STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE
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Japanese Colonial Education and the Culture of Academia in Korea, 1910-1945

In the late 1920s, Korea was swept by a cultural craze surrounding a translated Russian novel. In this novel, Red Love (Chŏk yŏn), the author Alexandra Kollontai depicts a vision for future gender relations where women were equal earners alongside men, allowing them to pursue true love free from the pressures of economic considerations. Yet Kollontai’s advocacy of new sexual mores caused a ruckus in the press, with one writer even coining the term “Kollontai-ism” to represent the unrestrained female indulgence of sexual desire.1 Amidst this controversy, the curious press turned to a prominent Korean female intellectual, Chŏng Ch'ilsŏng, for her thoughts. In an interview, Chŏng avoided these sexual overtones, instead prioritizing women’s economic self-determination, and she states that “the freedom to die on the side of the road is not freedom at all. Without… economic freedom, it is all meaningless.”2

While Chŏng’s critique is remarkable in itself, there is an equally surprising aspect to these interviews when viewed in historical context – namely that a woman would be in a position to speak authoritatively on gender relations despite the numerous hurdles of patriarchy. However, a closer look at her background offers some suggestions as to why: Chŏng’s education at Tokyo Women’s Art School and her familiarity with foreign literature, ranging from Alexandra Kollontai to Henrik Ibsen, gave her the legitimacy to speak out on this issue for the reading public. Some of her close colleagues went even further, and Hwang Sindŏk, a graduate of Waseda University, partnered with the well-known Japanese feminist Yamakawa Kikue and wrote on the Korean women’s movement for Japanese publications as well.

These two intellectuals, educated in Japan and active in both Korea and Japan, illustrate the possibilities provided through higher education. Thus my project excavates similar achievements by focusing on how Korean intellectuals appropriated their academic credentials to shape Japanese society, particularly in two fields: the women’s movement and literature. My research on the women’s movement draws on the experiences of the Kŭnuhoe, colonial Korea’s largest women’s group, which opened branches throughout Korea and Japan while also forming networks with influential feminists in Japan. For literature, I focus on authors like Yi Kwangsu and Kim Saryang and trace how their literary works shaped Japanese views on modernity. By placing intellectuals in these two fields within the larger framework of colonization, my project aims to show how imperialism is inherently a two way street – Korean intellectuals transformed Japanese society even as they were colonized.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD

Andre Schmid has challenged Japanese historians to consider the impact of Korea on Japan’s broader history throughout the colonial period. Because the very nature of colonization is wrapped within unequal power relations, it is much harder to trace the impact of the Korean colony on the Japanese metropole than vice versa, yet some historians have been successful in doing so. For example, Samuel Pao-san Ho and Michael Schneider have noted how the forced wide scale importation of Korean rice, at the great detriment of Korean farmers, helped to diffuse tensions between agriculture and industry within Japan. Other historians, like E. Taylor Atkins

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1 Yun Hyŏngsik, “P’uroret’aria yŏnaerom” in Samch’ŏlli vol. 4 no. 4 (1932): 57.
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and Kim Brandt, have traced the effects of popular cultural constructions of Korea within Japanese society, and note how images of the “innocent Koreans” became a means through which many Japanese citizens could articulate their nostalgia towards a simpler, premodern past. What is missing in these studies, however, is the agency of Koreans within these changes – Koreans as actors within the very developments that were transforming Japan and Korea alike. My project turns to the culture of academia and intellectuals to trace this legacy.

On one hand, the Japanese educational system was part of a disciplinary regime, as countless studies have emphasized. It was clearly a rigged system, designed not only to educate Koreans but also to enforce their continued colonization. Yet on the other hand, higher academia also provided several opportunities, particularly through cultural capital – proficiencies in both language and “high culture” – that bestowed the public prestige necessary for intellectuals to shape society. Pierre Bourdieu has described the diploma as a “patent of nobility,” and Chŏng and Hwang are two examples of how “name dropping” strange and foreign sounds like “Kollontai” and “Ibsen” could provide women with the academic prestige to write for public audiences both in Korea and Japan. Thus Korean intellectuals, educated in Japan, provide the ideal window into how Koreans shaped Japan’s history even under the yoke of colonial rule.

METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION

Professor Tae-eok Kwon in the department of Korean history at Seoul National University has agreed to oversee my research for this Fulbright-IIE project. His most recent work as co-author of Modern Mutual Perceptions between Korea and Japan (Kundae Han-il kan ui sangho insik) addresses cultural modernization in colonial Korea, focusing on Korean and Japanese actors, and his familiarity with pertinent sources will be a boon during my stay.

My affiliation with Seoul National University will provide access to the archives necessary for this project. In tracing the women’s movement, my project focuses on the Kûnhoe (Rose of Sharon Alliance), and many of the related sources are available only in Korea. For example, the Rose of Sharon Alliance journal (Kûmu), is only available at the Korean Magazine Museum in Yeouido. Seoul National University’s Central Library also houses a series of Japanese language publications on this organization by the Society for the Dissemination of Korean Thought (Chôsen shisō tsûshin sha) that will shed light on this group’s activities. For literature, many Korean authors’ Japanese language works were well received, and Kim Saryang, a Tokyo Imperial University graduate, was even nominated for an Akutagawa Prize. Seoul National University’s Central Library houses his works.

This field research in Korea will complement my current research on Korean exchange student networks as a Japan Foundation Scholar at Waseda University, and form the basis of a doctoral dissertation which I plan on revising for publication by an academic press. Furthermore, because I speak English, Japanese, and Korean, I will be able to present the results in all three languages. The Korean-Japan Cultural Foundation (Han’il munhwa koryu kikim) supports similar research, and regularly holds academic conferences in Korea and Japan. This research speaks to the academic communities in both countries, and I hope that Fulbright-IIE will help to support this project.

3 C.f. work by E. Patricia Tsurumi, Leighanne Yuh, Yi Pyongdam, Pak Chaehong, and Inaba Tsugio.
PERSONAL STATEMENT
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I have been asked about why I chose to study history, particularly between two nations with a relationship as troubled as Korea and Japan. I usually have to resort to a metaphor to explain: I want to become a scholar with depth perception. In human eyesight, the left and right eyes normally view objects from slightly different angles. Thus one’s sense of an object’s location differs whether one uses their left or right eye. Yet it is the combination of these two images that creates depth perception – one of the wonders of the human brain is that it can incorporate these views, provide context, and combine this into a comprehensive picture, complete with a sense of depth.

Similarly, it is my desire to give the history of colonial Korea more depth by integrating Korean and Japanese sources into a robust narrative that integrates the experience of both nations. I believe that as a liberal art, one of the duties that history is charged with is developing empathy, for which grappling over different perspectives and grasping context an important foundation. During my childhood as a Korean American, I was a constant arbitrator between my Korean-born parents and the surrounding American culture at large. It may be for this reason that I enjoy unpacking disparate points of view and providing context, and this preoccupation has shaped my life on both an academic and personal level.

Of course, in incorporating Korean and Japanese views, a grasp of both languages and their historical variants is a must. For Korean, I have completed a summer semester at Yonsei University’s Korean Language Institute and finished eighth semester Korean at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in addition to speaking everyday Korean at home. My eighth semester of Korean was independent study, and the instructor and I focused on reading Korean historical sources and writing academic essays. I have also completed eighth semester Japanese in addition to an intensive semester at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies in Yokohama and a semester of classical Japanese at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

I have also sought out opportunities to work with Korea and Japan on a personal level. My hometown, a small college town in Oregon, attracted many visiting Korean scholars and their families, and throughout high school I volunteered to tutor many of the newly arrived middle school and high school immigrants, helping them adjust to the local school system. After entering college, I became an active editor on the Korean, Japanese, and English Wikipedia pages. Since joining in 2007, I have made several contributions on topics ranging from Korean feminist activists to ancient Japanese clay figures, while mediating between Japanese and Korean editors on contentious issues like the assassination of Empress Myōngsŏng.

This interest has also shaped my volunteer activities. I spent a semester as a volunteer English teacher in Kunming, China while taking Chinese language classes at Yunnan University. The school, Kunming Grace International School, consisted largely of Korean expatriates in China, and my dorm included native speakers of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Furthermore, I received a Phi Kappa Phi Zillman Fellowship to serve as a volunteer lecturer at the Yanbian University of Science and Technology in China’s sole Korean Autonomous Prefecture this past summer. Yanbian stands at the crossroads of three nations: North Korea, China, and Russia. For someone interested in transnational arbitration, it was truly a paradise.

Thus in retrospect, my dissertation seems to have been a natural outgrowth from these experiences. I hope that the Fulbright-IIE Full Grant will allow me to carry out this research project to fruition.