invaluable teaching resource.

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² Sayaka Chatani, *Nation-Empire: Ideology and Rural Youth Mobilization in Japan and Its Colonies*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018) also highlights complex network of global transmission of ideas to Korea in this period.

³ Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999) was the influential harbinger of this trend in English language scholarship. The tendency to downplay colonial state presence in the cultural arena is more pronounced in Korean language scholarship such as Kwon Podŭrae, *Yōnae ūi sidae: 1920-nyōndae ch'oban ūi munhwa wa yuhaeng* [The Age of Love: Culture and Trend in the early 1920s], (Seoul, Korea: Hyōnsil munhwa yōngu, 2003).

⁴ Other works in the field of Korean women's history of note include Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender*; Janice C. H. Kim, *To Live to Work: Factory Women in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Ruth Barraclough, *Factory Girl Literature*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Sonja M. Kim, *Imperative of Care: Women and Medicine in Colonial Korea*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019).