

Na Hyesök: The “Korean Nora”*

Jung A Choi and Han Sung Kim

Na Hyesök (1896–1948), the so-called “Korean Nora” of colonial Korea, challenged existing patriarchal conventions and tried to dismantle androcentric myths. In her poem, “A Doll’s Song” (1921), an adaptation from Henrik Ibsen’s play, *A Doll’s House*, she exclaims, “I have a divine duty, setting out on my mission to become a person.” Her feminism was a common theme among Korean new-age women and her task was one shared with Japanese new women artists. Japan and Korea’s new-age women had ideological ties, despite their political differences as constituents of empire and colony, a fact closely linked to the reception of “Nora” in East Asia. Korean international students in Tokyo learned and experienced Western culture via Japanese intellectuals and celebrated Ibsen’s “Nora” as a role model of modern individuality. For Korean male students, being a “Nora” implied having a sense of enlightenment both as a modern person and a colonial intellectual with an awareness of nationalistic boundaries. However, Na Hyesök made it her priority to break with patriarchal ideology so that Korean female intellectuals could play a role equal to that of their male counterparts in modern Korean society.

Keywords: Na Hyesök, *sin yösöng*, first-generation Korean Feminist Artist, Kyöngħui, “Inhyōng ū ka” (A doll’s house), Noraism

*This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2017S1A5A8021892). It was also supported by Sookmyung Women’s University Research Grants (1-1703-2011). Unless otherwise noted, all translations to English are the authors’ own.

Jung A Choi (whitepine8@naver.com) is a lecturer in the Humanitas College at Kyung Hee University and Han Sung Kim (jungkim@sookmyung.ac.kr) is an assistant professor in the Department of Korean Language and Literature at Sookmyung Women’s University.