

Convention and Innovation: The Lives and Cultural Legacy of the *Kisaeng* in Colonial Korea (1910-1945)*

Lee Insuk

The women known as *kisaeng* or “courtesans” played a key role as entertainers for the Korean Royal Court before 1910. The political and social situation of the colonial period (1910-1945), when Japanese culture was promoted and Western culture was also gradually introduced, influenced the traditional Korean performing arts as represented by *kisaeng*. As a consequence, the *kisaeng* can be seen as pivotal in the transition between the old and the modern in the Korean performing arts. *Kisaeng* at the Royal Court had to broaden their roles significantly from being performing artists to acting as sex workers. Due to an exaggerated emphasis on the prostitution aspect, *kisaeng* received a social stigma that made it necessary for them to hide their identities in contemporary Korea.

In this article, I examine how *kisaengs*’ lives were linked to political, economic and ideological forces. I also explore how and why *kisaeng* organized their training system and expanded their performing repertoire by combining old traditions with new cultural influences in order to meet the expectations of their customers and the Korean public. A wide range of data, including resources on the Japanese colonial policies, the *kisaeng* school system, Japanese-produced *kisaeng* postcards, gramophone recordings, and the journal *Changhan* edited by *kisaeng* themselves, enables us to understand how and where *kisaeng* inherited the traditional performing arts and incorporated new trends in culture. I argue that the *kisaeng*’s experience in the colonial period should be re-evaluated in the light of the overall process of modernization in Korea.

Keywords: *Kisaeng*, courtesans, colonialism, *kwŏnbŏn*, convention, innovation

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Insuk Lee (i.lee@auckland.ac.nz) is currently a Research Fellow in the School of Asian Studies at the University of Auckland

Introduction

The *kisaeng* 妓生 system and the performing groups made up of *kisaeng* no longer exist in contemporary Korean society. For over five hundred years, *kisaeng* played a key cultural role as professional female entertainers at the royal court of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910). Byong Won Lee points out that, despite their low social status and insignificant family background, the contribution of the *kisaeng* to Korean music and dance was considerable. It was through the *kisaeng* that the songs and dances of the court music (called *yŏak*, “female music”) were carried beyond the palace and transmitted to the general public.¹ The last generation of *kisaeng* can be defined as Korean female courtesans who were trained at *kisaeng* schools during the era of Japanese colonization (1910-1945). They were also the last generation of Koreans to be trained in *kagok* (a traditional Korean vocal genre) without notation, using traditional methods. Such traditional teaching methods have almost disappeared, as over time the *kisaeng* have died or gone into hiding.² Only a few of them are still teaching music or dance and are still respected as elderly musicians and dancers.

Any representatives of this last generation of *kisaeng* still alive in Korea today are in their late eighties and most of them are reluctant to reveal their identities for fear of being tainted by the stigma of their career. Drawing on the social and political impact on women’s psychological changes identified by feminist scholars (Jo Freeman, 1975; Lillian Faderman, 1981; Sheila Jeffrey, 1985; Celia Kitzinger, 1996),³ I will argue that this reluctance, far from being a case of individual preference, has been influenced by changes brought about by

1. Byong Won Lee, “Korea,” Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, eds., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1984), vol. 13, 201. For more information on the *kisaeng*’s role, see Byong Won Lee, “The Evolution in the Role and Status of Korean Professional Female Entertainers (*Kisaeng*),” *World of Music* 21 (1979): 75-81.

2. There is a valuable interview with the former *kisaeng* Ch’ohyang who hides her connection with *kisaeng* out of concern for her adopted son. Sŏ Chŏngbŏm, “Nŭlgŭn *kisaeng* Ch’ohyang’yi,” *Sumŏ sanŭn oet’olbagi: Chŏnt’ong sahoe ŭi hwanghon e sŏn saramdŭl* [Lonely Recluses: People in their twilight years] (Seoul: Ppuri kip’ŭn namu, 1979), 70-85.

3. Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women’s Liberations* (New York: David McKay and Company, 1975); Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Junction Books, 1981); Sheila Jeffrey, *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1985); Celia Kitzinger, “Therapy and How it Undermines the Practice of Radical Feminism,” in *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, eds. Diane Bell and Renate Klein (London: Zed Books, 1996).

social, cultural and political forces during and since the colonial period. The issues raised in the following quotation from Geraldine Moane are critical to understanding changes in the social role of the last generation of *kisaeng* during this period:

What will be kept clearly in the mind for the present is the insight that the personal is influenced and shaped by the political and social context. In order to understand the personal, it is therefore necessary to focus on the political and social context. Furthermore, if psychological patterns are shaped by social conditions, then psychological change must also involve changes in social conditions.⁴

The last generation of *kisaeng* faced dramatic political and social changes during the colonial period. At a time when Japanese culture was promoted and Western culture was also gradually being introduced, they played a pivotal role in linking old and new in the transformation of Korean culture. However, the image of the first-grade *kisaeng* during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) as elegant and intelligent was almost replaced by an image of third-grade sex workers, a stigma which affected the *kisaeng* in the 35 years of the colonial period.

In spite of their long history, the gradual disappearance of the last remaining *kisaeng*, and the existence of a wide range of valuable resources on them, few academics have taken up the challenge of introducing the *kisaeng* tradition within its social and cultural context to non-Koreans.⁵ In contrast, the culturally comparable Japanese courtesans known as *geisha* have been discussed by both Japanese, many non-Japanese scholars, and even non-scholars; culturally specific aspects of courtesanship are dealt with in, for example, *Geisha* by Liza Dalby in 1985 and *A Geisha's Journey: My Life As a Kyoto Apprentice* by Komomo in 2008; and are also the subject of a Hollywood film based on Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (book 1997, film 2005 directed by Rob Marshall). *Geisha* have always been a source of fascination among Asia specialists and

4. Geraldine Moane, *Gender and Colonialism* (London: University of Berkeley Press Ltd, 2003), 4.

5. Jennifer J. Jung-Kim explored *kisaeng* as one of the New Women together with *haenyŏ* (women divers), officers and factory workers, in her PhD dissertation "Gender & Modernity in Colonial Korea" (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 2006). Joshua D. Pilzer examined the role of South Korea's modern sex-entertainment industry in the *kisaeng*'s transformation in his article, "The Twentieth-Century 'Disappearance' of the Gisaeng during the Rise of Korea's Modern Sex-and-Entertainment Industry," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, eds., Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 295-311.

ethnomusicologists.⁶

This article focuses on the experiences and legacy of the final generation of *kisaeng* during the Japanese colonial period, including their systematic training system, teaching methods, social involvement, and crafts, all of which were strongly influenced by political, economic and ideological forces. It will show how *kisaeng* perpetuated their profession in Korean society after the collapse of the Chosŏn dynasty, focusing on their social and cultural activities as expressed through their work. In addition, I will look at how *kisaeng* as female courtesans preserved their traditional performing arts and adapted to new cultural trends. These achievements will be considered using a wide range of data including resources on the *kisaeng* school system, Japanese-produced *kisaeng* postcards, the journal *Changhan* (長恨, Everlasting Regrets) edited by the *kisaeng* themselves, and gramophone recordings. This paper will not only introduce the last generation of *kisaeng* and highlight their social and cultural significance beyond the popular view of them as sex workers; it will also consider the momentous shifts that occurred in Korean culture and values during the colonial period as they relate to *kisaeng*.

Origin of the *Kisaeng*

The *kisaeng* 妓生 (妓 = talented, 生 = student) were also called *yŏak* 女樂 (female musicians), *kinyŏ* 妓女 (talented women), *yegi* 藝妓 (talented performers) or *kwan'gi* 官妓 (official talents) according to the era and place in which they lived. The term *kisaeng* has been commonly used in contemporary Korea since the Japanese colonial period. Their origins are obscure; a casual reference in the *Koryŏsa* (History of Koryŏ) describes them as the descendants of the members of a migrant group, the Willow and Water People (Yangsuch'ŏk), whom the first ruler of the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392) had difficulty controlling and consequently designated as male and female slaves, sending them to various government offices established throughout the provinces.⁷

Although the *kisaeng* system was originally developed during the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392), it was strengthened during the Chosŏn dynasty, and had

6. Kelly M. Foreman, *The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2008).

7 Kathleen McCarthy, "Kisaeng and Poetry in the Koryŏ Period," *Korean Culture* 15:2 (1994), 6. For more information on *kisaeng* in the Koryŏ Period, see Kathleen McCarthy, "Kisaeng in the Koryŏ Period" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1991).

strong links to the official ideology of the Chosŏn dynasty, Confucianism. *Yangban* (male literati) viewed Confucianism, which had developed in China over centuries, as a universal system of truth available to all civilized people regardless of geography, and they often claimed to be more faithful transmitters of Confucian orthodoxy than were the Chinese themselves. After the fall of the Ming dynasty to the Manchus in 1644, Korean scholars considered themselves the sole guardians of Confucian civilization.⁸

In Confucian ideology, music is viewed as an important vehicle for cultivating human nature and controlling the people. In order to carry out Confucian ritual music and the Royal Ancestor's Shrine music, the first king of the Chosŏn dynasty, King T'aejo (r. 1392-1398), established an *aak* 雅樂 (elegant music) department and King Sŏngjong (r. 1469-1494) enhanced the court Music Department, Chang'ag'wŏn 掌樂院. To allow the Department to properly carry out royal court music and rituals, over 1141 performers were recruited, including 819 male accompanists, 10 boy dancers and 160 female performers.⁹

Female performers called *yŏak* had to be trained systematically in the palace to perform at the semi-annual sacrifice to Confucius, formal banquets, royal marriages, and welcoming ceremonies for foreign envoys. Another reason why the *kisaeng* system lasted for over five hundred years throughout the Chosŏn dynasty has been explained by Kim Yŏngchung as follows:

Since the early Yi dynasty [Chosŏn dynasty] there were demands for the abolition of the *kisaeng* system because it conflicted with Confucian ethics, but none had force enough to implement an effective opposition. This was because the *kisaeng* had direct influence on the conduct of the officials themselves. Also, it was often argued, if *kisaeng* were abolished government officials might steal the wives of commoners.¹⁰

Under the Confucian social ethos of Chosŏn society, the roles of women in the upper and middle classes were largely confined to the domestic sphere. Women received only an informal education at home, and were required to observe the Confucian virtues of diligence, filial piety and chastity. It was not possible for the *yangban* to enjoy music with their wives or other non-professionals, who

8. JaHyun Kim Haboush and Joan R. Piggott eds., *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea and Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 6.

9. Song Chiwŏn, *Chang'ag'wŏn, uju ū sŏryul ūl tamda* [Chang'ag'wŏn, performing universal music] (Seoul: Ch'usub, 2010), 32.

10. Kim Yŏngchung, ed. *Women of Korea: A History from Ancient Times to 1945* (Seoul: Ehwa Womans University, 1976), 139.

were excluded from such occasions. Apart from male musicians and boy dancers, *kisaeng* were the only female group to perform in a number of formal court ceremonies and at the *yangban*'s private functions. For the most part, except for national festivals, *kisaeng* were required to entertain male literati at parties with traditional music and dance performances. Under these social circumstances, it was inevitable that the *kisaeng* system would be strengthened by Chosŏn dynasty officials.

By the end of the Chosŏn dynasty there were three different and strictly classified grades of *kisaeng*. The grade of *kisaeng* and their performing repertoire also varied according to the social level of their guests. The highest grade of *kisaeng* were called the *ilp'ae* 一牌 or "Grade 1," a government position especially created to control the *kisaeng* group, and which also included female doctors (*ügi* 醫妓) who treated women in the palace. The *ilp'ae* were selected from lower class girls aged from six to ten. They were expected to learn music, dance, and literature in order to perform court music and to entertain at upper class functions. In order to achieve a higher level of performance, *kisaeng* lived together and trained every day in the court-supported institution of the *Kyobangwŏn* 教方院 or "Teaching College."¹¹ They were also allowed to entertain private guests in their home. The association of higher-class *kisaeng* with entertainment during the Chosŏn dynasty did not necessarily mean these women were always subservient to men. Many *kisaeng* had close friendships with men and enjoyed a level of freedom and autonomy that was denied most of the women of that period.¹² An even higher level of *kisaeng*, commonly called the *yegi*, were accomplished composers and singers of *kagok* (Korean classical song). During parties, *yangban* often enjoyed singing *kagok* together with these *kisaeng*. *Kagok* songs and the aristocratic song poems (*sijo*) that comprised their lyrics were the most popular media of expression of thought for both the *yangban* and the *kisaeng*.¹³

The second grade of *kisaeng*, *ip'ae* 二牌 or "Grade 2," were concubines who had retired at the age of thirty from the highest grade, and who acted as part-time prostitutes and entertained at private parties with their artistic skills. The third grade, *samp'ae* 三牌 or "Grade 3," served ordinary men by singing popular songs, and were forbidden to perform the regular songs and dances of

11. Cho Kyuik, *Kagok ch'angsaü kungmunhakchök ponjil* [The Nature of *kagok* in Korean literature] (Seoul: Chimmundang, 1994), 359.

12. Pak Minyŏng, *Han'guk hansi wa yŏsŏng insik ü kudo* [Korean poetry in Classical Chinese and the epistemological frame for femininity] (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2003), 139-144.

13. Ibid., 232.

the first-grade *kisaeng*.¹⁴ Their repertoire consisted mainly of *chapka* (miscellaneous songs) and *sijo*; they also practiced prostitution.¹⁵ Regardless of the grade of *kisaeng*, most *kisaeng* were involved in “entertaining men” with song, dance or sexually explicit behavior. In both formal and informal functions and parties, the involvement of *kisaeng* was essential, and *kisaeng* appear in almost all contemporary paintings of functions of the Chosŏn period.

With the opening of Chosŏn to the outside world in the nineteenth century, the strictly Confucian Chosŏn society was forced to confront the destruction of the traditional order of affairs. As summed up by Pilzer:

Chosŏn emerged from several hundred years of isolation and entered a new era of rapid societal change and economic development as Japan forced Chosŏn to sign the unequal Treaty of Kanghwa in 1876. The traditional middle classes (*chungin* and regional bureaucrats) and the growing merchant class gained power. And as the clientele of the private *samp'ae* entertainers prospered, so did the institution of the private high-class female entertainer. At the same time, as the court was gradually weakened by foreign imperial encroachment, the numbers of court *kisaeng* dwindled.¹⁶

The official courtesans, the *kwan'gi* 官妓, were abolished in 1907 by the incoming Japanese colonial power. Thereafter, the highest *kisaeng* could no longer live at the *Kyobangwŏn* in the palace or governmental offices and the traditional hierarchy of the *kisaeng* system collapsed.

Relocation of *Kisaeng* Activities during the Colonial Period

As part of the increasing Japanese control over the country, in 1908 the Japanese police (Kyongsich'ŏng 警視廳) promulgated the “*Kisaeng* Regulation Order” (*Kisaeng* Tansongnyŏng 妓生團束令). Under this regulation, although *kisaeng* were prohibited from working as prostitutes, all *kisaeng* were required to undergo health examinations to check for sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁷ This fact suggests that the Japanese police did not recognize the traditional hierarchy of *kisaeng*, but rather treated *kisaeng* and *ch'anggi* 娼妓, *chakpu* 酌婦

14. Kim Yŏngchung, ed. *Women of Korea: A History from Ancient Times to 1945*, 139-140.

15. Joshua D. Pilzer, “The Twentieth-Century ‘Disappearance’ of the Gisaeng,” 297.

16. *Ibid.*, 297.

17. Yi Kŏngmin, *Kisaeng ūn ōttŏk'e mandŭrŏjŏnmŭn'ga* [How did *kisaeng* come into being?] (Seoul: Archive Books, 2005), 63-64.

or “prostitutes” all equally as sex workers, rather than as skilled female professional entertainers. The Order also required all *kisaeng*, *ch’anggi* and *chakpu* to register with the Japanese police and be affiliated with an authorized *kisaeng chohap* 組合 or ‘guild.’¹⁸ According to Yi Kōngmin, the aim of the *Kisaeng Regulation Order* was to manage the *kisaeng* through a *kisaeng* licence (*In’gajŭng* 認可證) issued by the Japanese police and collect tax revenues more effectively from them.¹⁹

In 1910, a male teacher of the traditional Korean classical vocal form of *kagok*, Ha Kyuil, established a private *kisaeng* institution, the Chōngak Chōnsūpso or “Institute for Korean Classical Music” to look after and train talented first-grade *kisaeng*. This establishment can be considered as the origin of the system of *kisaeng* schools, which trained female entertainers solely for performing traditional music and dance. Another aim for setting up the school was to protect *kisaeng* aged from 13 to 23 from being sold off to rich men, which was quite a common practice during this period.²⁰ In 1912, an article in the *Maeil Shinbo* introduced the *kisaeng*’s fervent efforts to learn various kinds of performing arts.²¹ In 1914, the Japanese Governor-General of Korea (Chosŏn Ch’ongdokpu 朝鮮總督府) issued an order that made the *chohap* guilds change their names to *kwōnbōn* (Japanese: *kenban* 券番). The term originated from the Japanese *geisha* system’s management and accounting office, so Ha Kyuil’s Chōngak Chōnsūpso had to change its name to Taejōng Kwōnbōn or “Taejōng Kisaeng School” and then in 1925 to Chosŏn Kwōnbōn.²²

At the time Ha Kyuil changed the school’s title to *kwōnbōn*, it usually offered training in classical songs (*kagok* and *sijo*), traditional instruments (*kōmun’go*, *kayagūm* and *yanggūm*) and dance. Ha Kyuil also taught his students the traditional classical court dance or *ch’unaengjōn*, which had first been performed in front of King Sunjong of the Chosŏn dynasty. *Ch’unaengjōn* is not an active dance and its extremely slow, grave movements are intended to bring about a peaceful and tranquil mood.²³ Learning such a formal dance and

18. Jennifer J. Jung-Kim “Gender & modernity in Colonial Korea,” 212.

19. Yi Kōngmin, *Kisaengŭn ōttōk’e mandŭrōjōnnŭn’ga*, 63.

20. Hwang Byungki [Hwang Pyōnggi], “Ha Kyu-il *kagok* ūi yōksajōk ūiŭi,” [The Historical Significance of Ha Kyu-il’s *kagok*] *The Proceedings of the Symposium of the Celebration of Kīmha Ha Kyu-il as the Honorable Person of the Month* (Seoul: Ehwa Womans University), 2000.

21. Kim Yōnghŭi, *Kaehwagi taejung yesul ūi kkot, kisaeng* [The flower of the enlightenment period, *kisaeng*] (Seoul: Minsogwōn, 2006), 40.

22. Sin Hyōngyu, *Kkot ūl chapko* [Holding flowers] (Seoul: Kyōngdōk, 2005), 47-48.

23. Kim Chinyang, *Sōn’ga Ha Kyuil Sōnsaeng yakchōn* [Memories of the *kagok* singer Sōn’ga



Figure 1. Child *kisaeng* in *kwŏnbŏn*.²⁴

classical songs enhanced their reputation as the highest *kisaeng*, “*yŏgi*,” even though the hierarchy system had already collapsed by this time.

During the 1910s, more than sixteen *kwŏnbŏn* were established across the nation in order for *kisaeng* to receive training and then go on to work as courtesans. [Figure 1] According to the *Chosŏn miin pogam* or “Chosŏn Pictorial of Beauties,” in 1917 sixteen *kwŏnbŏn* were run and controlled by the Japanese police, with girls aged from eight to twenty being eligible to attend. Approximately 65% of the girls there were aged between sixteen and twenty. In 1918, girls in their late twenties were very rare.²⁵ This suggests that the *kisaeng*’s working period was very short, no more than ten years.

In order to achieve financial independence most *kisaeng*, even while being linked with *kwŏnbŏn*, worked in the evenings at party houses called *yorijip*. The *yorijip* were deluxe entertainment complexes serving cuisine, drinks and performances for colonial officers, Japanese tourists, rich Koreans and even independence fighters. The first *yorijip*, called Myŏngwŏlgwan, was set up in

Ha Kyu-il] (Seoul: Yeŏm, 2003), 77-78.

24. Shin Hyungyu, professor at Chung-Ang University, has generously allowed the author to use his important collection of digital images of postcards for this study.

25. Song Bangsong, “Kyŏnggi Pangsongguk e ch’ulyŏnhan yŏgidŭl ŭi kongyŏn hwaldong,” [Kisaeng’s performance record at the Kyŏngsŏng Radio Broadcasting station] *Sŏng Kyŏngnin sŏnsaeng kusun kinyŏm kugakhak non’go* [Festschrift for Sŏng Kyŏngnin] (Seoul: Ŭnha, 2000), 94-96.



Figure 2. *Kisaeng* and Japanese Police in the 1920s.

Seoul in 1909. It had many private rooms and a large stage for performances. After the collapse of the *kisaeng* system, many former first grade *kisaeng* came to Myŏngwŏlgwan to work, so that it became the most famous high society meeting place of the colonial period. One of the most famous *kisaeng*, Yi Nanhyang, started performing at Myŏngwŏlgwan at the age of 13. She recalled her performing experience including participating in the royal banquet (Chinyŏn 進宴) in front of Emperor Sunjong (r. 1907-1910) and at Myŏngwŏlgwan through her newspaper article series in 1970-1971.²⁶

There were several *yorijip* during the 1910s for which performers would be dispatched from the *kwŏnbŏn*. If a customer requested a *kisaeng*, a *yorijip* would contact a *kwŏnbŏn*, and the *kisaeng* would be dispatched in a rickshaw sent by the restaurant. Travelling by rickshaw was part of the *kisaeng* image, but more importantly, the restaurant was able to pass on the cost of the rickshaw to the customer. About 15% each was deducted from the *kisaeng*'s fees for her *kwŏnbŏn* and for the *yorijip*.²⁷ Such business transactions and the *kisaeng* themselves were under surveillance by the Japanese police and *kisaeng* were officially banned from doing prostitution. In order to run their business smoothly *kwŏnbŏn* and *kisaeng* had to offer the police bribes.²⁸ A photo

26. Yi Nanhyang, "Myŏngwŏlgwan," Memorable Stories no. 41-60. The *Chung'ang Ilbo* newspaper, December 25, 1970-January 21, 1971.

27. Jennifer J. Jung-Kim, "Gender & Modernity in Colonial Korea," 213.

28. Minato Kawamura, trans. Yu Chaesun, *Malhanŭn kkot: Kisaeng* [*Kisaeng: Speaking flowers*]

featuring two young *kisaeng* and a Japanese police officer provides some evidence of the close relationship between the two professions in this period. [Figure 2]

In 1920, there were six *kwōnbōn* located in Hansōng (Seoul), with over 80% of *kisaeng* (470 out of 588) belonging to one of these *kwōnbōn*.²⁹ Of these, the Chosōn Kwōnbōn and Hansōng Kwōnbōn were more active than the others, because most members of these *kwōnbōn* had already been well-trained professional *kisaeng* in the palace and were able to carry on their profession after the breakdown of the court system.

Shifting from Convention to Innovation

As Japanese colonial power became entrenched in Korean society, assimilation to Japanese norms occurred throughout Korea. Since the Special Order for Koreans (Chosōnmin saryōng 朝鮮民事令) No. 7 was promulgated in 1912, the assimilation policies were increasingly reinforced. For example, in 1936 Special Order No 19 was launched in Korea, and legislation was passed to compel Koreans to learn and speak Japanese instead of Korean, and to adopt Japanese names at school. From 1937, increased airtime for Japanese-language broadcasting decreased the time available for Korean-language programs (which ceased all together in 1944) and suspended programming that promoted Korean culture.³⁰ The *kisaeng* schools were directly influenced by this order.

The former highest grade *kisaeng* were no longer restricted solely to the classical repertoires of music and dance that had been their mainstay during the Chosōn dynasty. They were, in fact, forced to broaden their repertoire to meet their clients' and audiences' expectations. In response to these pressures, *kisaeng* schools expanded their repertoire to include folk genres such as *p'ansori* (operatic folk songs), *chapka*, solo instrumental music for the popular twelve-stringed zither *kagagūm sanjo*, and even Japanese music. Among the *kisaeng* schools in Seoul, the Hansōng Kwōnbōn (185 students) and Taejōng Kwōnbōn (181 students) were the most famous, and concentrated on educating

(Seoul: Sodam, 2002), 186-187.

29. Yi Chinwōn, "The interpretation of Chosōn miin pogam," *Chosōn miin pogam* (Seoul: Minsogwōn, 2007), 15.

30. Mark E. Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea 1910-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 157.



Figure 3. Performance of Japanese songs with *samisen* at the P'yŏngyang Kwŏnbŏn.

the highest grade *ilp'ae kisaeng*.³¹ In 1918, the Hansŏng Kwŏnbŏn offered an unusually diversified curriculum of ten different types of vocal genres, including folk songs. At the P'yŏngyang Kwŏnbŏn, *kisaeng* also had to learn Japanese and to play Japanese instruments (*samisen* and *koto*) in order to serve their customers, who were mostly Japanese or Koreans working for the colonial government. The postcard reproduced here [Figure 3] shows *kisaeng* performing the *samisen*, a Japanese three-stringed musical instrument, as one of their school subjects.

The new *kisaeng* training system at the *kwŏnbŏn* schools clearly illustrates how quickly *kisaeng* assimilated new cultural developments whilst continuing to use traditional teaching methods. The students at such schools had to complete a three-year course and pass the final exam in order to gain their diploma. In order to transform young girls into professional courtesans within a very limited time, both a high level of musicality on the part of the teachers and excellent teaching methods were crucial, aspects also critically important in the traditional *kisaeng* training house, the *Kyobang*, during the Chosŏn dynasty. The students were required to meet a strict standard of aural and oral musicality and concentration in order to achieve the requisite high level of performance. Teachers expected students to listen carefully and follow the teacher's eyes, mouth and hand movements while singing. Students then copied the teacher's singing as closely as possible. Such a teaching style is known as *kujŏn simsu* 口傳心修, literally, "transmitted through the mouth, cultivated by the mind."

31. Song Bangsong, "Kyŏnggi Pangsongguk e ch'ulyŏnhan yŏgidŭl ŭi kongyŏn hwalldong," 94-96.

The teaching style and rules at the *kwŏnbŏn* schools were quite strict. A *kwŏnbŏn kisaeng* in the 1920s, Kim Chinhyang, provides one example of the school's severity: "When a student did not concentrate in class, the lowest and most common punishment was for a few stitches to be sewn on her wrist with a needle."³² This particularly painful method of punishment has become a symbol of *kisaeng* training, and so was shown in the opening scene of the contemporary performance, *Kisaeng Becomes You* in 2009.³³ Students who showed poor attendance and manners or were two months behind on tuition fees (2 yen per month) were expelled.³⁴ Such strict punishments continued under the *kwŏnbŏn* system and they had their origins in the high level of professionalism required to serve the king or government officials during national feasts. *Kisaeng* did not learn music and dance as hobbies or for cultivating their minds, but rather to provide professional services.

At the P'yŏngyang Kwŏnbŏn, the timetable for the school [Table 1] shows that *kisaeng* took eleven subjects in total. In terms of its musical content, four different musical subjects were taught: *kagok*, Japanese songs, Korean folk songs, and musical skills. According to this timetable, the curriculum was focused on training the first grade *kisaeng*, offering *kagok* and calligraphy

Table 1. Timetable of the P'yŏngyang Kwŏnbŏn in the 1920s³⁵

Mon.	Japanese	Calligraphy	<i>Kagok</i>	Japanese Songs	Korean Folk Songs	Singing practice
Tues.	Japanese	Calligraphy	<i>Kagok</i>	Japanese Songs	Attitudes	Music
Wed	Composition	Calligraphy	<i>Kagok</i>	Japanese Songs	Korean Folk Songs	Singing practice
Thurs.	Painting	Calligraphy	<i>Kagok</i>	Japanese Songs	Korean Folk Songs	Attitudes & Manners
Fri	Poetry	Calligraphy	<i>Kagok</i>	Japanese Songs	Korean Folk Songs	Singing practice
Sat	Poetry	Calligraphy	<i>Kagok</i>	Painting		

32. Ibid., 47.

33. *Kisaeng Becomes You*, produced by video artists Morris Duncan and Kim Yunjin in New York and Seoul in 2009.

34. Minato Kawamura, *Malhanŭn kkot kisaeng*, 194.

35. Ibid., 197.

every day. This reveals how these *kisaeng* schools tried to preserve traditional classical music by treating *kagok* as the most essential subject in their training, equal in importance to calligraphy in the overall curriculum. However, research has not yet been done to determine whether every *kisaeng* school offered a curriculum organized similarly to that shown above.

In these schools, training in traditional Korean music included dance and at least two or three musical instruments (the *kōmun'go* six-stringed plucked zither, the *yanggŭm* brass-stringed dulcimer and the *kayagŭm* twelve-stringed plucked zither), as well as folk songs. For example, prominent *kagok* singer Yi Chuhwan (1909-1972) was proficient not only at playing the *p'iri* (double reed oboe) and singing *kagok*, but also at performing Buddhist dances called *sŏngmu*.³⁶ *Kagok* singers, even though their major focus was on *kagok*, also had to learn traditional Korean instruments and dance.³⁷

The reasons for this broad training are clear. Firstly, traditional Korean music was originally either for ensembles or orchestral groups rather than for solo performances. Solo instrumental performance or *sanjo* developed only in the late nineteenth century. To produce a good ensemble performance, it was essential for all players to have knowledge of the techniques used by other instruments in the ensemble. For example, in the *kagok* ensemble, a singer performed both the role of singer and conductor, and consequently, *kagok* singers needed considerable knowledge of all the accompanying instruments. Secondly, Korean traditional classic dance assisted the understanding of *sigimsae* (musical ornamentation) which is one of the most distinctive characteristics of traditional Korean instrumental and vocal music.

Among classical dance genres, the court dance, *Ch'unaengjŏn*, was especially popular traditionally, and also seemingly with the clients of the *kisaeng* under Japanese colonial rule. Many postcards produced by the Japanese Tourism Department in the 1920s shows *kisaeng* dressed in *Ch'unaengjŏn* costume. This traditional classical dance features very limited movements expressing very slow curving lines in a tranquil mood, movements that are also exaggerated by the dancer's long sleeves. [Figure 4]

A prominent scholar of *kisaeng* dances, Kim Yŏnghŭi, has identified the repertoire and performing order of the theatrical court dance in contemporary

36. Cho Soonja [Cho Sunja], "Han'guk hyōndaesa ūi ūmakka yŏlchŏn (III)," [Biographies of Korean contemporary musicians, 3rd installment] *Han'guk ūmaksa hakpo* 6, no. 2 (1989): 60-68.

37. Information provided by Cho Soonja, a Human Cultural Asset for *kagok*, during a personal *kagok* lesson. February, 1999.



Figure 4. Kwŏnbŏn *kisaeng* dressed in *Ch'unaengiŏn* dance costume.

Korea as formed by *kisaeng* from Tadong Chohap and Kwanggyo Chohap in the 1910s. These chohap *kisaeng* also performed 33 different types of court dance for royal festivities in 1915 and 1917.³⁸

The *Kisaeng* as Cultural Innovators

1. Release of Gramophone Recordings

From 1907, *kisaeng* began to release vocal music recordings through several gramophone record companies. The following table explains the details of the gramophone recordings until the launch of microphone recording in 1928.

According to the Korean Traditional Music Disc Museum, 685 gramophone recordings are preserved today.³⁹ However, there are only a few gramophone recordings left from the early 1920s. Even though many were made and sold, they were made of very fragile “shellac” material. In addition, recordings of

38. Kim Yŏnghŭi, “*Kisaeng yŏpsŏ sok ŭi Han’guk kŭndae ch’um*” [Korean modern dance in *kisaeng* postcards], *Yŏpsŏ sok ŭi kisaeng ilgi* [Understanding of *kisaeng* in postcards] (Seoul: Minsogwŏn, 2006), 185.

39. “Yusŏnggi ŭmban,” <http://www.hearkorea.com>. (accessed 16 February 2007).

Table 2. Gramophone producers and performers until the launch of microphone recording in 1928⁴⁰

Company	Record label	Year of Launch	<i>Kisaeng</i> Singers	Repertoire
American Columbia	None	1907	Ch'oe Hongdo	<i>Chapka: Sōdo sori</i> (miscellaneous songs of the north-west provinces)
American Victor	None	1908	Kim Hyesŏn, Pak Yihwa, Pyŏdo, Yŏm Kyewŏl, Ch'ae Ok and Hyang Sŏn	
Japanese Gramophone Company 日本蓄音機商會	Royal Record Nipponophone	1911	Kim Hongdo	<i>Chapka: Sōdo sori</i>
	Nipponophone	1913	Ch'oe Yŏnok and Cho Moran	Classic; <i>kagok</i> , <i>kasa</i> and <i>sijo</i> Korean Folk songs
	Nipponophone	1920	Kim Yŏnyŏn, Park Ch'aesŏn, Sin Ongnan, Sin Ongyŏn, Yun Usŏn, Yi Yusaek, Cho Tŏkhyang and Han Puyong	Japanese and Korean popular songs
	Ilch'uk Chosŏn Sorip'an	1925	Total 21 <i>kisaeng</i> including Yi Nanhyang, Kang Soch'un, Kwŏn Kŭmju, Kil Chinhong, Kim Kyewŏl, Kim Kŭmhwa, Kim Sanwŏl, Kim Ch'uwŏl	Classic; <i>kagok</i> , <i>kasa</i> and <i>sijo</i> Folk: Folk songs, <i>p'ansori</i> , <i>chapka</i> and <i>tan'ga</i> (short songs)
Japanese Gramophone Ltd. 日本蓄音機株式會社	Chebip'yo Choson Record	1925	Total 11 <i>kisaeng</i> including Kang Soch'un, Pak Nokchu	Classic; <i>kagok</i> , <i>kasa</i> , <i>sijo</i> and <i>samhyŏnyukkak</i> (instrumental ensemble music) Folk: folk songs, <i>p'ansori</i> , <i>chapka</i> and <i>tan'ga</i>
Haptong Gramophone Ltd. 合東蓄音機株式會社	Pihaenggip'yo	1926	An Kŭmhyang, Kim Wolsŏn, Yi Nanhyang and Pae Unsŏn	<i>Tan'ga</i> and Japanese songs

classical songs were extremely limited in the 1930s, while the number of *kisaeng* singers recording significantly increased when they expanded their repertoire from traditional folk genres to newly-composed Korean popular songs (*yuhaengga*), and even Japanese and Western popular songs. The recording companies also promoted their records using publicists who assisted performers and the companies through positive reports in the Tong-a Daily and the Maeil Shinbo to attract new audiences.

2. Performances at Kyōngsōng Radio Broadcasting

The Japanese used radio broadcasting as an assimilation tool. The first Korean broadcast network, Kyōngsōng Radio Broadcasting, was established in 1927 in order to contribute to the Japanese assimilation process. Encouraged by the Ministry of Communication, this medium contributed to Korea's cultural, educational, and entertainment forums. While the broadcast schedule included Japanese music, it also set aside spots for lectures on ethics, agriculture improvement, and women's education.⁴¹

The role of *kisaeng* as singers for radio programs was critically important. Classical and folk songs and pop music performed by *kisaeng* were regularly aired on the radio during the Japanese colonial period. According to Song Bangsong, *kisaengs'* performances on radio contributed to the increasing popularity of Korean traditional music, whereas classical songs, including *kagok* and instrumental musical genres, were insignificant in radio programs in the 1920s.⁴² The number of students in the classical vocal genres (*kagok*, *kasa* and *sijo*) at schools then was higher than that for folk songs and *chapka*.⁴³ However, in the programs of Kyōngsōng Radio Broadcasting, *chapka* was the most popular genre while the classical *kagok* were rarely aired. This fact reflects the low demand for classical songs from audiences during Japanese

40. The table has been adapted from the following two references: Kwōn Tuhŭi, "Chōn'gi nogŭm ijōn ūi kisaeng kwa ūmban sanōp" [*Kisaeng* and the recording industry until the launch of microphone recording in Korea], *Han'guk ūmbanhak* 10 (2000): 593-607; Kwōn Tuhŭi, *Han'guk kŭndae ūmaksa* [Korean musical history during the 19th and 20th centuries] (Seoul: Minsogwōn, 2005), 120-126.

41. Michael Robinson, "Broadcasting, Cultural Hegemony, and Colonial Modernity in Korea, 1924-1945," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, eds. Shin Gi-Wook and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 52-69.

42. Song Bangsong, "Kyōnggi Pangsongguk e ch'ulyōnhan yōgidŭl ūi kongyōn hwalldong," 104-105.

43. *Ibid.*, 98.

colonization, in spite of the *kisaeng*s' interest in *kagok*. *Chapka* and folk songs could more easily attract the Korean public rather than classical songs in terms of tempo, melody, texts and performing duration. For example, *Isudaeyöp* (the first piece of one suite of *kagok*) takes 12 minutes to sing and its tempo is extremely slow (one beat per 3 seconds). Such pieces may well have found it difficult to compete against faster paced popular songs.

The repertoire of *kisaeng* performers on the radio varied: twenty-seven genres from vocal music to instrumental music were aired. The classical *kagok* was performed only four times over 320 broadcasts. This fact suggests that the popularity of *kagok* in the 1920s may have been very low. On the other hand, vocal folk music such as *sōdo chapka*, miscellaneous songs of the northwest provinces (30.9%), and *namdo chapka*, miscellaneous songs of the southern provinces (18.75%), were more popular among the public. It is clear that the radio's use of traditional performers stimulated a revival of traditional music genres. However, there were objections to radio's use of *kisaeng* entertainers from the *kisaeng* schools in P'yōngyang as well as disagreements over which folk songs were "representative" of certain regions.⁴⁴

Another important point to note is that *kisaeng* rarely performed instrumental music. Song Bangsong points out that learning instrumental music required more time than vocal music. Therefore, the short period of *kisaeng* training during the period of Japanese colonization made the vocal folk genres, excluding *kagok*, more popular, leaving the instrumental and classical genres in a weaker position.

Korean radio had a catalytic effect on the creation and expansion of the important popular cultural medium of song. This music was "consumed" in records and radio broadcasts, but it also became the staple of restaurant, wine shop, and home singing—a continuation of earlier and more "participatory" forms of popular culture. On the other hand, Korean intellectuals worried that the "vulgar" pop idiom was replacing an appreciation for traditional music.⁴⁵ However, some *kisaeng* gained great popularity with their popular song (*yuhaengga*): amongst others, Wang Subok (1917-2003), Sōnu Ilsōn (1918-1990), and Sin Ilsōn (1907-1990) achieved great popularity with audiences.⁴⁶

44. Michael Robinson, "Broadcasting, Cultural Hegemony, and Colonial Modernity in Korea, 1924-1945," 55.

45. Ibid., 65-67.

46. For a more detailed discussion, see Sin Hyōn'gyu, *Kkoch'il chapko*, 120-145, and Sin Hyōng, *Kisaeng iyagi* [Stories of *kisaeng*] (Seoul: Sallim, 2007), 32-36.



Figure 5. *Kisaeng*s' Revue dance at the P'yŏngyang Kwŏnbŏn in the 1930s.

3. Performing Revue Dance and Western Music

The above postcard [Figure 5] shows eleven *kisaeng* performing a revue dance on stage in the 1930s.⁴⁷ The dance became popular in the 1910s and the 1920s in Japan and other countries, so it was introduced to Korea by the Japanese Chŏnsŏng Circus Club in Korea in 1913. After that it was performed by *kwŏnbŏn kisaeng* as a popular theatrical entertainment in concerts or expos.⁴⁸ Such performances seemed to be one of the most common visual spectacles for men in the 1920s. In addition, the frank display of the female body was strong enough to attract male audiences. Their dancing costumes and the new and very expressive performing styles for women would be striking for the Koreans in that they fail to cover their shoulders or legs compared with their traditional Korean dancing costume. The ordinary and dancing costume in those days, *hanbok*, also covered almost the entire women's body. The following postcard shows *kisaeng*'s other pioneering work. These were women introducing Western performance with other male performers.

The above postcard [Figure 6] shows males and females combining to perform Western chamber music, with three *kisaeng* accompanying one female singer on piano, violin and accordion. In the 1910s, individual *kisaeng* were

47. See the Seoul Museum of History's exhibition catalogue, *Kŭndae taejung yesŭl—Sori wa yŏngsang* [Popular art of the modern age: sounds and images] (Seoul: Seoul yŏksa pangmulgwan, 2003), 68.

48. Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe ed. *Ot ch'arim kwa ch'ijang ŭi pyŏnch'ŏn* [The history of Korean costumes and accessories] (Seoul: Tusan Tonga, 2006).



Figure 6. Western music performance by *kisaeng* with a male ensemble group.

even trained in Western music. In 1916, the *kisaeng* Kim Myongok from the Tadong *kisaeng* school left for Japan to learn the piano, as announced in the *Maeil Daily* on October 27.

4. The *Kisaeng Journal Changhan*

In 1927, the pent-up energy, passion and deep sorrow found an outlet in a unique journal, *Changhan* 長恨 (literally “eternal bitterness” but also a literary Chinese term meaning “everlasting regret”), written and published by *kisaeng* themselves, but not discovered until 2005. Unfortunately only two volumes of the journal have yet been found: the first volume of about 120 pages was published on the 10th of January, 1927, and the second one on the 12th of February in 1927. Since the journals were unearthed in 2005, Korean scholars have started to write about *kisaeng*’s lives based on *Changhan* and old newspaper articles. The price of each journal was 40 *chŏn* including postage. The address of the publisher is the Kugilgwan, one of the most famous *kisaeng* party houses in Seoul.

The theme of the first journal is “Friends! Be vigilant against social prejudice.” The authors were not passive and reticent like upper class women, but they seemed independent and volatile, unlikely to back down in a dispute or give up when confronted by barriers. The main writings refer to the social

discrimination towards them and their strong desire to be treated equally as human beings who had been oppressed and whose rights had been denied by both Koreans and Japanese. The aim of the journal is clearly conveyed in the essay written by the *kisaeng* Pak Nokchu in the inaugural volume in 1927:

We *kisaeng* need to unify systematically in order to survive in this society, which is the main reason why we eventually published *Changhan*. Now we can raise our voices and thoughts to people who ignore us through this journal, which has become our “mouthpiece.” Our social status is extremely miserable and marginalized. There is no social welfare system for us at all in our society. This means that we have not been treated equally with other ordinary people as human beings, and are always looked down on as slaves. However, we should not endure this any more. [...] We are human beings and we also have tears, blood, and senses [...]. How meaningful the launch of this journal, *Changhan*, is! It would lead us to live as human beings. I am really proud of the launch of this journal and I hope we can put infinite effort into it.⁴⁹

Through *Changhan*, *kisaeng* attempted to disseminate their views and to express their grievances. The journal contains thirty-five prose articles, other literary works (a film review and a book review written by *kisaeng*), and three essays by foreign clients (a Japanese, a Chinese and a Westerner). The three articles written by foreign clients share common opinions. They seemed enamoured of the *kisaeng*, but recommended that they revert to their traditional elegant *kisaeng* roots. The articles written by *kisaeng* themselves cover a wide range of subjects: their professional experience as miserable courtesans; their ambiguous identity; the social prejudice directed towards them, and issues related to their self-respect. The short stories included here are also very moving, reflecting the substantial literary abilities of many *kisaeng*. If the fact that the *kisaeng* were the best-educated, best-dressed and most elite female group in the country is considered, then their production of a journal is not so surprising.

As members of a modernizing society, *kisaeng* also participated in social, economic, and political activism. *Kisaeng* in Hyeju participated in the 1907 movement to repay the national debt, and expressed their patriotism and social activism by supporting the independence activists.⁵⁰ In addition, thirty-three *kisaeng* aged 15 to 23 in Suwŏn participated in the Korean Independence

49. Pak Nokchu, “About The journal *Changhan*,” *Kindae kisaeng ū munhwa wa yesŭl* [Arts and Culture of Modern *Kisaeng* 1] (Seoul: Pogosa, 2008), 92.

50. Yi Nanhyang, “Myŏngwŏlgwan,” *Memorable Stories* no. 45, 56, 57, & 58. The *Chung’ang Ilbo* newspaper, December 30, 1970 & January 15-18, 1971.

Movement in 1919 and the *kisaeng* Kim Hyanghwa (1897-?) endured six months of imprisonment after the movement. Their patriotic involvement was discussed in a symposium on the “*Kisaeng* in Suwŏn and the Korean Independence Movement” in 2008 and was turned into a TV documentary in 2009.⁵¹ In 2009, the Korean government re-evaluated her activism by giving her an honorable, posthumous award as a patriot who fought for national independence.

Conclusion

They [living courtesans and their heirs] are the historical present of an always elusive past. Far from allowing us to deny the chasm of historical distance, they draw attention to it even as they also suggest the possibility of meaningful relationships across time and space. Moreover, they insist, through their vitality and their very survival, on why we should listen to them as we attend to echoes of their courtesan sisters—because all of them are real people who produced and inspired remarkable art, and for whom art was a way out of hardship, subjugation, and even cruelty.⁵²

The last generation of *kisaeng* faced dramatic political and social changes and the deterioration of traditional values in colonial Korea (1910-1945). Alongside the continued existence of *kisaeng* traditional performances during the colonial period, something that occurred despite the promotion of Japanese culture and the gradual introduction of Western culture, their broader repertoire and social roles were strongly related to the political situation. The social and cultural roles played by the last generation of *kisaeng* broadened significantly, and acted as a pivot between the old and the modern in Korean performing arts. However, since independence from Japan in 1945, this legacy has mostly been ignored, and they have been left carrying a social stigma that makes it necessary for them to hide their identities in order to survive in contemporary Korea.

In this article, I have therefore examined how the last generation of *kisaeng*

51. Yi Tonggŭn, Researcher of Suwŏn Museum, presented his paper titled “Suwon *kisaeng* ŭi chŏn’gye yangsang kwa 3.1 undong” during the “Symposium of the Suwon *Kisaeng* and the Korean Independence Movement” by the Association of the Kyŏnggi Regional History on 7 November 2008 and produced his collaborative work, the television documentary series, *Suwŏn kisaeng manse undong* [Suwon *Kisaeng*’s Korean Independence movement] with Kyŏnggi City Council in March 2009.

52. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon, “Introduction,” in *The Courtesan’s Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24.

negotiated their new circumstances in order to survive under Japanese colonial power. They responded by training themselves in multiple arts at *kisaeng* schools (*kwŏnbŏn*), working as courtesans, and performing as professional artists. I have also explored how *kisaeng* put their efforts into performing Korean traditional genres while assimilating into both Japanese and Western culture to meet their customer's expectations. They had to sing or perform traditional Korean music, Japanese songs, jazz or Korean popular songs (*yuhaengga*) on radio programs and in recordings. Some *kisaeng* gained great popularity with their singing, such as Yihwajungsŏn (1898-1943), Chu Sanwŏl (1893-1982), Pak Nokchu (1906-1979), and Wang Subok (1917-2003).

In addition, *kisaeng* endeavored to express their various identities as human beings through their journal, *Changhan*. This journal revealed not only their role as innovative, cultural pioneers in terms of their understanding of both old and modern culture, but also the depth of their suffering and sorrow as sex workers serving their Japanese colonial masters under harsh conditions of social discrimination. Some of the *kisaeng* also expressed their patriotism and social activism by participating in the Independence movement in 1919 in order to be accepted as part of modern Korea. However, their efforts were not intentionally to canonize the *kisaeng* legacy as a chapter in the history of Korean traditional performing arts, but rather to survive under these turbulent circumstances. Unfortunately, their patriotic involvement started to be appreciated only after their death.

It is meaningful that innovative works by *kisaeng* such as the journal *Changhan*, *kisaeng* post cards depicting their cultural involvement, Suwon *kisaeng*'s patriotic involvement, and a *kisaeng* popular star, Wang Subok, have been discovered and reported since 2005. This fact tells us that the images of *kisaeng* have been changing from negative ones into those of positive "modern girls" or "cultural leaders" as issues of gender identity and colonialism become more prominent in contemporary Korea.

As observed above, the topic of '*kisaeng*' contains old and new cultural dialogue, colonialism, gender identities, and the modern process of Korean society coming together. The *kisaeng*'s social significance and cultural resonance for Korean society during the colonial period needs to be viewed through an interdisciplinary focus. Therefore, it is urgent that *kisaeng*'s experiences be thoroughly re-evaluated through the prism of their acculturation and positive social involvement as Korean professional performing artists and socio-cultural leaders.