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Los Angeles

Performing Masquerade

The Politics of K-Beauty in South Korean Literary and Popular Culture

from Colonialism to Neoliberalism

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Theater and Performance Studies

by

Hye-Kyoung Kwon

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation traces the historical trajectory of selected Korean female iconographies: Modern Girl, Après Girl, Factory Girl, Gangnam Beauty, and Soybean-Paste Girl. These figures have functioned as avatars of the gendered history of Korea and have also had a considerable transpacific impact on the dynamics that affect gender and class structures, as well as on national beauty culture, norms of femininity, and everyday performance of masquerade. With all these embodied female icons—icons that represent male fabrications that cater to the male gaze—I focus on the tension between authenticity and imitation/copies, which patriarchal society has demanded be distinguished. Amid the oblique power relations created primarily by the conjuncture of Japanese colonialism and US imperialism, Korea has consciously strived to establish national cultural identity as the original. Such transnational struggles have been

projected as struggles internal to the nation—that is, between the privileged and the marginalized of society. Particularly in this Confucian and patriarchal society, such intense power dynamics have produced and maintained unequal relations between genders. In other words, having to differentiate authentic from imitative disempowers women’s performance of self and agency and their presentation of femininity in everyday life. I draw on the concept of *masquerade* not only to resolve this tension but to narrow the gap between what is projected as authentic and what is considered imitative, or between the reality and the representation, thus traversing the boundaries of class and challenging the normativity of femininity and the ideals of beauty constructed by social intellectuals, the state, and hegemonic mores.

My object of analysis is what I call a “nexus of beauty”: I weave together a wide range of media (cinema, magazines, governmental policies and propaganda, literature); social events such as beauty pageants, parades of Korean actresses, and the sociocultural trend of “dance fever”; and the everyday life performances of marginalized Korean women in a public realm. My objective therefore is to illuminate the relationship between each historical context and transformative and multilayered “Koreanesses,” particularly in terms of national beauty culture and women’s corporeal identity. Although many everyday beauty practices and performances of working-class Korean women have been restored through archival images and narratives, this restoration is insufficient. Drawing on a variety of discursive/archival materials and forms of popular culture—including novels, essays, advertisements, newspapers, in-house beauty/weekly magazines, and “webtoons”—I analyze how notions of K-Beauty have been promulgated and performed, beginning with Korea’s decision to participate in the Western capitalist economy at the turn of the twentieth century. By examining these various discursive sites of media, I demonstrate the ways in which K-Beauty has been developed and disseminated as once-familiar bodies become—or engage in performances of masquerades that become—visually ambiguous. In that process, the relationship between bodies and behavior becomes theatrical.

The dissertation of Hye-Kyoung Kwon is approved.

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Introduction

The *New York Post* reported on October 9, 2017, during China's Golden Week national holiday, that three Chinese women had been prevented from boarding a flight home after their nip-and-tuck procedures in South Korea (hereafter Korea) because their faces no longer matched the photos in their passports (Woods). This is one of many disturbing news articles addressing plastic surgery in Korea that have suffused social media and US-based feminist blogs such as *Jezebel* in recent years, often under provocative headlines such as "I Can't Stop Looking at These South Korean Women Who've Had Plastic Surgery" (Stewart). Because Korea's plastic surgery industry has been promoted to women of neighboring Asian countries as part of state-sponsored medical tourism with the Gangnam district of Seoul as its epicenter, Korean medical techniques have been sold to the citizens of other nation-states as forms of knowledge and technology. The presence of the tall building of the GMTC (Gangnam Medical Tour Center) in the most expensive area of Gangnam illustrates the national effort to attract medical tourists by providing services such as interpretation, airport pick-up, consultations with professional doctors, bookings, and more, all under the aegis of promoting K-Beauty.¹

Such medical tourism nowadays depends heavily on cosmetic surgery; however, it gained its momentum from the online circulation of Korean beauty culture. A variety of media platforms have proliferated to the point of collapsing the boundary between celebrities and individual creators of beauty content: daily beauty tips and rituals of Korean celebrities have been transmitted widely through YouTube beauty tutorials with subtitles in various languages. K-Beauty is shaped not solely by high-profile female Korean celebrities but also by ordinary young Korean women. Moreover, while this digital environment of Korean beauty culture foments global spectatorship, it also generates a sense of virtual intimacy with regard to Korean

¹ The public institution of Gangnam province (*Gangnamgu*) has operated this facility since 2013. For more information, visit the website (Gangnam Medical Tour Center).

women's daily makeup and fashion practices. In this sense, K-Beauty represents a highly mediatized culture and set of beauty practices that are spread to global spectators.

At stake in this transnational cultural phenomenon, and in various embodiments of this culturally specific notion of beauty, is the question of Korean women's agency. Korean beauty practices are often mischaracterized as reflecting Korean women's pursuit of the transient spectacles of consumer-capitalist "makeovers," or as a manifestation of Western imperialism and the desire of colonized subjects for Western aesthetics. For instance, at the level of culture and media, many writers for global beauty magazines and Western media have generalized that Korean women's obsession with plastic surgery reflects a distorted desire to catch up to Western beauty standards; yet these same writers also often voyeuristically fetishize the "sameness" of Korean women's faces as a commodity. At the level of economy, such representations of Korean women's tireless efforts to titivate their appearance, including through the use of plastic surgery, ironically have seemed to help boost the skyrocketing worldwide sales of "made-in-Korea" cosmetics and makeup sold under the name of K-Beauty or K-Chic during the last decade.²

In actuality, these representations intersect in complex ways with East Asian women's racial/gender identities, labor, and social mobility. Indeed, what has been called the Anti-Corset Movement, which agitates against the global circulation of K-Beauty, recently emerged in Korea to warn that such racialized and gendered stereotypes and essentialized images, shaped in relation to plastic surgery and Korean women's obsession with appearance, constitute "cultural violence against Korean women" at a global level. As such, the immediacy of Korean beauty culture and practices should prompt critics to address the underlying cultural tensions and power dynamics of racial and gender stereotypes, especially when recent technologies have resolved geographical challenges through what David Harvey terms *time-space compression*

² In chapter 4, I address how the Korean government sponsored medical tourism specifically in relation to plastic surgery for foreigners.

(“Time-Space” 98). Harvey’s term describes the simultaneity, immediacy, and shared sense of intimacy that mark the contemporary global era, which is heavily mediatized by technology. Although the discourse of K-Beauty today has been shaped by the development of media technologies in the era of globalization, Korean women’s beauty culture and practices are not recent cultural productions. They have operated throughout Korean history as an apparatus to present and sometimes control Korean women’s femininity.

My inquiry, therefore, extends into how we unfold (pre)modern Korean women’s beauty culture to a time before these technologies and social media existed. This dissertation, *Performing Masquerade: The Politics of K-Beauty in South Korean Literary and Popular Culture from Colonialism to Neoliberalism*, investigates how current K-Beauty practices intertwine with the history of gendered labor in Korea, and with this nation’s deeply rooted *class* ideology and ethos of *nationalism*. Utilizing a wide range of discursive materials, as well as popular cultural forms—such as newspaper and magazine articles, public advertisements, novels, films, interviews, “webtoons,” and archival materials—I trace the concealed relations among seemingly unrelated spheres, and especially among popular and consumer culture, governmental institutions and legislation, medical tourism, and women’s bodily expressions of femininity and beauty.

I compare various media and lived experiences in each chapter in order to develop a multilayered notion of “beauty,” as this dissertation deals with a historical trajectory of Korea in the twentieth century. From the Enlightenment era to the Japanese colonial period (and although male elites dominated print media as the primary producers), newspapers and magazines transmitted more than information and new knowledge. They—particularly newspapers—serially published novels and advertised new (beauty) commodities. Advertisements stimulated consumerist desires and affected new patterns of consumption that reflected individuals’ identification with modernity. While these newspapers and magazines

were controlled in a certain way under colonial rule, they also offer us a crucial channel to understand Korea's appropriation of translated modernity and sociocultural changes that took place before visual media emerged.

In their representations of women, popular/commercial magazines could be more proximate to those in real life (that is, to real women) than could novels or newspapers. Magazines were targeted at a wider circulation and thus dealt with different classes of Korean women in their coverage—which ranged from interviews with female public figures to discussions about working-class women's marital lives and labor. During the industrialization of the 1970s, when the Korean beauty industry developed, in-house beauty magazines were particularly widely disseminated through cosmetic saleswomen and beauty-related places such as beauty salons and department stores, sites of producing and educating new feminine corporeality.

What had been primary print/textual—descriptions of commodities, representations of “women,” and fictional narratives about modernity—became intensely visual with the rise of cinema as a more widely available popular medium. In a broad way, cinema came to be more accessible than print, as literacy was a form of privilege in Korean society. The consumption of Western modernity was accelerated through the seduction of visual spectacles. For instance, in the 1950s, Hollywood films—deeply associated with glamour, extravagance, and luxury, along with Western female fashion icons—influenced the construction of Korean women's femininity and also reinforced certain visual stereotypes. Likewise, Korean cinema was infused with a patriarchal gaze that has visualized working-class women's gender, labor, and femininity in certain ways.

If print media and cinema distinctly demarcate the positions between “producer (author/director)” and “consumer (reader/audience),” social media in the twenty-first century offers an interactive media platform in which communication between producers and

consumers is immediate, the boundary between them easily blurred. In addressing contemporary Korean society, which is widely known as being the most wired, I draw on the genre of webtoons, a major cultural form that represents Korean youth culture due to its convergence of digital technologies, smartphones, and popular culture.

The history of the twentieth century is marked by diverse foreign powers and forces such as colonialism, modernity, and imperialism that have clashed. It is important to read between the lines of a wide range of sources, both fictional and nonfictional, because each medium not only reflects a fascination with each period's sociocultural phenomenon and political/economic agendas, but expresses women's voices and experiences, which are difficult to capture in a patriarchal society. Although most of the media I address reflect the male gaze, I also foreground a woman fashion designer's interview, factory workers' essays, novels/essays by feminist writers such as Park Wan-Seo, and newspaper articles that resonate with the obscured voices of marginalized Korean women in each period and show how they attempted to resist social/gender norms determined by the male elites. These fictional and nonfictional materials are interwoven to show the interplay between the top-down and bottom-down drives and desires of people living during this period. Unless we cross references in multiple types of media, our understanding of beauty will remain partial. These media not only inflect one another, but interact in ways that create effects greater than any individual work or medium.

Addressing the epistemological gap between Korean studies and theater/performance studies, I place these fields in dialectical tension and dialogue. The first of its kind, my study situates Korean women's quotidian experiences against what I call a "nexus of beauty"—theatrical performances of fashion and beauty, including dance, plastic surgery, and lived embodiments of femininity—in historical contexts ranging from colonialism to globalization/neoliberalism. In recent years, scholarship that focuses on Korean women's beauty practices has emerged as a contested site to address race, gender, feminist perspectives, and

globalization.³ Particularly, in terms of fashion and body politics at the turn of the twentieth century, Susie Kim rightly points out that “studies dealing with fashion in the non-West have been sparse. However, fashion takes on more layered meaning when it becomes a symbolic site of epistemological contestations in the non-West” (611). My intervention is to examine the concept of national class ideology and its changes through the lens of Korean women’s beauty practices in specific historical contexts. In four case studies, I attempt to show how the concept of class has intersected with women’s experienced embodiments of beauty and (non)normative femininity, which I argue often represent forms of resistance to state law and regulations.

What Is K-Beauty?

How do we then define K-Beauty? Plastic surgery certainly is at the center of heated global debates and attention when it comes to Korean beauty culture and practices. As the neologism recently emerged, K-Beauty—like K-Pop and K-Drama—seems to have been fostered as a national brand that features culturally specific content in the era of globalization. In my view, however, the critical aspect of K-Beauty involves the historical trajectory through which Korea’s Confucian society was transformed into the present nation-state that advocates democracy and neoliberalism. Consequently, I develop my case studies chronologically from Japanese colonialism to neoliberal era and emphasize the political/ideological transformations of Korean history. By doing so, I reveal K-Beauty as a multifaceted concept that has been reconfigured through geopolitical dynamics at particular critical (trans)national historical moments. Aspects of K-Beauty have been performed in ambiguous and complex ways that have disrupted national and political certainties and agendas regarding race, gender, and class in each historical milieu that I address.

³ See further: S. H. Lee, “(Geo)politics”; S.-R. Lee; Holliday and Elfving-Hwang; and K. J. Woo.

Seeking answers regarding what K-Beauty entails, I engage with political transformations and economic shifts in Korean society in relation to Japanese colonialism (1910–45); decolonization, along with the US military occupation (1945–48) and the Korean War (1950–53); Park Chung-Hee’s military regime (1961–79); and the era of globalization(1993–). Each historical period exposes sociopolitical tensions, especially in the relations between the state’s regulations and sociocultural policies concerning women’s bodies and clothing and women’s experienced embodiments of beauty. These tensions are succinctly encapsulated as follows: in the state’s top-down gender/labor politics, implemented through policies and legislation regulating women’s clothing and beauty practices; in the bottom-up response of Korean women’s everyday life performances of corporeality; and in women’s bodily expressions of beauty and femininity. I examine these vertical tensions because each state/government has played a significant role in driving and shaping the discourse of K-Beauty, from the “stateless” colonial period to “Global Korea.” In order to unravel such sociopolitical tensions, I examine selective Korean female iconographies in each chapter—from the colonial Modern Girl to the Après Girl, Factory Girl, Soybean Paste Girl, and Gangnam Beauty—focusing on those that provide roles or masks with which working-class/lower-class women can (dis)identify. Except for Factory Girl, these iconographic types have been assumed to be, and mostly celebrated as, privileged, highly educated, and fashionable women, and as pioneers who appropriated Western modernity. But as Alisa Freedman, Laura Miller, and Christine R. Yano point out, “while many scholars have analyzed images of the leisurely modern girl, few have acknowledged the iconography of her labor” (6). Their observation pertain to more than just the images of modern girls. The iconographies that I address denote more than the showy or superficial trophies of the cultural and economic modernization of Korea: they are inscribed with *doubleness*. Behind the euphoric female images and embodiments are the grim and somber realities that many marginalized women encountered, dramatically belying certain projected

iconographies. Focusing on these groups of women, rather than on privileged female icons, I attempt to demonstrate how seemingly laboring women may be reassessed as “authentic” pioneers of modernity in Korean society.

If a state can be defined largely by its political sovereignty, its territory, and the state apparatus, Korea (Joseon) under Japanese colonialism was in a state of “statelessness,” its sovereignty and political agency co-opted by Japan for thirty-six years (see chapter 1). Showcasing Gyeongsoeng (Seoul) as a palimpsest of the empire’s power, Japan reconstructed the urban space as racially segregated in the early phase of colonial rule. However, it promoted *Naeseonilche*—the idea that Korea and Japan are one entity and that Koreans and the Japanese are the same ethnicity—for its own interest in the late phase of colonial rule. Under the ambivalent colonial politics of racial discrimination and urban segregation, the embodied practices of laboring modern girls—in their appropriation of modern beauty ideals such as bobbed hair, Western dress, and slim bodies—offered a way to articulate colonial identity struggles in terms of gender, class, and race. By attempting to pass as a “Japanese woman,” and by taking on the characteristics of a modern beauty ideal and a woman of the colonizer, laboring Korean women engaged in an ambiguous self-fashioning of appearance that not only eroded the boundaries of race and class but challenged the colonizer’s politics of race. I focus on the everyday performances of working-class modern girls because they were not only the bearers of colonial modernity but also gendered and racialized “flâneurs” in their everyday life performance of crossing over the doubled colonial city.

After Japan’s surrender to the Allied forces in 1945, which ended World War II, Korea seemed to become a self-governing state after being liberated from Japan, but Korea was divided into two separate political states, respectively occupied by the United States and the Soviet Union. After the “official” period of US political intervention (1945–48), South Korea became an independent state and held an election approved by the United Nations Temporary

Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), and Lee Seung-Man (Rhee Syngman) became the first president of the Republic of Korea (1948–60). The period of 1945–60 (see chapter 2) is critical because of the political transitions and sociocultural permutations resulting from World War II and the Korean War. Because of the Korean War, which destabilized the economy and in which nearly a million Korean soldiers were killed or wounded, South Koreans suffered from extreme hunger and shortages of labor. At this time of national crisis, Korean women were employed to compensate for the lack of manpower, which led to a challenge to the male-centered patriarchal system in the 1960s.

I assess the state's political intervention into Korean women's lives in the mid-1950s and early 1960s through the "Simple Clothing Movement" (*uibokgansohwaundong*), which regulated Korean women's clothing and excessive cultural Americanization. Against the backdrop of the state's top-down control of women's fashion in quotidian life and its restrictions on imported commodities, one of the emerging attributes of *Après Girls* was an "excess" of femininity and sexuality. That is, juxtaposed against the state's propaganda to maintain women's clothing as modest, a bottom-up momentum arose. This momentum was driven by women's desire to express and embody nonnormative femininity and sexuality, especially through fashion and "dance fever," an urban sociocultural trend that began in the mid-1950s.

The term *Après Girls* refers to a nonnormative Korean women's collective that surfaced after the Korean War; its members dismantled traditional values—such as chastity, a subordinate domestic role, and Confucian morality—that had long been imposed on Korean women. Korean women of varied walks of life became more visible in society because the residents of the US military camps created new conditions and options for these different categories of women (Enloe). While the term *Après Girls* itself encompassed different classes of women—GI military sex workers (*yanggnongju*), Madame Freedom (*jayubuin*, or middle-class housewives), war widows, military brides, showgirls, and even highly educated college girls—

these seemingly disparate categories of women were held together by dance madness (*chumbaram*), in which Korean women mingled not only with US servicemen but also with Korean middle-class married men and male college students. Dance halls offered moments of leisure and a temporary escape from an often cheerless reality, but for some women they also represented a way to survive hunger and poverty and seek a better future. Within the limited physical space of a dance hall, Korea's system of social distinctions, categories, and stereotypes was challenged by the rather homogenous fashion landscape, which could make it hard to distinguish class and background. The lack of diversity in fashion trends and the scarcity of materials left ample room for lower-class/laboring women to *pass* as upper-class women, in a performance not only of empowerment and respectability, but of resistance against the state's control.

What did such sartorial performances, dancing, and evenings out mean for these women in an era of hunger and poverty? One might wonder how dance halls proliferated even during the war, when everything was scarce. But even in this scarcity, going out to the theater and visiting dance halls were not activities exclusive to the affluent; even lower-class women would wear *hanbok* made from lavish fabrics such as velvet or nylon and go out on the town as a form of escape—not only from the somber reality of war-era life but from the traditional woman's role as “wise mother and good wife.” However, the war itself left wounds and stigma on Korean women. For instance, Koreans still use the word *mimangin*, which can be translated as *war widow*, but which also implies a woman who could not survive her husband's death. The word expressed a moralistic condemnation of women who lost their husbands during the war and channeled long-standing Confucian values. Dancing/dancing parties could provide employment for some women, whereas for others it might offer pure pleasure and satisfy curiosity about the new foreign culture. One thing for certain is that a dance hall was a “figurative” site where

different classes of women accessed a certain aspect of US culture, when such access was not yet granted.

Through a series of social dramas and everyday performances during the postwar era, inflected by class and gender disparities, Korean women experienced “modernities,” and their self-fashioning and self-adornment were embodied performances to elaborate their experiences of modernization. As Laurel Kendall contends,

As a cultural expression and ideological stance, “modernity” may be distinguished from “modernization,” the measurable material processes of industrialization, technological innovation, expanding capitalist markets, and rapid urbanization. Modernities are the cultural articulations of modernizations as self-conscious experiences and discourses, judgments, and feelings about these experiences. (2)

As she implies, a certain gap always exists between modernity and modernization, especially between the spheres of economy and culture. Such inequalities and unevenness—not only between economy and culture, but between gender and class—were exacerbated during South Korea’s industrialization process under Park Chung-Hee’s regime (1961–79). Park’s export-centered economic strategy led to the rapid economic growth of the “Miracle of Han-River,” but so-called Factory Girls (*gongsuni*, young women factory workers) remained as a cultural inscription of what *not* to look like, despite their enormous sacrifice for the national economy and industrialization. This stigma arose because of the nationally imposed imperative that Factory Girls signify only labor (*nodongja*), and because of the state-controlled media that hailed them as “industrial soldiers.” Against the backdrop of the military regime’s top-down regulation and surveillance of young Korean women’s quotidian looks, I demonstrate that Korean working-class women used everyday beauty practices in the 1970s to present themselves as desirable, and that they did so in ways that helped suspend class struggles while simultaneously providing a moment of emancipation and freedom.

The academic discussion of Factory Girls is not new. Nonetheless, I examine their everyday life performances of beauty and fashion to reveal that what recently has been dubbed K-Beauty is intertwined with the history of gendered labor in Korea and with the deeply rooted class ideology and nationalism that helped drive Korea's industrialization. K-Beauty did not emerge suddenly as a culturally specific and now globally circulating national brand. Instead, it was initiated as a part of a state-sponsored national industry, as well as part of the culturally specific beauty practices of Korean women's everyday lives. These performances and practices were driven by women factory laborers who were the actual producers of the beauty culture and industry, yet whose femininity could not be acknowledged by society.

As head of the first civilian government in South Korea, President Kim Young Sam (1993–98) announced his globalization drive along with an untranslated Korean word, *Segyehwa*, “encompassing political, economic, social, and cultural enhancement to reach the level of advanced nations in the world” (Samuel Kim 3). Since then, Korea's expanding transnational connections have been driven by advancements in media technologies, as the phenomenon of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) has branded the nation's celebrities as models of physical attractiveness around the region and beyond (Epstein and Turnbull). More precisely, the Korean government has promoted K-Beauty along with the Korean Wave as a national brand and competitive cultural commodity in global markets, in conjunction with its promotion of medical tourism (Epstein and Joo 10).

In chapter 4, I foreground the disjuncture or disparities between the global and local embodiments of plastic surgery and Korean women's beauty culture by focusing on locally specific online-based media productions. Sharon Heijin Lee interrogates beauty as the intersection of race, technology, and geopolitics within a frame of neoliberalism. Analyzing an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* titled “Around the World with Oprah,” which included coverage on Korean women's plastic surgery, Lee argues that “neoliberal feminist subjects are

not produced equally, however, but are discursively constructed along a First World/Third World divide” (“Lessons” 27). She contends that plastic surgery represents an individual choice and form of self-enhancement in a neoliberal era, and that neoliberal feminist subjects are produced unequally at the intersection of race, technology, and neoliberalism. By contrast, my argument regarding the representations of plastic surgery and the recent self-fashioning of young Korean women focuses in part on nationally produced popular media such as “webtoons” (online comics), and on neologisms that have spread through online environments. I examine two neologisms pertaining to Korean women’s conspicuous consumption of global fashion brands. The first of these neologisms is the Soybean Paste Girl (*doenjangnyeo*), a stereotyped female figure who desires to *pass* as an upper-class woman. She shows off her economic capability by carrying expensive handbags and wearing pricey clothing and shoes; her behavior chafes against the socioeconomic/gender inequality and unemployment that permeate current Korean society. The second neologism is that of the Gangnam Beauty (*gangnam-miin*), a parodied image of Shin Yun-Bok’s painting *A Portrait of a Beauty* (*miindo*). The image of the beauty, digitally reborn, was circulated through online platforms as a critique of the “artificial faces” of certain images of Korean women who had undergone multiple plastic surgeries.

I attempt to understand the profound tension between the state’s promotion of K-Beauty in the era of globalization and the everyday life performances of young Korean women’s materialistic consumption, as well as their use of plastic surgery. In addition to the socioeconomic agendas behind the state’s promotion of Korean beauty culture as a national brand, I discuss the disjuncture and conjuncture between the global and local implications of Korean women’s consumption of beauty and use of plastic surgery. By examining these two neologisms and media portrayals of Korean women’s plastic surgery in relation to the Asian Financial Crisis (1997–98), I illuminate the ways in which South Korean women have embodied their desire for upward mobility against the fact of national economic immobility.

As I have mentioned, this dissertation's case studies try to capture the moments in which Korean women have performed ambiguity of race, gender, and class, especially by transforming their culturally encoded appearances. Their everyday life conflicts and struggles to invent alterity often produced ambiguity of race, gender, and class; that ambiguity underpins a sartorial performance of *masquerade* in the everyday lives of marginalized young Korean women. As Kim Ju Yon argues,

Ambiguity emerges when unfamiliar bodies take up familiar behaviors, when the relationship between the body and behavior becomes an open question and consequently takes on a *theatrical* character: as the subject seems to split into actor and role, questions of imitation and authenticity surface. (6, original emphasis)

When a working- or lower-class woman tries to imitate an upper-class woman's normative fashion, makeup, and attitudes, she becomes a theatrical character, an actor performing the role of an economically privileged woman. At the very moment of the embodied performance, she becomes an ambiguous figure, staging unfamiliar behaviors. This performance becomes a *masquerade*, an act of role-playing with masks, if it is intended as a pretense. In this regard, I view K-Beauty as a malleable cultural construct, as well as what Rey Chow calls a *coping mechanism* that helps women survive racial and gender inequalities in specific Korean historical conditions. It allows women to perform "mimetic tricks" that insinuate *doubleness*—that is, "mimesis either as subversive performativity or as ambivalent desiring" (Chow, *Entanglement* 96). K-Beauty is not a simple enactment to spectacularize one's façade; instead it uses performance and repetitive negotiations that (re)construct femininity and class status to enhance marginalized Korean women's agency and empowerment.

Why Class Matters

Korea's experience of Western modernity, as introduced by colonialism, profoundly changed and restructured the status quo of society and its gender hierarchy. As Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi elaborate,

Feminism and nationalism are the antinomic offspring of modernity. Feminism as a project of modernity stands at odds with nationalism, which imagines a fraternal community. On the one hand, nationalism, while emphasizing liberal democratic notions of individual differences, has in fact reconstituted the class hierarchy of the *ancien regime*. On the other hand, it is these very liberal democratic notions that have been used to segregate gender and race in the interests of a unifying ideology of the nation-state. (7)

As I argue in each case study, the precepts of nationalism for its own sake—that is, for the sake of the nation—have militated against women's desire to express self and femininity, especially when this desire is associated with Westernization and (what the state perceives as) a false glamour of modernity. Despite social repression and the inherent contradictions of its formulation, beauty has brought Korean women a certain agency and empowerment, especially when it has been manipulated as a machine for resistance to patriarchy and the state. Although her argument specifically concerns the Korean TV drama *Boys over Flowers*, Kim Suk-Young contends that it is beauty that bridges the gap between the representation and the reality of South Korean society:

Though this partnership [between the Park Chung-Hee regime and large corporations called *jaebeol* in the 1960s and 1970s] might have taken place under the banner of the public interest, it generated various side effects, such as the increasing gap between rich and poor and the suppression of democratic measures in governance. Growing economic inequality is sustained by oppression, but the genre of drama possesses all the tools *to revamp it with beauty*. (“For the Eyes” 97, emphasis added)

What comes to the fore in this narrative is the disturbingly class-embedded nature of contemporary South Korean society, in which the economic power of the so-called *jaebeol* dominates the everyday lives of ordinary people in the world of capitalism. Such a narrative creates a fantasy of a heterosexual romantic relationship between the rich male character and the ordinary female character, which rarely develops in real life because Korean class hierarchy is rigidly immobile, and Korea is “going back to [being a] traditional class-based society [*sinbunsaheo*]” (“Korea Going Backward”). Contradicting reality, as Kim attests, “stories involving *chaebol* (*jaebeol*) abound on Korean TV, especially as the fates of these financial elites become entangled with those of the ordinary citizens so much so that these programs could even constitute their own genre” (“For the Eyes” 96).

Why then have Korean society and media been so infatuated with the *Boys* narrative? Can it simply be equated with the ubiquitous appeal of Cinderella stories in Western society? As Kim stresses, the economic disparities stemming from Park Chung-Hee’s military regime in the 1970s provide an answer to these questions: one needs to examine Korea’s historical and political contexts—especially in relation to Western modernity and modernization—to understand that *Boys* does not reflect a fairy tale–like cliché originating in Western culture. I address what Kim calls *beauty* as a social phenomenon that responds not only to economic disparities but also to gender and racial disparities that have been aggravated since the implementation of the Park military regime’s export-driven economic agenda. Park’s state heavily emphasized light industry, where most of the so-called Factory Girls were engaged, and it created an economic imbalance with a stratified labor market developing as a result of wage differences between the successful export sector and the domestic economy.

Likewise, while the cultural brand K-Beauty per se emerged alongside the recent rise of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*), I do not confine my consideration of K-Beauty to contemporary contexts. Instead, I treat it as a *class-embedded* concept amalgamated with Confucian traditions

and values—values that have been reconstructed and transmuted through the historical experiences of Japanese colonialism, decolonization, the Korean War, US imperialism, and globalization. Though inflected by temporal and spatial disparities, culturally coded iterations of Korean women’s beauty ideals and norms of femininity as embodied knowledge/expression have appeared in a variety of media platforms. The notion of K-Beauty has shifted and been performed in multiple permutations not only based on race, class, and gender, but shaped and mediated by specific (trans)national historical contexts.

Especially as Korea embraced Western modernity and consumer capitalism, consumption became a fundamental “site” for establishing and communicating *difference*. As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, “To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This presupposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class’” (*Distinction* 1). The notion of class is by no means fixed and essentialized. Rather, for Korean women, it is continuously negotiated through such things as marriage, education, and consumption. In defining *class*, I draw on Beverley Skeggs’s explication of the concept as signifying not a given, static condition, but a continual production. As she elaborates:

These [working-class] women, although inscribed and marked by the symbolic systems of denigration and degeneracy, managed to generate their own systems of value, and attributed respectability and high moral standing to themselves. They were both positioned by but also contested the symbolic systems of historical inscription to generate alternative systems of value. *This daily struggle for value* was central to their ability to operate in the world and their sense of subjectivity and self-worth. (2, emphasis added)

As Skeggs suggests, although class today is no longer a wholly visible marker, it still produces “struggles for value” in everyday life, which are significant components of the process of

identity-making.⁴ Skeggs explains that class is an especially contested system for working-class women, for whom fashion, as an “alternative” apparatus of status, is in constant conflict with the apparatus that society imposes.

Drawn to the notion of *masquerade* in relation to class and femininity, I attempt to illuminate Korean women’s experienced embodiments of fashion and beauty through the theoretical frame of performance. Psychoanalyst Joan Riviere uses the term *masquerade* to designate a mask of normative femininity that allows women to blend into a male-dominated professional realm. Such an individual adopts the mask because she wants to be identified with the normative image of a feminine woman, so that her presence in that world will be recognized as legitimate and unthreatening. In Riviere’s theory, femininity—or *womanliness*, to use Riviere’s term—is a mask and thus a social construct; no real or authentic femininity exists beyond the mask. This theory of masquerade, however, does not destabilize the norms of femininity. While Mary Ann Doane maintains Riviere’s argument, she accentuates the distance between a woman and the image of femininity in masquerade, which provides a woman with the agency to use this distance to her advantage:

The theorization of femininity as masquerade is a way of appropriating this necessary distance or gap, in the operation of semiotic systems, of deploying it for women, of reading femininity differently. Here it is crucial to point to the constant slippage in Riviere’s discourse between “normal” femininity and pathology—the former appearing inherently unstable. Femininity is fundamentally, for Riviere, the play of masks.

(“Masquerade” 47)

⁴ In Korean premodern culture and tradition, as well as in Chinese imperial cultures, social class was visibly inscribed. For instance, both criminals (by state imposition) and members of the lowest class of society (by choice) had marked bodies, especially by the tattooing of faces.

Doane's understanding of the masquerade can also be seen through different time periods of Korean history. According to Judith Butler, gender is not what one is but *what one does*. The performance of masquerade itself is ephemeral, but it certainly provides an alternative imagining of a nonnormative mode of femininity through a "stylized repetition of acts" in order to effect a specific formation of power (Butler, "Performative" 519). Luce Irigaray likewise writes that "to become a normal woman [is] to enter into the *masquerade of femininity*" (134, original emphasis). At the same time, Irigaray implies that such a performance of masquerade—or play with mimesis—might be subversive, an aspect that I have tried to prove in each chapter:

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself . . . to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means "to unveil" the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. (76)

Within this theoretical frame of masquerade, a woman tries to make herself visible by conforming to men's desire and logic; in this respect, visibility is a still-viable technique of self-empowerment for women.

Overview of Chapters

In each chapter, I trace the historical trajectory of selected Korean female iconographies: the Modern Girl, Après Girl, Factory Girl, Gangnam Beauty, and Soybean Paste Girl. These figures have functioned as avatars of the gendered history of Korea and also have had a considerable transpacific impact on the dynamics that affect gender and class structures, as well as on national beauty culture, norms of femininity, and everyday performance of masquerade. With all these embodied female icons—icons that represent male fabrications that cater to the

male gaze—I focus on the tension between authenticity and imitation/copies, which patriarchal society has demanded be distinguished. As Shu-Mei Shih elaborates,

the copy is never the original, but a form of translation. . . . Translation is not an act of one-to-one equivalence, but an event that happens among multiple agents, among multiple local and hegemonic cultures, registering an uncertainty and a complexity that require historically specific decodings. (5)

Amid the oblique power relations created primarily by the conjuncture of Japanese colonialism and US imperialism, Korea has consciously strived to establish national cultural identity as the original rather than the copy. Such transnational struggles have been projected as struggles internal to the nation—that is, between the privileged and the marginalized of society.

Particularly in this Confucian and patriarchal society, such intense power dynamics have produced and maintained unequal relations between genders. In other words, having to differentiate authentic from imitative disempowers women’s performance of self and agency and their presentation of femininity in everyday life. I draw on the concept of *masquerade* as a way not only to resolve this tension but to narrow the gap between what is projected as authentic and what is considered imitative, or between the reality and the representation, thus traversing the boundaries of class and challenging the normativity of femininity and the ideals of beauty constructed by social intellectuals, the state, and hegemonic mores.

My objective therefore is to illuminate the relationship between each historical context and transformative and multilayered “Koreannesses,” particularly in terms of national beauty culture and women’s corporeal identity. Although many everyday beauty practices and performances of working-class Korean women have been restored through archival images and narratives, this restoration is insufficient. As Taylor writes, “archival, from the beginning, sustains power. Archival memory works across distance, over time and space” (19). Drawing on a variety of discursive/archival materials and forms of popular culture—including novels, essays,

advertisements, newspapers, in-house beauty/weekly magazines, and “webtoons”—I analyze how notions of K-Beauty have been promulgated and performed, beginning with Korea’s decision to participate in the Western capitalist economy at the turn of the twentieth century. By examining these various discursive sites of media, I demonstrate the ways in which K-Beauty has been developed and disseminated as once-familiar bodies become—or engage in performances of masquerades that become—visually ambiguous. In that process, the relationship between bodies and behavior, as Kim Ju Yon intimates, becomes theatrical (6).

In each chapter, I attempt to weave together a wide range of media, not only popular media such as cinema and magazines, including *Sunday Seoul* and in-house beauty magazines, but government policies and propaganda in relation to women’s fashion and consumption; literature (particularly novels); social events such as beauty pageants, parades of Korean actresses, and the sociocultural trend of “dance fever”; and the everyday life performances of marginalized Korean women in a public realm. Among these media, a variety of print publications are the focus of a significant portion of my discussion because, by the 1920s, print had become the dominant form in which knowledge was produced and everyday life was experienced in Korea. The publication of newspapers created a modern reading public. The readership was initially fragmented, roughly following the class lines of Joseon’s social status system (M. D. Shin 65–73). In other words, the primary readers of vernacular publications—those written in Korean only—were women and members of the lower classes, whereas mixed-script newspapers were produced primarily for educated elites. Such racialized, classed, and gendered divisions among readers during Japanese colonial rule continued to grow.⁵

⁵ According to Michael D. Shin, the print world, rooted in the rise of new social organization, played an important role in the formation of the colonial bourgeoisie. As he explains, “Though the industry enabled commoners and people of secondary status to rise to the elite, colonialism altered the dynamics of class development. When print capitalism fully emerged after 1919, it was not the new social force who dominated the print industry. Landed elites, who would have

Entering the era of the postliberation period, however, the main audience for cinema comprised middle-class women rather than men (Byeon). The sociocultural phenomenon of theater-going became, in its kinesthetic experience, a newly gendered performance. Journalists referred to the audience, increasingly composed of economically stable middle-class housewives, as “troops of rubber shoes” (*gomusinbuda*) (Gang). While 99 percent of Korean screenings between liberation and the Korean War were of foreign films, the 1960s were regarded as the “Golden era” of the South Korean film industry. As a primary channel to present new beauty ideals as performed by Korean and Hollywood actresses, cinema was consumed as a woman’s leisure activity. It also provided a medium to reproduce new modes of femininity for Korean middle-class women, as well as for lower-class laboring women whose earning power began to grow.

Several factors helped democratize the readership of print media and the consumption of cinema in the 1970s: the circulation of commercial magazines reached its peak, cinema became more popular, and the state even sponsored a certain genre of films during the Jeon Du-Hwan (Chun Doo-Hwan) government (1980–88). In addition, the era was marked by an increase in the rate of women’s higher education, a growth in women’s economic capabilities; and the emergence of proletariat “labor literature” (*nodong munhak*)” along with the Democratic movement during the 1980s.

More recently, existing media have had to face an enormous transition with the development of the internet and social media. Not only has the internet changed the mode of readership of Korean print media culture, but it created male-dominated online communities such as “DC [digital camera] Inside.” Although “DC Inside” evinces progressive characteristics, cultural critics have chastised its members for inappropriate productions of Korean young

been superseded in ‘normal’ capitalist development, were the main figures in turning the production of print into a large-scale industry” (60).

women and their everyday performances of beauty and consumption in a society (Korea) that is among the world's most wired (see chapter 4; Epstein and Jung).

I unravel the ideal embodiments of Korean beauty and the images and everyday life performances that are entangled with the government's top-down propaganda and control. Examples of such governmental intervention include the Japanese colonial decree that Korean women wear *momppe*, marking them as laboring bodies, or the "Simple Clothing Movement" of the Lee Seung-Man and Park Chung-Hee governments, which restricted women's consumption of imported commodities. I consider these top-down regulatory schemes against their inverse: the bottom-up performances—such as lower-class women's appropriation of Western fashion and culture (masquerade)—in which women used everyday life performance to challenge and resist the top-down hegemony.

Although the chapters are organized according to certain female categories that reflect each period, the various media platforms—cinema, novels, magazines, social events, everyday life performances, archival materials, government policies and legislation, and webtoons—cannot be so easily separated. Each medium is interwoven with the others and should be carefully connected to reveal the obscured presence of socially marginalized women. Such women remain largely invisible and underrepresented in the media as a whole, which even today fails to adequately incorporate working-class women's voices. Given the fact that most cultural producers of literature, cinema, magazines, and even webtoons and medical operations—not to mention writers of government policies—are elite male intellectuals, one encounters a certain limitation: in examining Korean women and surrounding issues, I often must work with materials that see women through the eyes of Korean men. As Kelly Y. Jeong explicates, the modern Korean masculine subject, often identified with the nation itself, responded and reacted to national crises and threats *through literature and cinema* "as particular symptoms, hostility, and even violence towards women" (ix–x). In other words,

assessing the wounded masculinity that we find in literary and cinematic texts provides another way of interrogating issues related to women, gender, and nationhood. “Women’s resistance, however, has continued as tenaciously as the history of the patriarchal system. . . . [T]heir resistance was not organized but formulated only on personal dimensions. . . . Although this challenge has been attempted every now and then *in literary works*, it could not reach beyond the frame of personal, existential angst,” as feminist writer Park Wan-Seo states (“introduction,” 8, emphasis added). Although I agree with Park’s appraisal, I have tried to assemble the fragmented vestiges of the modes of resistance of marginalized Korean women from these disparate media and temporalities.

In chapter 1, I address how proletarian Korean modern girls, rather than embodying an image of the elite upper- or middle-class Modern Girl, masqueraded as Japanese women and blurred class boundaries. In mastering the empire’s language (Japanese), as well as appearing as modern “beauties” (*mi-in*), these Korean modern girls subversively imitated and consumed the surface beauty of middle-class *moga* (Westernized Japanese women) under Japanese colonial rule in the 1920s–30s. These Korean women engaged in theatrical enactments of modern beauty and everyday performances of class and racial ambiguity not only to survive, but to attain power and agency.

In chapter 2, I unfold the social imageries of the *Après Girl* (*jeonghupayeoseong*), a nonnormative Korean woman who from 1945 to 1962 dismantled traditional notions of femininity and Confucian values, which insisted that women be chaste and kept in a subordinated, domestic role. This was a transitional period in which women’s everyday clothes were Westernized or liberated from the traditional *hanbok*, despite the state’s regulation of women’s clothes and bodies through its political strategies of containment. I contend that the images of the *Après Girl* were a social invention that functioned in the gap between a lived experience of exhaustion and despair, and the nation’s new construction of gender and class

identity, which developed under the influence of US cultural propaganda and the political and cultural intervention of the US military force.

In chapter 3, I argue that proletarian women laborers, who were derogatorily called Factory Girls, performed fashionable masquerades not only because they had gendered desires to attain new appearances, class mobility, and respectability, but because they sought to resist repressive state-imposed images that constrained female workers under Park Chung-Hee's military regime (1961–79). Through my extensive archival research from 1945 to the present of Amorepacific, a company that was emblematic of the Korean cosmetics industry, I also demonstrate that what has been dubbed K-Beauty was initiated not only as a way to promote culturally specific beauty rituals in Korean women's everyday lives, but as part of a state-sponsored and effectively regulated national industry.

In chapter 4, I investigate how recent neologisms and visual representations of young Korean women and their everyday enactments of beauty have helped formulate aspects of K-Beauty, and how these performances maintain or create class distinctions and social privileges. I particularly focus on two images: the first is that of the Soybean Paste Girl (*doenjangnyeo*), which refers to a young South Korean woman who overly consumes foreign-made luxury goods (*myeongpum*); and the second is that of the Gangnam Beauty (*gangnam-miin*), a young South Korean woman who has undergone multiple plastic surgeries and has achieved an "artificial" face. While the images of Soybean Paste Girls and Gangnam Beauties encapsulate young South Korean women's desire for upward mobility, they also reflect an ambivalent attitude toward tradition or materiality and locate one of the many tensions that highlight the uneasy blend of local and global demands made on Korean women.

Chapter 1. The Masquerade of Colonial Working-Class Modern Girls: Crossing Race and Class in Gyeongseong (Seoul) under Japanese Colonialism (1910–45)

In this chapter, I investigate the ways in which emerging working-class colonial Modern Girls were embodied as visually ambiguous figures in terms of race, gender, and class through their everyday performance of adornment and self-fashioning. As the iconic Western Modern Girl was appropriated and culturally translated across the world, its sociocultural implications were differently articulated in each new region. In the case of Korea, such cultural transactions occurred while another empire, Japan, occupied Korea. Despite the ubiquity of the representations of Modern Girls all over the world, each iteration had her own particularities according to regional politics of gender, race, and class. I focus on the ways in which the mysteriousness of one's appearance, or what I call *visual ambiguity*, as represented in different modes of print media during the time illuminates the shifting power dynamics and relationships between metropolis, culture and politics, and colonialism and nationalism—particularly in terms of race, gender, and class—during the Japanese colonial period(1910–45).¹

I use the term *visual ambiguity* here to describe the uncertainty of Korean Modern Girls' class, race, and gender identity, an uncertainty that was generated through the consumption of modern fashion. Korean women's consumption of modernity was selective and heterogeneous

¹ In this chapter, I draw substantial archival and literary evidence from the Korean daily newspapers *Joseon Ilbo*, *Dong-A Ilbo*, and *Mail Sinbo*; a woman's magazine, *Yeoseong*; and other more commercial magazines, such as *Byeolgeongon* and *Samcheonri*. All of these were published during the colonial period. While the Japanese Government-General of Korea published *Mail Sinbo*, the other two newspapers were published by nationalist intellectuals, which led the Japanese authority to censor and suspend them. Most authors in these daily newspapers were male elites, and even at *Yeoseong*, a woman's magazine published by *Joseon Ilbo* from 1936 to 1940, only 14 percent of the writers were women (which was still more than *Byeolgeongon* and *Samcheonri*, where fewer than 6 percent were women). In this sense, most of the images of young Korean women that I draw on were reflections of the male gaze and patriarchal ideology. As Japan's colonial rule shifted from a coercive military regime around 1919, cultural policy changed, and political censorship of these local publications was loosened, so that the publication and circulation of Korean commercial magazines substantively increased. Refer to Lee Yoon-Hee.

rather than uniform, so that the individual looks made the wearers undefinable (by the male gaze) along lines of class, gender, or race. I will show through an analysis of male intellectuals' writings on gendered bodily attributes and modern beauty (*miin*) how this visual ambiguity in fact fomented class mobility and fluidity of colonial female identity, thus potentially subverting colonial identity politics in everyday life. I will reveal the ways in which emerging working-class colonial Modern Girls achieved social privilege, agency, and class mobility through the everyday performances of class- and race-crossing. Consequently, this chapter proves the mobility and fluidity of the bodily embodiments of colonial working-class women, in contrast with the social classification that the male gaze imposed.

Based on visual representations of nonelite proletarian Modern Girls' fashion and beauty practices, rather than those of elite, bourgeoisie Modern Girls, I attempt to read the everyday life performances of sartorial ambiguity as a form of *masquerade*. The masquerade was a projection of colonial women's desire for upward mobility as well as a subversion of race and class against the Japanese colonial ideology (which stated that the Japanese were ethnically and culturally superior to Koreans). That is, this modern fashion helped disseminate key precepts of Western culture and modernity in print media such as newspapers, novels, and popular magazines, and these new feminine modes of being helped challenge the precepts of traditional Korean (and colonial) society. Women in patriarchal Korean society, as inflected by Japanese colonialism, had strictly assigned class and gender identities that were codified in their attire and that could not be altered; in adopting aspects of Western modernity, colonial Modern Girls changed their attire to change their identities, thus subverting the male gaze.

First and foremost, my argument presupposes that images of Korean Modern Girls consisted of heterogenous collectives in terms of profession, education, class, and economic status, as Suh Ji-Young rightly addresses, and in contrast to male elites' homogenous renditions of the Modern Girl in print media. In other words, I am not trying to discuss an idealized

embodiment of Korean Modern Girls as pioneering elites called “schoolgirls” (*yeohaksaeng*), or female *yuehaksaeng* who were highly educated abroad. As these schoolgirls showcased a form of colonial modernity and embodied a modern femininity in public through fashion and beauty in Korean society, they have long been the subjects of significant research among U.S. and Korean scholars. Instead, I want to examine working-class Modern Girls—such as *gisaeng* (professional courtesans), café waitress, shop girls, kiss girls, hand girls, and mannequin girls—and their bodily embodiments of Modern Girl-like fashions and beauty practices.² This chapter will reveal why some colonial Modern Girls from poor and uneducated backgrounds invented alternative identities, attaining privilege and power through self-adornment. In this respect, their corporeal embodiments of race and class as reflected in their representations of modern beauty serve as a *tactic* for the women to articulate new race and gender subjectivities.

Although colonial Modern Girls were idealized as highly educated middle- and upper-class women, nonelite working-class colonial women could encounter the iconic visuals of Modern Girls through magazines, which were easily accessible even for illiterate women. Magazines increased in circulation during the colonial period as a significant channel through which women could consume a nexus of modern aesthetics in everyday life. As Kim Kyeong-

² Although they were still limited, various female professions appeared and were often represented in daily newspapers and magazines at this time: factory girl; bus girl, who collected tickets; shop girl, who helped customers in department stores; dance girl, who made money by dancing in dance halls; *gisaeng*; café waitress; actress; kiss girl, who earned money by kissing men; hand girl, who helped old men walk; and mannequin girl, who displayed herself as a human mannequin in stores. Most shop girls, as high school graduates, were well educated, and the incomes of café waitresses and *gisaeng* were substantial enough that they became new consumers of the modern looks. Although I situate the print media images of these “emerging women” as those of working-class Modern Girls, I am not categorizing these women in the way that most scholars currently define the working class. I use this term to indicate their professions, jobs that were not primarily based on their intelligence, education, or professional capabilities. As I will document, these women’s family backgrounds and educations were not uniformly underprivileged. The fact that some shop girls and waitresses were in fact highly educated or born into the *yangban* (aristocratic) class helps to render these emerging women as “mysterious” or “unidentifiable” in terms of their class and social status.

Yeon argues, women's magazines (*yeoseong japji*) in the colonial period played a crucial educational role outside of the official women's educational institution that was called "a woman's school" (*yeohakkyo*), which systematically produced "schoolgirls," each of them destined to be a "wise mother and good wife" (K.-Y. Kim. 61). Opposed to the dominant discourse and institutions that upheld homogenous, traditional images of Korean women, women's magazines were an important sphere encompassing heterogenous women's muted voices of resistance against the patriarchal system, and a critical channel to consume Western aesthetics, values, and visual culture.

Western modernities were consumed by heterogenous classes of Korean Modern Girls to varying degrees and through different channels. For uneducated working-class Korean Modern Girls this consumption was more likely to entail appropriation of the visual elements of the Modern Girl rather than an understanding of her sociocultural implications. Within this system of cultural appropriation and translation, what I have identified in literature and popular culture is the representation of a "mysterious beauty" or ambiguity of Korean Modern Girls. This mysterious beauty arose from the gap between 1) privileged and socially idealized Modern Girls and 2) working-class Modern Girls, who look like or "pretend" to be girls in the first category. The work-class Modern Girls' masquerade was thus a matter of both class-crossing and race-crossing. Let me introduce two excerpts showcasing how the patriarchal gaze fixed Korean Modern Girls in terms of class:

A woman with a western suit (*yangjang*) gets out of a ramshackle house (*chogajip*). She walks through the street wearing the fancy dress that is several times more expensive than the collapsing house she lives in. ("Who Is Joseon's")

There are weird women who never give up glossy patent leather shoes and a fox-fur muffler even though shivering in this cold weather. . . . What they want is only to look

like a woman in a cutting-edge fashion, wearing glamorous makeup, *habudae* dress,³ and fox-fur muffler. Who is the face of Joseon [Korea] now? Is it a Modern Girl? Or *gisaeng*, or café waitress? (“Landscape”)⁴

In the first excerpt, the woman in the fancy *yangjang* is criticized for the fashion and its consumption, which seem not appropriate for her standard of living. This judgment is based on a Confucian legacy that emphasized frugality and imposed it as a womanly virtue. Long before the official period Japanese colonialism, Japan had already tried to annul all remnants of Confucianism through Gabo Reform (1894–96), especially class hierarchy and the men’s topknot hairstyle.⁵ If premodern Korean society followed Confucian values that required fashion to strictly signify the wearer’s class and social status, then modernization undermined both Korea’s class hierarchy and its Confucian clothing system. Ambiguity arose as the modernization of Korea destabilized fashion as a signifier of class. Jean Baudrillard contends that “there is no

³ *Habudae* was one of the signature fabrics originating in Japan. It was a unique and expensive fabric, and many Japanese Modern Girls dressed in *habudae* Western suits. Most of the daily newspapers and magazines represented it as a visual identifier of Modern Girls.

⁴ The excerpts that I use—especially from *Joseon Ilbo*, which was one of the initial Korean daily newspapers, and which was published from March 1920 until the early 1940s, when Japan stopped its publication as a part of the *Naseonilche* Movement—were called *Manmunmanhwa* and consisted of short notes and cartoons. These notes and caricatures addressed interesting news events in Gyeongseong and contributed to describing the rapidly changing city space. Within these items, the newly invented female professions were negatively portrayed by male authors, in large part because the young women made money by commodifying their bodies despite their substantial education. However, these emerging women in the new professions were fetishized, and they were considered Korean versions of Japanese working women in Ginza, Tokyo. For original archival materials, see M.-j. Shin.

⁵ Despite Korean resistance, Japan’s Gabo Reform initiated significant social reforms (*gaehwa*) and attempted to erase Confucian-inflected social ideologies; for example, it tried to eradicate class hierarchy, modified traditional garments, and passed a “short-hair act” (*danbalryeong*), all of which led to profound surface transformations. Accordingly, modernization allowed Korean women a certain flexibility in presenting their identities in public. The performance of identity through fashion was accelerated through the global circulation of an ever-expanding array of women’s fashion and beauty commodities, along with emerging visual media and consumer capitalism in the 1920s. For more details, see H. G. Lynn.

such thing as fashion in a society of cast and rank, since one is assigned a place irrevocably” (84); premodern Korean society had strict dress codes that designated one’s class and social status, so that clothing was stable and essentialized. One could wear certain colors of clothing that were linked to class and rank; specific hairstyles that signified status (i.e., a middle-class housewife vs. a lower-class woman); and shoes made from straw, rubber, or leather according to one’s economic status, which was primarily determined by social class until late in the nineteenth century. Regardless of class privilege, colonial women’s appearances came to be conflated such that class boundaries were visually blurred, intentionally or not. Although the woman in the first excerpt lives in a broken-down house, her fashion contradicts her economic background: the products that she consumes signifying a certain higher class and femininity. As the second excerpt reveals, while a woman is allegorized as the face or national identity of Joseon (Korea), she also generates emotional confusion and indeterminacy, blurring through her fashion choices the lines between Modern Girl, *gisaeng*, and café waitress. These three categories of Korean women should have been publicly distinguishable by looks and class.

Colonial Modern Girls and their bold public displays of modern fashion were socially condemned for their putatively deviant behavior that exaggerated women’s inherent vanity and extravagance. They were seen as morally corrupt women who indulged in Western materialism and consumerist capitalism (S.-J. Kim, *Modernity*). The Women, though, for their part, adopted these behaviors out of a certain gendered on the part of the colonized to catch up to the rapid speed of urbanization under the colonial gaze and alongside the influx of Western modernities; that is, the masquerade is a bodily performance that is undertaken for empowerment and agency in everyday life, a strategy of conforming to the patriarchy through the mimicry of modern beauty ideals and subverting the Japanese colonial ideology at the same time. As Gail Faurschou aptly puts it, the adornment of bodies, as a cultural practice and a form of consumption, involves “not only aesthetic and symbolic but a *political* terrain, an economy, that

marks and inscribes the most intimate surfaces of our skins” (68). For the colonial working-class Modern Girls, who were disempowered in the social imaginary, the act of adorning one’s body or presenting one’s looks according to one’s own desire, was an act of empowerment that countered the male gaze (the acting arbiter of decency, normalcy, and respectability). As Yoo Sun-Young rightly contends, “changing bodily appearance [per se] meant as much liberation as denial of, and resistance to, the tradition, history and norms” of the previous society (426).

In terms of performing race-crossing, the masquerade was enacted not only through fashion, but within a set of relations, a spatial matrix in which colonial ideology and the representation of fashion and beauty met; that is, several temporal and spatial contexts buttressed the theatrical aspects of the masquerade. An urban reform project reshaped Gyeongseong (Seoul), and its initial center, the Jongro area (Bukchon), declined as most of the important administrative buildings were moved into a Japanese commercial district in the 1920s⁶—what was called *jingogae* (Honmachi, Namchon). The result was that a new colonial city center emerged as a place with several exotic administrative complexes, commerce, entertainment, theaters, urban spectacle, and luxurious department stores. Because of such Japanese urban reforms, the colonized city was racially segregated between Bukchon as a district of poor Koreans and Namchon as a district of wealthy Japanese. Such racial and geographic segregation created the possibility for racial ambiguity between young Korean and Japanese women, especially as young Korean women crossed over the geographic boundary to get jobs in the Namchon area. In this specific context of the geographic demarcation and racial segregation of Gyeongseong, young working-class Korean women from different social strata

⁶ This district was marked by massive architectural projects, the most symbolic buildings among them being the Bank of Joseon and Gyeongseong Post Office, which faced each other on Hwangeumjeong Street. The Bank of Joseon, built between 1907 and 1912, was a white granite building in the Renaissance style, and the Gyeongseong Post Office, built between 1913 and 1915, featured a Baroque-style dome and arched entablatures on the red and white brick walls. See S.-M. Oh; and Kal.

and professions who appeared in public and in print media were identified by “what she was [they were] not” under a male gaze, a process that produced a sense of mystery, confusion, and indeterminacy. The male anxiety over Modern Girls arises from the male viewers’ inability to distinguish the colonized women in terms of class as well as race. Moreover, in its intensive political transitions and cultural permutations, the period from the early 1920s to the late 1930s was particularly critical. Japan loosened its forceful military grip on Korea after the March First Movement in 1919; turned from military rule to cultural rule; intensified compulsory education in the Japanese language; and even promoted *naeseonilche* (the idea that Korea and Japan are one entity and that Koreans should consider themselves the same ethnicity as the Japanese) to mobilize Korean subjects for war.

Against this backdrop of the colonial ideology and cultural politics, the performance of race-crossing was intimately interwoven with the Japanese imperialistic desire, a (Korean) patriarchal gaze, and colonized women’s gendered labor and racial identity. In other words, although consuming modern fashion could have offered a way for young colonial women to *become* pretty girls, this consumption was not simply an aesthetic practice or an objectification of female bodies for a male gaze. For working-class colonial Modern Girls, beauty was associated with a specific political context—*becoming Japanese*—that directly affected the literal and cultural geography of Gyeongseong as an extension of the Japanese empire. In terms of the Korean colonial working-class women’s performance as pretty Japanese girls in the Namchon area, the irony of this colonial ideology of *naeseonilche* lies in the fact that Japanese and Koreans are in fact biologically indistinguishable, which allowed modern fashion to obfuscate ethnic boundaries between the two. Although many scholars have argued that male intellectuals’ anxiety came from a perception that Gyeongsoeng explicitly showed the nation (Korea) as falling apart, overwhelmed by Western modernity and Japanese colonialism, I contend that their anxiety and negative observations of colonial Modern Girls and the colonized urban city

emerged instead from their failure to distinguish between Japanese women (as agents of translated modernity) and Korean women.

Performing Class-Crossing: Ambiguous Embodiment of Colonial Working-Class Modern Girls

U.S. and South Korean scholarship on colonial Modern Girls in Korea has paid less attention to working-class women than to elite bourgeois women such as Na Hye-Seok, Kim Hwal-Ran, Kim Myeong-Sun, and Kim Maria; they were the pioneers who helped import and disseminate the initial cultural phenomenon of the New Woman (*sinyeoseong*) in the 1920s and the Western fashion of the Modern Girl, with the intent of enlightening uneducated lower-class Korean women (H.-a. Kim; H.-s. Na). As Kim Susie addresses, as Korean women's fashion reform was undertaken by such elite upper-class New Women, who were exposed to Western culture through their early education abroad, these pioneering elite women attempted to suggest that wearing bobbed hair could represent a form of activism for liberating Korean women and critiquing patriarchal tradition and the social shackles imposed on women in the Confucianist society. Kim Hwal-Ran also encouraged wearing bobbed hair for its hygienic value and convenience in mundane life, and Na Hye-Seok shared her personal experience of bobbing hair and introduced it as a practical style.⁷ Kim Ki-Rim, a male novelist and modernist captured the ethos of colonial modernization in his appraisal of bobbed hair. Among his many writings, he wrote an essay entitled "Miss Korea, Bob Your Hair" (1932), which encouraged colonial young Korean women to cut their hair short to participate in global social changes and liberate themselves from traditional limitations and domestication. He asserted that "the 'bobbed hair' is

⁷ Although many scholars, both in the United States and South Korea, have discussed Korean Modern Girls either as actual historical agents or as representational figures, most academic discussions have focused on the ways in which elite Korean schoolgirls, as representatives of New Women or Modern Girls, navigated their lives as pioneers who tried to enlighten uneducated Korean girls and fight overtly against the Confucian societal system for Korean women's liberty. See I. Kwon; J. Y. Park; B. Kwon, "Paradoxical"; and M.-y. Wu.

the ultimate symbol of liberation and of women venturing outside,” and considered it to be the most significant external feature of modernization at the turn of the century.

As Alys Eve Weinbaum et al. enumerate, the Modern Girl had “numerous iconic visual elements including bobbed hair, painted lips, provocative clothing, elongated body, and open, easy smiles.” These visual elements established the Modern Girl as a cultural signifier of modernity and a new feminine subjectivity (2). Moreover, although Henry Em states that “in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century, one’s hair and clothes became intensively visible signs of political and cultural allegiance,” the social influence of and attention generated by the Modern Girl far exceeded the number of people who directly participated in the cultural phenomena (4). The Modern Girl was consequently more of a visual imaginary and representation than actual sartorial and beauty practice in daily life. Nevertheless, the Gyeongseong Modern Girl was a popular cultural figure, with her glamorous fashion and socially deviant attitude, as delineated below:

The first thing she does is smoking when [she] wakes up. And then, it will take almost two or three hours for her to wash her face and put on some makeup, and walk around the Hwasin and Donga department stores or other ones in Jingogae. . . . Although the lifestyle belongs to “ultra-Modern Girls,” I still don’t understand how she affords the expensive coats, fox-fur mufflers, glossy patent high-heeled shoes, white gold rings.

(“The Year”)

The specific fashion commodities—a coat, fox-fur muffler, heels, and gold ring—were not only visual markers of colonial Modern Girls but also material markers of Western modernity. Modern Girls were identified by both the consumption of fashion commodities and beauty routines *and* their daily strolls around department stores. As Heide Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger accurately articulate, “identity, image, and gender ideals have been historically bound to the consumption of commodities,” and “this consumption has led to the articulation of

alternative, often transgressive, behaviors and models of identification” (4). These fashion commodities would visually mark working-class colonial women in the image of educated middle-class Modern Girls and thus were bodily performances of transgression, in a certain way.⁸

Against the backdrop of the homogenous popular renditions of the colonial Modern Girls as extravagant and beauty-obsessed consumers, women did begin to enter a range of new professions, though their choices were severely limited:

A new working woman (*jikeopyeoseong*) called a *stick girl* recently appeared in Ginza, Tokyo, who helps an old man walk around by being his cane. . . . These new working women recently emerged in Gyeongseong as well even though their identities (*jeongche*) were unknown. These women, called *hand girls*, are slightly different from *stick girls* in Ginza; whereas a *stick girl* is a substitution for an old man’s leg, a *hand girl* was that for a man’s hand. . . . *Hand girl* would be the best to replace a Joseon Modern Girl who smiles freely at a man while touching his cheeks . . . When I see those female crowds dressing up very nicely in the streets, I simply think that they are just more *hand girls*. (“Hand Girl”)

Whereas this description of the new professions shows how much colonial women were restricted and limited to service labor in their choices, it also shows that they had a chance of entering into the public sphere. The male observer easily stereotypes the new working women as

⁸ Modern consumption itself was a classed practice in the colonized city. The department stores Hwasin and Donga, located at Jongro and mentioned in the above extract, were mostly targeted at middle-class Koreans, so these stores had more affordable products than the ones located at Jingogae. Yoo Sun-Young addresses class and the appropriation of Western modernity during the colonial period: “Two restrictions are placed on modernity when it becomes an object that is collectively desired and consumed in a society. One is the restriction that modernity can only be ‘appropriately’ consumed with a certain level of knowledge and information, and the other is the restriction of scarcity becoming a luxury. These restrictions were the driving forces that make modernity come to acquire the classificatory power of differentiating social classes—by becoming a cultural article deluxe” (426–27).

simply bad copies of Japanese Modern Girls in Ginza, and categorizes different kinds of jobs and roles—stick girl, hand girl, and Modern Girl—as indistinguishable. However, these new working women made money by commodifying their own bodies as prosthetic: by replacing an old man’s leg or hand. They were not only paid for their physical attractiveness but for their role as prosthetic bodies to old men who had difficulty in walking around. While these women’s identities were embodied as mysterious and unknowable, what led them to be identified as Joseon Modern Girls was their fashion. A fashionable public appearance was an important visual marker in terms of public recognition and visibility for working women. In this respect, Stuart Ewen sharply asserts that “style isn’t limited to the realm of subjectivity, but also functions as a significant component of power” (23). Women’s self-stylization was not necessarily predetermined by a male-centered society, but rather enacted to empower women. Although women’s self-fashioning and self-display might be interpreted as acts that objectified their bodies and reproduced beauty norms, a different way of interpreting these acts is possible. As Liz Conor astutely elaborates, “for women to identify themselves as modern, the performance of their gendered identity had to take place within the modern spectacularization of everyday life” (7). As she further illustrates, modern women performed their subjectivity through what she terms “techniques of appearing” as spectacles in public. One undertakes body adornment, of course, to promote beauty and physical attraction in some way. I propose that instead of understanding the act of female adornment through the lens of a homogenous voyeuristic gaze, we view women as not only claiming agency through their dress but also determining their social class and status through these external changes.

Meanwhile, during this social context of the 1920s, class mobility, more often downward than upward, further blurred class boundaries. News articles and essays offered stories of young *gisaeng* and waitresses who were originally from upper-class and prestigious families, but who descended in class after they became responsible for their whole families as the primary

breadwinners. Some women even voluntarily chose to be working-class women despite the social disrespect of their new jobs; for instance, some elite schoolgirls worked as café waitresses (*yeogeup*) and even professional courtesans (*gisaeng*). Public figure Bok Hye-Suk (1904–82) was well known as a film actress and as owner of a café called Venus, even though she was a well-educated elite woman, for instance.⁹ The popular Korean magazine *Samcheonri* published an interview with elite women who were working as courtesans in real life and who confided to the magazine about authoritative men, society, professions, and identity.¹⁰ Following is a part of the published discussion revealing certain colonial women's social class were rather mobile and fluid:

Male interviewer: Ladies, thank you for coming today. Most of you are top elites who are highly educated in Gyeongseong, Tokyo, or Shanghai. I assume each person has her own story as a working woman about your profession, male customers, paycheck, romance, and so on. Today, we would like to hear how you started working as courtesans and waitresses.

Kim: I started working as a *gisaeng* from a simple idea that . . . to make money like men and to be independent economically. In actuality, now I earn much more money than when I used to work as a teacher.

Lee: In my case, I am not working just for money. When I studied in Pyeongyang [a northern area of Joseon], I was interested in the fields of film and theater. But that doesn't make me money.

⁹ Venus was a popular café in the area of Namchon. Bok Hye-Suk was also a popular public figure to Koreans who lived outside of the city. See Y.-i. Lee on Bok and Venus.

¹⁰ *Samcheonri* and *Byeolgeongon*, popular magazines written in the Korean language, were disseminated to a wider readership than newspapers as they targeted popular interests.

Park: I remember a customer coming into Venus, where I work. He was very masculine and didn't talk much. I liked the guy . . . and he often gave me a big tip.

Yoon: That would be because they consider *gisaeng* as artists who have so many talents in music and dance, while *yeogeup* is a more low-birth or vulgar profession.

(“Discussion of Women Elites”)¹¹

Although most of the cases covered in the interview seem to be marked by downward mobility, some women also experienced upward mobility in terms of economic opportunity, as one of the interviewees states how she makes more money as a *gisaeng* than she did as a teacher. As these women's public discussion confirms, many colonial Modern Girls had been upper-class schoolgirls from privileged families before they started to work as *yeogeup* or *gisaeng* for different reasons, such as simply to make money or to pursue their artistic talents and passions even though the professions were not respected. They studied not only in Seoul, but in Tokyo and Shanghai. The important point is that they voluntarily chose to be working women.

However, that does not mean that these women represent all the possible cases of class mobility during this time. Rather, there were women who had no choice but to take up working-class professions. The preceding class structure collapsed and lost its function as an official social system when the Japanese colonial rule tried to eradicate the Confucianist-embedded class system by generating a new class structure and relations through Western consumer capitalism.

¹¹I omitted some parts of the interview that are not relevant to my argument here. Regarding class mobility and fluid class boundaries, there are many media representations of working Korean women such as café waitresses who studied a second language and read English poems and novels. Particularly, Yeom Sang-Seup's novel *Two Hearts (isim)* concerns an elite bourgeois Modern Girl, Park Chun-Gyeong, who descends into a lower class by being sold into prostitution. As Yeom intimates through Park's experience, the lives of working-class women were unstable, precarious, and fluid, as the spaces that Park occupies move from the center to the margins of Gyeongseong. The city is delineated as a symbolic space in the colony, one that embodies the fluidity of lower-class colonial women's lives through their occupations, movement, transitions, and loss of physical space.

Along with the political changes as well as the hypervisibility of the emerging working colonial women in print media, working-class women's consumption of modern fashions made their looks more ambiguous in terms of class. Consider an excerpt from an article in

Byeolgeongon:

An increasing number of new women recently come and go in Seoul. It is a great pleasure to run into such an *unknown beautiful woman* wearing a Western silk shawl with resplendent colors and patterns. Her fashion draws my attention and gives off irresistible eroticism . . . ! The *mysteriousness* makes me worship her like a religion; skin-toned high-heels, viscose silk stockings, braided hair with a black-satin ribbon, *slender calves like a doe*, a big handbag that she holds close to her breasts. She would probably be about seventeen. . . . I just wonder what kind of charming girl she is. ("The New Looks," emphasis added)

As Elfriede Dryer and Estelle McDowall expound, "In the city women are seen as part of the urban 'architecture,' something to be observed by the (male) flâneur, therefore they become part of the urban drama to be 'consumed' together with the other components of the city" (33).

Likewise, the new fashion and beauty of colonial women in the urban space was consumed and objectified in tandem with Gyeongseong's transformations under colonial rule. As the passage demonstrates, whereas the mysterious beauty is identified through her corporeality and bodily attributes—such as her shawl, heels, stockings, hair, and calves—nothing is exposed about her class or status. Rather the point of this passage is the wonder and curiosity felt by the male viewer. The affective response of a patriarchal projection intensifies the sense of arbitrariness and porousness of class boundaries as generated by the new fashions, as follows:

There are two groups of women leading a fashion trend (*yuehaeng*) in Gyeongseong. One is what is called New Women (*sinyeoseong*), and the other is women in *hwaryugye* [prostitutes]. Put simply, the fashion of *gisaeng* conflicts with that of housewives who

used to be schoolgirls. If working women (*jikoepyeseong*) such as actresses follow the fashion of schoolgirls, concubines follow that of *gisaeng*. (“The Fashion of 1931”)

This excerpt shows the ways in which Korean women’s class and social status were arbitrarily demarcated based on their fashion and bodily adornment. The consumption of modern fashion by different classes of colonial women made them ambiguous and transgressive figures in the urban scene. Thus, not only was the modern fashion consumed in fragments, but the patriarchal gaze was highly arbitrary in its demarcation of class and status boundaries. Along with early consumer capitalism, the new fashion system of *yuehaeng* helped develop a new female subjectivity and social class that were tethered to dressing skills, fashion commodities, and hair styles. The new sartorial system might have been in juxtaposition with the imperial structures of domination as “schemes of intelligibility that govern, and leave unaddressed and unquestionable, [racial] constitution and (mis)recognition” (Butler and Athanasiou 83). The techniques of self-adornment gave colonial working women the individual agency to manage their own bodies in everyday life.

Colonial Urban Reform of Gyeongseong: Racial Segregation/Ambiguity

Starting with the Japanese annexation that began in 1910, the demographics of Gyeongseong were radically altered through Japanese urban reform projects, and the city was racially segregated into two parts (Bukchon and Namchon [jingogae]), polarized areas that were developed asymmetrically under the emperor’s strategic urban reform. As Oh Se-Mi contends, this plan strategically aimed to “build a showcase city that would convey colonial ideology through architectural representations on the one hand and control[ing] movement and modes of seeing on the other hand,” in part by erasing the site of Gyeongbok Palace, the main royal palace of the Joseon dynasty (70). Namchon as a new urban center of the colonized city is described in the popular commercial magazine *Byeolgeongon* as follows:

. . . anyway now Japanese took over the current Jingogae. It became their heaven. Korean *Yangban* (aristocrats) were kicked out, while Japanese wealthy people occupied it. Even the Korean name Jingogae is changed into Bonjeong (*honmachi*). The place is full of two- or three-story Western-style houses, and the streets are always bustling. If you walk into the place now, it would be like traveling to Japan instead of Joseon.

(“Jingogae”)

The previous downtown area of Seoul, Jongro, became obsolete and crowded exclusively with poor Koreans. Japanese administrators created a schizophrenic colonial space of ethnic segregation instead of incorporating Koreans into the Japanese community. While Namchon, including the Jingogae area, was delineated as a space of pleasure, affluence, exoticism, and modernization, Bukchon became a space of the dispossessed, outdated, and primitive. The following description of Jongro (Chongno) from Kajiyama Toshiyuki’s novel *Gei no naka (Inside the Rainbow)* encapsulates such a racially segregated urban landscape:

While living in Seoul, Kaji absolutely refused to walk in the world of Chongno. That was pure Koreatown. To walk into that part of town strangled him in depression. One could go so far as to describe this as a feeling of numbness (*bukimi*). This feeling did not stem from a fear of Korean hostility toward the Japanese. It was simply an extremely chilling feeling that passed through Kaji. (qtd. in translation in Caprio 133)

The character Kaji expresses the heart of Koreatown as a primitive space, one that was so static, immutable, and immobile that he does not even want to walk into it. During the first decade of colonial military rule (1910–19), Koreans and Japanese were strictly separated, so that the “pure Koreatown” was considered a place of disorderly and primitive others: what the character Kaji feels about the place is also cultural stunting and backwardness, as embodied in a static product display and a shop owner’s outdated hairstyle: “the proprietor squatting in front of the shop’s entrance with his disorderly hairstyle seemed to fit in perfectly with the atmosphere of the

scene: a picture that had not changed for at least 1000 years” (Caprio 133). The pure Koreatown was represented as a place of exception, isolation, depression, and primitive otherness. The Japanese empire imagined Korea an inferior and subordinated colony; Kaji’s observation and affective response emblemizes the imaginary that the empire projected onto the colonized.

The two perspectives above—one from the colonized and the other from the colonizer—show how colonial hegemony controlled the colonial urban space and how the space was consumed as guided by its producer. As Ha Young-Chool puts it, “colonial space is recognized and defined by its artificiality, discontinuity, and arbitrariness” (45). The representations of the colonial urban space support an understanding of Gyeongseong as “an alienated other” (Pai). This process more accurately can be understood through the way in which the empire recognized Koreans:

Koreans are on a different level from the Japanese and thus it is difficult to put them under the same [education] system right away. After they learn the conditions, customs, and mannerisms of the Japanese, after the welfare of the people is secured through improvements in their level of culture, and after they develop the required knowledge, gradually they can be assimilated as Japanese. (qtd. in translation in Caprio 94)

Japan recognized the colonized as different and inferior. The assimilatory colonial discourse, as Christopher P. Hanscom and Dennis C. Washburn explain, “presents the colonized with a contradictory injunction, demanding that the colonized become the same—imperial subjects—while also maintaining racialized difference, thus justifying the on-going ‘civilizing’ role of the colonizer” (10). Meanwhile, in terms of urban reform, colonial governance of the space was directly informed by the assimilation policy, whose implementation was divided into three phases. First, military rule lasted until the March First Movement in 1919. During this period, the empire intensified segregation through the educational system, arrangement of residences, and even spaces of consumption. Second, the empire loosened its military grip and turned to

cultural rule after the massive March First movement, since it resulted from the repression of the previous military rule. During this period, Japan focused on removing the barriers between colonizer and colonized, but these efforts did not last long because of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Third, as Japan tried to use Koreans as laborers for war, it proposed the aforementioned idea of *naeseonilche* and tried to eradicate Korean cultural identity.¹²

As the empire pushed ahead with *naeseonilche* after 1937, the assimilation policy required Korea and Japan to become one Japanese entity—and Korean identity to be subsumed by Japan’s—to ensure Korean cooperation in the coming war. As Mark Caprio attests, the last few years of colonial rule were marked by “unprecedented measures to eradicate Korean culture and identity,” for example renaming Koreans with Japanese family names (42). Although *naeseonilche* purportedly transformed Koreans into Japanese citizens, it was simply intended to be a strategy to erase the racial particularities and cultural differences of Koreans. Kim Ji-Hye aptly observes that most cosmetic advertisements around the mid-1930s did not distinguish Korean women as Korean but instead interpellated them as “new Japanese ladies” and attempted to exclude Korean women who retained their own nationhood from being consumers.¹³ Particularly, as Hyung Gu Lynn aptly illustrates, the emerging female identities “were based not only on dualities of colonizer and colonized, but also on complex and often

¹² Regarding colonial policies, see Shin and Robinson; Caprio; Uchida; and Ku.

¹³ Furthermore, before the 1920s, when the Japanese colonial policy over Korea turned to cultural rule, the Japanese cosmetic advertisements that appeared in *Mail Sinbo*, published by the Japanese Government-General of Korea, featured a young upper-class Japanese woman wearing a kimono (a traditional Japanese female garment). The advertisement introduced a Japanese cosmetic by claiming that “anyone can have a beautiful white face if you use this powder. It is a huge fad now in Tokyo among many middle- and upper-class Japanese women.” This advertisement first and foremost assumes that Korean working-class women desired white skin in order to achieve not only a beauty ideal but also upward mobility. White skin itself can be understood as a marker of class—of economic affluence—in that it implies a life free from labor. Thus, the advertisement appealed to colonial women’s desire to transform their status. As such, the concept of “beauty” was intimately tied to the manifestation of social class. For more on the advertisements discussed here, see J.-M. Ma.

contradictory negotiations and constructions of beliefs and desires associated with modernity, industrialization, and the colonial project” (76). It is essential to connect the formation of colonial female subjectivity with the colonial governance of the space as well as with imperialist ideologies of beauty (*miin*). The concept of beauty at that time was especially racialized, as colonial rule affected the way that Koreans perceived “beauty.” The following example from male Korean novelist Choe Dok-Gyeon’s serialized novel *Hwangwonhaeng* (1929) helps explicate how racialized beauty ideals were visually manifested and conflated with Westernized beauty ideals:

“I-zzang! Customer!!”

Hearing someone yell, *a tall and slender beauty* in a Western dress suit slowly appeared out of nowhere; her light gait was just like that of a dancer.

“Welcome, it’s been a while since you visited the last time” [in Japanese].

Such cheerful talking belonged only to a woman who was born in Pyongyang and had lived long in Seoul. The beauty in a Western suit, called “I-zzang,” was a Joseon woman, and [also working there was] a *Joseon woman pretending to be a Japanese*.

She had an exceptional femininity from her straight and long legs, which got along with her skin-toned *habudae* Western suit. (8, emphasis added)

This scene describes a moment when the male narrator meet a Joseon waitress who is called by the Japanese name I-zzang. She is working at an upscale *Cheongyori* restaurant located somewhere in Namchon.¹⁴ The narrator seems not to immediately realize that I-zzang is a Korean woman because of her fluent Japanese and stylization, exemplified by her expensive

¹⁴ In Gyeongseong, wealthy Japanese owned *Cheongyori* (Chinese cuisine) restaurants. The upscale restaurants were gathered around Namchon and Jingogae, where the Japanese Government-General of Joseon was located beginning in 1926. Around this time, Japanese took over the Jingogae area and called it Bonjeongtong, which became a center of commercial trade and markets for imported Western/Japanese commodities, in contrast with Bukchon, where Koreans lived. Regarding the spatial transformations of this area, see Mi-seon Kim.

habudae dress, one of the signature fabrics originating in Japan. He is confused, even though he knows that “another Joseon woman pretending to be a Japanese” works at the same restaurant. All of her bodily movements, her physical attributes—tall and slender body, and exposed long legs—and her perfect mastery of the colonizer’s language lead him to assume that she is a sophisticated Japanese girl. In terms of physical attributes, I-zzang’s thinness reflects the growing social influence of Westernized beauty standards. Women’s fashionable bodies “may have helped [their] rise in class,” as “the culture of slimness began in [the] upper classes, and developing a thin body was thus a way of marking oneself as being from a higher class,” as Carolyn Comiskey argues (38). The way that I-zzang is embodied exemplifies the racialized beauty ideals, and colonial working-class women’s efforts to imitate them. Superimposed on the Japanese beauty ideals are Western corporeal aesthetics that the colony simultaneously appropriated.¹⁵ The dual beauty ideals become more explicit in the following excerpt:

. . . it is a silhouette (*yaueseonhyeong*) [that is important] when you hire a mannequin girl; it is important even when you choose a bride, a shop girl, a café waitress, or an actress. All you need to care for is her curve. This is important even when you introduce your wife to friends, she needs to have a slim curve. It seems like things are well sold when a shop girl has a slender silhouette. (“The Era”)

As Sean Metzger addresses, a silhouette registers a restricted form but also an incipient process of becoming. The act of becoming a woman was a paradoxical harbinger of modern femininity and gendered labor. This construction of new femininity through the silhouettes influenced by the West changed the way that colonial working-class women might imagine their bodies. As

¹⁵ Rather than being a voluntary adoption of Western beauty ideals, this appropriation was partly promoted by the colonial rule. As Hyung Gu Lynn elaborates, “Explicitly linking Korean clothes with ‘backwardness’ and ‘simpleness’ buttressed one of the ideological justifications of colonial rule and the constructions of ethnic difference. Japanese colonial guidance, would supposedly liberate the Korean people from a corrupt and stagnant Joseon Dynasty, and lead them towards modernity” (79).

this excerpt also suggests, colonial women—mannequin girls, shop girls, waitresses, actresses, and even brides—who had slender silhouettes would be well hired and even well married.

In terms of modern femininity, after the First World War, a new fashion style that was emblemized by a knee-length skirt influenced the rise of a new beauty and fashion ideal from France of the 1920s. This ideal deemphasized breasts and waistlines so that visual attention was shifted to legs. The youthful but boyish look emphasized a slenderness of body, especially a svelte leg and calf, which “was so essential in finding a mate and in obtaining and keeping a job” (Comiskey 32). As Comiskey further illuminates, the glorification of thinner calves helped young women maintain a successful career and improve their class status, goals that paralleled the desire for upward mobility that suffuses Japanese cosmetic advertisements.¹⁶ Not only a woman’s fashion but also her body type and even her way of walking and talking contribute to her status as a beautiful (and socially elevated) woman.¹⁷

In terms of gendered labor, both in the workplace and in the “marriage market,” as an interview published in *Samcheonri* in 1933 suggests, a significant number of women even sought jobs to secure advantageous marriages. As a result, several department stores were considered to be marriage markets:

If there were a marriage market, it would be a woman’s school and a department store.

Since men aren’t allowed to enter woman’s schools, only department stores are left to be

¹⁶ Comiskey further explains the complex relationship between body, fashion, and class in Paris in the 1920s, where women had opportunities to rise into the upper ranks of fashion. For instance, Coco Chanel began working as a day laborer in a fashion house. In addition, being considered attractive was necessary for social advancement and for success in certain public-facing jobs (37–38).

¹⁷ In terms of Westernized beauty ideals, *Maeil Sinbo* announced a “back-beauty competition” taking place in the United States, with a photo of the female participants wearing black open-back swim suits, described as follows: “it is now outdated judging beauties (*min*) based on whether one’s face is pretty or not,” because what one “needs to be a modern beauty, most of all, [is] a beautiful back and neck.” See “Back-Beauty Competition.”

privileged places for meeting men. Especially, everyone can see shop girls working there, and these women are relatively well educated, so lots of men have lately been going to department stores to pick brides up. An executive of Mitsukoshi department store once told me that most of the shop girls quit their jobs for marriage within three months of starting work. Marriages are much easier for the shop girls. (“Discussion”)

The Mitsukoshi department store was the first department store built in the area of Jingogae whose primary male customers were upper-class Japanese and Koreans. In contrast, Hwasin and Donga department stores in Jongro sold more affordable products and were targeted at middle-class Koreans.¹⁸

But in cases like that of I-zzang, modern fashion enabled marginalized colonial women to *not* be marked as Korean women laborers, and thus I-zzang’s pretending was a *masquerade* to help her blend into a racialized space, become visible as a seemingly Japanese pretty girl, and attain a stable livelihood. The everyday practice of self-fashioning was not a simple aesthetic practice, but rather a masquerade to secure a future amid a precarious life. As Jennifer Craik aptly elucidates, “codes of dress are technical devices which articulate the relationship between a particular body and its lived milieu, the space occupied by bodies and constituted by bodily actions. In other words, clothes construct a personal *habitus*” (4). Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* is intimately connected to the performativity of *passing* in relation to spatiality, as he argues:

we say of a piece of clothing, a piece of furniture, or a book: “that looks pretty bourgeois” or “that’s intellectual.” What are the social conditions of possibility of such a judgment? First, it presupposes that taste (or habitus) as a system of schemes of classification, is objectively referred, via the social conditionings that produced it, to a social condition:

¹⁸ See my footnote 8 above.

agents classify themselves, expose themselves to classification, by choosing, in conformity with their taste, different attributes (clothes, types of food, drinks, sports, friends) that go well together and that go well with them or, more exactly, suit their position. ("Social Space" 19)

As Bourdieu further explained, *habitus* implies a "sense of one's place" and a "sense of place of others"; I-zzang's appearance reflects her choice to conform to Japanese taste and thus to blend into the space of *others*. Hence, her embrace of the expensive *habudae* suit and mastery of the Japanese language might be culturally forced, or undertaken by necessity, so that she would not be marked as a Korean girl who was considered a "primitive" and "outdated" other. The consumption of expensive clothing and cosmetics, indeed, might be beyond these working women's means, a fact that could make them objects of social condemnation: as a male journal writer opined, "how can they be considered legitimate working women if all they know is buying expensive cosmetics and clothing with money extorted from [the] bourgeoisie by becoming a commodity?" ("When Intelligent"). However, as Bourdieu might contend, we need to regard the consumption of I-zzang and others from a different perspective than as a pretext to challenge their legitimacy as working women. The working women consumed modern fashion commodities not to satisfy "women's inherent vanity" but to cross racial lines and thus potentially subvert colonial paradoxical racial politics. Although Japan promoted *naeseonilche*, the idea that Japanese and Koreans were the same entity on surface, it did so out of an imperialistic desire to mobilize Koreans for war. Japan continued to imply Koreans' backwardness through colonial ideologies.

A way of dressing, self-representation, or self-fashioning is a "technical device" to express a spatial tension between a body (self) and its surroundings, and in the context of Korean modernity it also reflected the spatial tension between the colonized space and colonial working women such as I-zzang. Therefore, the new fashion and aesthetics of beauty, as

techniques of self-fashioning, helped engender the intimate relationship between the body and the space, or a *habitus*. The space of the empire, Namchon, produced its own regularities and practices that were sanctioned within it; I-zzang's pretense of being a different racial body and adopting different tastes was possibly a practice of "common sense" to hide in plain sight in that specific place. Consequently, the pretense of the two Korean girls—I-zzang and her fellow waitress—represents a mundane performance based on their perception and experience of how the Japanese classify them. Hence, the fashion of colonial working-class Modern Girls manifests the tension between their bodies and the spaces that they inhabit, and functions as a critical site for negotiating racial identity and social visibility.

Countering this spatial immobility and segregation, however, was a simultaneous increase in class and racial mobility, achieved partly through the embodiment of ambiguity. I see such visual culture as described in the print media as a critical factor that created social mobility in Gyeongseong. Although the social mobility remained in the realm of the popular cultural imaginary, it offers us a crucial window into how such corporeal embodiments transformed the otherwise immobile colonial space. The bodily embodiments of the colonial working-class women are mobile and fluid, in contrast with the social classification of these groups of women that the male gaze imposed. A representative article titled "The Great Gyeongseong's SOS" (1934) expresses a concern over "gray women" (*hoesaeknyeoseong*), who present themselves as ambiguous or who seem to cross the line demarcating social class through their appearance:

The exterior boundary between a schoolgirl and a courtesan has been recently blurred so much so that it is difficult to tell which one is a schoolgirl or a courtesan [in Gyeongseong]. Likewise, as many courtesans *pretend* to be schoolgirls, real schoolgirls must keep the surface boundary clear instead of imitating the fashion and appearance of *gisaeng*. Schoolgirls should keep their own honor and modesty so that *these gray women do not cross over the line*. (emphasis added)

The author assumes that patriarchal society was disconcerted by these ambiguous women who transgressed social norms. The images of “gray women” were as attributed to transgressors who endangered a social system that was maintained and routinized through categorizations and classifications. As Rey Chow importantly argues in relation to the imperialist gaze, the act of stereotyping reduces the world to observable and manageable units (*Protestant* 51); the example above evidences a social anxiety triggered by women’s appearances or looks, which lost their reliable social function of marking class and identity in the women (heretofore objects of social control). The curiosity of the male gaze at the sight of unknown and mysterious women walking in the city could be satisfied if these women pretended to be someone else or crossed the line by consuming new beauty ideals and modern fashion. The practice of pretending can be interpreted as a form of passing—a way to transcend one’s given identity in terms of class, gender, and race/ethnicity, which were otherwise difficult to alter within the social structure.

Therefore, against a context of modern beauty ideals generated under Japanese colonialism and Western modernity, the corporeal embodiments of working-class colonial women were constantly conflicted and negotiated within a central duality. The doubly racialized beauty standards reified and justified notions of Japanese ethnic superiority to working-class Korean women. In order to attain social privilege, certain colonial women had to impersonate—or masquerade as—Japanese women, emulating their ideals of beauty. Considering these female subjects as racial drags through the everyday performances of “pretending” and “crossing the racial line,” I am specifically drawn to Tina Chen’s term *impersonation* as the performance of racial passing, through which women “wrestle not only with the tactic of how to perform as well as undermine racial constructions but also with the implications and contexts of such performances as they are affected by specific cultural, historical, and political circumstances” (7). The colonial working-class woman as a viable category of identity engaged in a complicated but “not so secret” quotidian performance in search of her own femininity, agency, and beauty.

The masquerade also challenges the notion of authenticity of Modern Girls as a reflection of colonial male elites and male authority, by questioning the patriarchal distinctions between real and fake.

Performing Masquerade as an Everyday Tactic of Empowerment and Agency

Mail Sinbo published an article entitled “Why Does a Woman Need Makeup?” in 1919, stating that “becoming a beauty” is a privilege for women that could entail empowerment:

What would be a weapon for a woman to survive and to be a useful person in the world?

What would be a power for a woman to survive in an extraordinary position in a society?

Needless to say, it would be the power of beauty. . . . Beauty is the power allowed only to women (qtd. in T.-u. Song 178–79).

This article implies that beauty offers women a power that they can use to survive and be successful in society. It concludes that makeup is a tool to help a woman become a beauty. Along with emerging modern beauty aesthetics, self-fashioning through makeup is necessary not only to “become pretty,” but also to survive in a male-centered society as a woman; that is, beauty pays. During the time when this article was published, female professions were highly restricted, and few positions were available, so Korean women’s primary options for survival were likely to either be married or have a relatively well paid job by sacrificing respectability.

To see how beauty could empower women, we can examine Korean male writer Bang In-Geun’s short novel *Mo-Bo, Mo-Girl* (1936).¹⁹ The male protagonist, M, is a wealthy elite young man who used to live in a rural area. He moved to Gyeongseong and adorned himself as a modern boy. His indulgence in urban life, however, was challenged by the marriage that his parents arranged for him. He did not like his bride because she looked like a dowdy, unpolished

¹⁹ Bang In-Geun (1899–1975) studied German literature in Japan and published several magazines during the colonial period. His novel *Mo-Bo, Mo-Girl* was published by *Shindonga*, a Korean magazine that entered circulation in 1931.

rural woman. Unlike elite schoolgirls in the city, she was neither sophisticated nor well dressed. He consequently did not visit her for five years after the marriage, enjoying his life in Gyeongseong. When he heard that his wife had left to return to her parents, he did not care because he was interested in flirting only with Modern Girls. M persistently asks his friend, R, to introduce him to a schoolgirl, a Modern Girl. R finally introduces M to H, such a type, and M falls in love with her at first sight:

M thought H was the most beautiful and interesting girl ever seen. . . . She walked toward me and looked just like my dream-girl. She was wearing a *knee-length short skirt*, and I saw her *white straight legs* which were just like a marble sculpture. Her legs were glowing with her *soft silk socks*. She was holding her *handbag* like a book bundle, *tilting her head slightly*, and *blinking her starry eyes*.

When M looked through her legs, he found her *patent high-heels* that were so fashionable. The heels were so high and their tip was pointier than a gimlet . . . her pretty face, and *wavy chignon*. (Bang 110–11)

M likes H's appearance and thinks that she is his dream girl. However, the story ends with a twist; H later turns out to be M's wife from his arranged marriage, not a Modern Girl at all. The story unfolds through the wife's voice, as she confesses to her husband that she educated herself to *become* a Modern Girl. She was saddened and frustrated by her husband's lack of faithfulness to their marriage. When she realized that her husband wanted a schoolgirl type, she decided to "make over" herself to look like a schoolgirl. With R's help, she appeared before her husband, who did not recognize her at first. The story illustrates exactly how fashion is performative and can be used as an identity-shaping practice. As Shu-Mei Shih contends, seduction by visual practice is an identity practice, and thus a visual trope provides a "primary means of identification" (8). The unattended traditional wife uses fashion to transform herself into a schoolgirl and Modern Girl, whose presence as an object of attention always creates a spectacle.

Indeed, H's self-adornments shift the dynamic of the relationship within her marriage. The unattended, unloved traditional wife earns what she had wanted; she proves that the schoolgirl image that her husband admired was not innate but "achieved," and she makes him return to her. The narrative foregrounds how (gender) identities can be constructed and destabilized through imitation. As Diana Crane rightly stresses, as "one of the most visible markers of social status and gender and therefore useful in maintaining or subverting symbolic boundaries, clothing is an indication of how people in different eras have perceived their positions in social structures and negotiated status boundaries" (1). Since H's specific clothing—the silk socks, patent high-heeled shoes, short skirt, and handbag—make the husband perceive her as a fashionable schoolgirl, fashion has played a role in subverting her identity as a traditional housewife. The performance of fashion and dressing up, therefore, is an act of *becoming* someone else; that is, in this case, the image of the schoolgirl is an ideal of beauty that empowers the woman.

Through their bodily performance of overstepping the boundaries of class and race, colonial working-class Modern Girls performed their own identities to counter those socially assigned to them. However, I do not claim that representations of their transgression reflect a form of pure social resistance; instead, I see them as a nexus for the struggles, negotiations, and survival of colonial working-class Modern Girls. My claim might be more convincing when applied to an image of Lee Gyeong-Ok, protagonist of one of Yeom Sang-Seup's early novels, *A Court Waiting Room* (*geomsaguk daehapsil*), published in 1925.²⁰ The following passages encapsulate the misrecognition, or perception of visual ambiguity, that occurs when X, who is a journalist, sees Lee:

²⁰ Yeom Sang-seop (1897–1963) was a pioneering Korean modern novelist. He helped establish modern literature in Korea during the colonial period.

She is certainly not a schoolgirl from her modest appearance. She's wearing a dark-greenish skirt with a white cotton jacket and a jade-color shawl around her shoulder; but she seems rather more like a teacher or a nanny than a (middle-class) housewife because of her yellowish, but lighter, high heels stained with some soil and dirt. But I am convinced she is around thirty years old. (1)

After that, I still don't know whether she is eventually confined to wearing a simple tieless skirt jacket or still flirting with another guy for his money and expensive Chinese cuisine or studying prudishly like a schoolgirl. . . . Now, I am looking at schoolgirls wearing a chignon in the street, but I just give a long look at those girls passing by me wearing greenish skirts, the same as Lee's, and those so-called new women dropping their heads pretending to be modest. (2)

X originally meets Lee in court, but he thinks from her appearance that she does not belong there, since she seems to be the daughter of a wealthy family. However, even after X realizes that she is a prostitute who habitually extorts wealthy men's money, he is reluctant to believe it. In the first extract, X recalls the Lee Gyeong-Ok whom he met at court. When he first met Lee, he wondered whether she was a schoolgirl, a teacher, a nanny, or a housewife. He soon convinced himself that she was certainly not a schoolgirl because she wore a modest white cotton jacket.²¹ That was not a typical accoutrement among schoolgirls who were sensitive to fashion, but rather garb worn by middle-class housewives. Nonetheless, X does not think that Lee is a middle-class housewife either because of her soiled heels, which a modest housewife would not be seen sporting. He therefore assumes that Lee might have a job caring for children in a lower-level school or for babies, which would explain the dirt.

²¹ A white cotton, padded jacket (*Mumyeong*) was usually worn by common people. It was considered a practical and simple form of traditional clothing for housewives (Brown 81).

In the second extract, X is reminded of Lee again when he sees a crowd of schoolgirls who wear chignons and dark green skirts, much like Lee. Lee's fashion again makes X think that she is a wealthy schoolgirl. He wonders about her whereabouts, and about whether she is committing fraud again by flirting with another man somewhere as she used to. It was not unusual for even news articles at this time to feature titles such as "A Beauty Turns Out to Be a Prostitute" or "A Beauty Turns Out to Be a Monster," a transformation that also reflects a form of visual misrecognition, as many scholars have pointed out.²² The representation confirms the performativity of fashion, which could thus easily engender misrecognition and subvert the fixed visualizations of identities through *passing*.

As Lee's case demonstrates, a colonial working-woman's identity was embodied based on "what she was not": housewife, teacher, schoolgirl, or prostitute. New aesthetic ideals empowered colonial women in a certain way; the self-fashioning of working women through modern looks allowed them to evade being identified in public as working-class women, and instead be recognized as "unknown and mysterious." This kinesthetic strategy allowed working-class colonial women's identities to be constructed by "what they were not" instead. These women thereby might have been able to escape the social condemnation or stigmatization of being working class. The visual ambiguity therefore empowered at least certain working-class women, and thus helped create some class mobility through the transgression and subversion of social normativity that was produced by the ruling class and the Japanese empire. As noted, the colonial space was especially racially demarcated so that people were reluctant to cross its geographic lines. Traversing the geographic rigidity of that space, working-class Modern Girls crossed the lines of language, clothing, taste, status, class, and race in the name of "beauty."

²² See the following news article as an example: "A Prostitute Disguising as a Schoolgirl Extorted Wealthy Men's Money," *Mail Sinbo*, 1924.06.28.

The class mobility that I address might have remained as an imaginary, or fantasy of the colonial society whose print media was dominated by Korean male elites. It is unclear to what extent the representations of colonial working-class women documented the reality of the colonial period, but my research gives us new access to the lives of unaddressed numbers of women who were voiceless in the discourse of colonial modernity. The everyday performance of “gray women,” or their embodiment of visual ambiguity, hints at the imagination with which these underrepresented female activists disrupted the segregation of urban space, race, and class and opposed colonial ideology and power. As Lewis Mumford, a progressive scholar in urban planning, imagines it, the city represents a theater of social action: “the city creates the theater and is the theater” (94). The experienced embodiments of colonial working-class women—as actors and agents of the masquerades of *passing* and class-crossing—show them performing their own identities against their prescribed social positions in order to survive, secure their livelihoods, and escape marginalization. More importantly, their acts of masquerade potentially subverted colonial assimilation politics by performing resemblance and difference at the same time. One might think that the social mobility that colonial working women created was trivial or meaningless and a mere reflection of colonial fantasy. For bell hooks, important possibilities for political transformation arise from everyday life, and marginality can represent a “site of deprivation” and a “location of resistance” at the same time (151). In their everyday lives, working women experienced disempowerment and oppression in terms of race, class, and gender as their identities were defined mostly by what they were “not”—pioneering feminists, elite New Women, or legitimate Modern Girls. The masquerades of these emerging working-class women, at least in their imaginary, embodied liberation and empowerment through their practices of modern fashion and beauty, and in their resistance to the doubly oppressive social structure that imposed Confucian values and Japanese colonialism on them.

Chapter 2. The Transpacific Memory of Beauty, Dance Fever, and Nationalism:

National Propaganda and the Embodiments of *Après* Girls (1945–63)

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which *Après* Girls (*jeonhupayeoseong*) were materialized and culturally embodied as a “site” of Western modernity from the liberation in 1945 to the early 1960s.¹ Their representation was mediated by the US military force and national gender and class politics, especially in terms of fashion and beauty. *Après* means *after* in French, and *Après Girl* refers to specific, collective, embodied identities that emerged among Korean women after the Korean War. *Après* Girls also emblemized Korean women’s nonnormative femininity, entering into the public sphere through labor, the consumption of Western fashion and beauty, and the new experience of US culture, as mediated by encounters with the US military after the Japanese colonial period (B. Kwon, “Existence” 79).²

As Cynthia Enloe elucidates, the US military created various conditions for different groups of women—such as military brides, wartime rape victims, and military prostitutes—and different constructions of femininity to serve its objectives. Likewise, according to Lee Yu Jung, there were “Korean camp show entertainers as cultural [and mobile] workers, whose careers developed in the same location as the U.S. military camps and in service of American soldiers, but whose paths diverged from their fellow women” (10). That is, although some Korean songstresses such as the Kim Sisters and Yun Bok-Hee of the Korean Kittens earned international popularity, economic security, and respectability along with physical mobility

¹ The historical background that I address in this chapter pertains to the Lee Seung-Man government from 1945 to 1960. However, my argument regarding the state’s Simple Clothing propaganda and export-driven economic agenda needs to be extended to the early period of the Park Chung-Hee military regime, since it formed part of the continuum of the state’s top-down regulation of women’s fashion and beauty practices.

² Although Kwon differentiates Madame Freedom from the *Après* Girls because the former is not associated with the experience of the Korean War while the latter is, I view the two together because they both countered the state’s regulations of dancing and fashion, albeit differently.

abroad, the majority of young female showgirls and entertainers working at the EUSAK (the Eighth United States Army of Korea) were stigmatized as the equivalent of military prostitutes.³ These different incarnations of proletarian Korean women—which seemingly diverged across class, labor, and social status, and yet often overlapped and remained indistinguishable—represented contested sites for embodying not only the shifting politics of transpacific wars on a global scale, but the national politics of gender, labor, and class in 1950s Korea.

In a similar sense, the incarnations of *Après Girls* reveal the ambiguous parameters of class, femininity, and social status; they include Madame Freedom (*jayubuwin*, a middle-class housewife),⁴ college girls, war widows, showgirls, dancers, military brides, and GI military prostitutes (*yanggongju*).⁵ These seemingly disparate categories of women are held together by

³ According to Danielle Seid, along with Anna May Wong and Nancy Kwan, the Kim Sisters embodied “Asian/American chic . . . by crafting their appearance from the raw material of cultural ideas about femininity, sexuality, glamour, race, and nation” in US popular culture during the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s (Seid 1256).

⁴ The notion of Madame Freedom was based on a serialized novel of the same name written by Bi-Seok Jeong, a Korean male novelist, and published by *Seoul Daily* from January 1 to August 6, 1954. The Korean male director Hyeong-Mo Han adapted it into a film in 1956, which became the most watched film in Korea in the 1950s. The novel describes the journey from housewife to working woman for Seon-Yeong, a middle-class professor’s wife. That process provides her with a way to explore her identity and redefine femininity, labor, and corporeality. She works as the manager of a boutique, Paris Import, selling high-end imported perfumes and accessories, and she explores her femininity/sexuality by going out to dance halls. Madame Freedom was embodied as a morally corrupted married woman who frequented dance halls, and the meanings of *dance* and *dance halls* were interlocked with the construction of her femininity/sexuality. The novel triggered widespread social disputes about Korean women’s labor and dancing, as Seon-Yeong’s journey challenged women’s traditional roles as mothers and wives.

⁵ During the postwar period of Korea, young Korean women in urban areas who were engaged in the entertainment industry or in the beauty/fashion sectors—winners of national beauty pageants, hairdressers, flight attendants, entertainers (dancers/singers)—emerged as a newly privileged class. These professional women were able to travel for their performances even when Korea proscribed traveling abroad. There are archival records of women entertainers and flight attendants who were active before the government lifted the ban on international travel. The ban was conditionally lifted in 1983 for people who had exceptional reasons to travel, such as international study or business trips. General travel abroad became permissible after 1989. All relevant collections can be accessed through the National Archive of Korea’s online database.

“dance fever” (*chumbaram*), through which Korean women mingled not only US servicemen but also Korean middle-class married men and male college students. Dance parties were primarily mediated by and coordinated with the occupying US military forces. As JOO Chang-Yun observes, the dance fever that swept through Korean society in the 1950s, and the attendant proliferation of dance halls, was orchestrated by the “Nak-Rang Club,” a secret elite women’s social club and focused on a privileged class of women; the craze thereafter spread to middle-class women. Indeed, dance fever was a crucial sociocultural phenomenon in 1950s Korea in relation to both Americanization and to performances of *Après Girls*.⁶ At the dance halls, different classes of women accessed certain aspects of US culture, when such access was still limited.⁷

Après Girl performances therefore should be examined in reference to the kinesthetic experience of going to dance halls and theaters. Such entertainment offered a moment of ephemeral escape from an often less-than-cheery reality for middle-class women who appropriated dance as a leisure activity, while for many working-class women it simultaneously represented a workplace that was structured by the power relationships that controlled gender, class, and racial identity. My examination of *Après Girls* in relation to dance fever and theater-going, and in conjunction with the state’s policy of ordinary women’s Western fashion and consumption, will reveal the multilayered notion of K-Beauty during the postwar period of Korea. That notion is inseparable from the social demand that women laborers replace men’s work power after the war; a shifting class ideology; and women’s gendered desire to present their corporeality and femininity to subvert the state’s top-down propaganda, which imposed

⁶ Dance parties were not restricted only to dance halls. Dance happened more broadly at cafés, cabarets, and upscale restaurants. See “Dance Fever.”

⁷ The dance halls were initially built for the US soldiers, and Korean women were allowed to enter only when accompanying them. I provide more details of this interaction later in this chapter.

traditional gender roles on women. As Stephen Brooke alleges, “the interweaving of changes in the bases of class and gender identity in the fifties opened up a gap between lived experience and the construction of gender and class identity” (756). As such, I contend that the embodiments of the *Après Girls* were a social invention that functioned in the gap between a lived experience that was frequently characterized by some level of exhaustion or despair and the new construction of gender and class identity, which developed under the influence of the cultural propaganda and political intervention of the US military force and the Lee Seung-Man government. More precisely, the term *Après Girls* projects a male desire to control such sociocultural insecurity and fluctuation in the process of the nation’s reconstruction and restoration through women’s bodies. This chapter’s interrogation of the *Après Girls* will show the patriarchal anxiety that arose from unstable class hierarchy along the importation of Western capitalism and consumerism during the postwar period.

The historical period from 1945 to the 1960s saw the ambivalent coexistence of tradition with modernity, and popular fashion trends with state regulation, mediated through women’s bodies and clothing. As Kim Su-Jin expounds, the culture that produced Korean women’s clothes from the liberation to the early 1960s was encapsulated through “multilayered ambivalences of nationalism and the intersections of desires for Western modernity and commodity” (“Reading” 296). Rather than reflecting a gendered stereotype, therefore, the presence of *Après Girls* embodies the cultural modernization that was partly mediated by the occupation of the US military forces in Korea. Interweaving the wide range of cultural ephemera and locations that I call a “nexus of beauty”—Nak-Rang Club, dance fever/halls, movie theaters, beauty parlors, bodily movement, fashion and beauty commodities circulating through GI camps and import boutiques, and state regulations—as mediated through the cultural imagery of the *Après Girls*, I aim to uncover the multilayered notion of K-Beauty during the postwar period, a moment of cultural transition from the remains of Japanese colonialism to the new

hegemonic force of US imperialism. That is, the “nexus of beauty” indicates the ways in which the *Après Girls* were mired within a series of disparate cultural locations of beauty. Crossing between various forms of media—including films, novels, magazines, governmental materials and policies, newspapers, and sociocultural events—this chapter demonstrates how Korean women’s clothing and consumption was restrained from the top (the state), as well as how the *Après-Girls* negotiated with these top-down regulations on clothing as a way to express their femininity and sexuality under turbulent sociopolitical circumstances. That is, the *Après Girls* may have emerged as a response to such a clash between top-down regulation and bottom-up subversion of normative bodily practice.

In order to show how the state’s top-down regulation was contested by Korean women’s fashion in everyday life, I introduce as subcategories of the *Après-Girl* two contrasting class of women who were both engaged with sexual work and in interaction with US soldiers, but who were treated differently: women of the Nak-Rang Club and GI camp prostitutes (*yanggongju*). The former was a secret social club consisting exclusively of elite women and funded by the Lee Seung-Man government, while the latter refers to sex workers in GI camp towns. Although these two groups of women are seemingly disparate, some have suggested that Nak-Rang Club amounted to nothing but prostitution on a pretext of political diplomacy (H. Lee, “War Widows” 66). This elite women’s club illustrates how the Lee Seung-Man government’s propaganda—aimed at regulating ordinary Korean women’s clothing and consumption of Western, and especially US, popular culture—was contradicted by the government’s practices concerning elite women. As the government attempted to erode class boundaries by promoting “simple clothing” (*gansobok*), which was a more suitable form for labor, it simultaneously funded the secret club’s extravagant parties with US officials and soldiers. This funding is paradoxical if we consider how Korean society despised the actions of *yanggonju* (sex workers of the GI camps) during the 1950s. This wide disparity between two groups that were loosely linked under the umbrella of

Après-Girls shows how beauty and fashion rendered both women's class and social position ambivalent.

Few people know that a small number of elite Korean women helped establish South Korea as an independent state under the occupation of the US Army Military Government (1945–48). Although UN delegates from Australia, Canada, India, and Syria expressed their doubts about the elections that were held on May 10, 1948 (and others refused to sanction them at all), the ballots cast in Seoul eventually led to the development of a democratic state in South Korea. The election itself generated worldwide controversy, but a few unconfirmed political rumors and allegations also shadowed the process—for example, regarding how Korea assuaged the UN delegates' initial doubts about Korea's capability to function as an independent state. I examine the Nak-Rang (Nang Nang Club) in order to counter the "official" narrative of Korean history, a narrative that largely overlooks women's roles as significant contributors and activists. I focus on elite Korean women's cooptation of the statist project through the instrumentalization of "beauty," the kind of roles that they played, and the ways in which they resonated with other classes of Korean women's quotidian experiences of beauty.

Mo Yun-Suk (1910–90), founder of the Nak-Rang Club, was a well-known Korean poet. She allegedly helped foment the independent election in South Korea in 1948 through her personal relationship with K. P. S. Menon (1898–1982), the chief UN delegate. Mo's secret diplomatic club was comprised of highly educated and affluent Korean women who could speak English well enough to engage in hospitality with the occupying US military officials and VIPs who were involved in Korea's national politics. Mo likely established the club around 1948 or 1949, and the Lee Seung-Man government supported it financially and diplomatically. According an interview that Mo gave in 1979,

President Lee personally asked me to introduce "Korea" in more proper and elegant ways when providing hospitality for VIPs from foreign countries, rather than simply throwing

“*gisaeng* [courtesan] parties.” That was why I organized Nak-Rang Club in haste. I recruited Kim Hwal-Ran [also known as Hellen Kim]⁸ as a consultant. Among the approximately fifty women members gathered for this club, I remember Hong Eun-Hye and Huh Suk-Ja to be the most popular and attractive women. They were pretty. We were agents for throwing parties for national VIPs in support of the government, so to speak. . . . We borrowed a luxury house from Secretary Heo Jeong and called it “Sea-Side Mansion.” All the costs for the parties were paid by the office of Jang Myeon, the Prime Minister at that time. . . . Hellen Kim educated the rest of members with certain forms of certain etiquette when they served the VIPs. And some members were very poor at dancing, so that they often stepped on their partners’ feet. Although I admit that we used our charm as women,⁹ we were also “citizen diplomats.” (Kim, 215-216)¹⁰

As the interview indicates, the government used these highly educated upper-class women and their feminine charm to promote the state’s political agenda—to hold a direct election to build an independent state with political support from the United States, to collect relevant information for the Korean government by socializing with the US officers and UN delegates, and—most significantly—to reconstruct national identity and refute stereotypes that centered on need, poverty, and Korea’s status as a former Japanese colony. The state took advantage of these

⁸ Hellen Kim (or Kim Hwal-Ran, 1899–1970) was a well-known female politician, educator, and activist. After graduating from Ewha women’s school(hakdang), she went to the United States to study at Wesleyan College in Ohio (BA), Boston University (MA), and Columbia University (PhD). In 1931, she became the first Korean woman to earn a PhD. For more details regarding Kim, see I. Kwon.

⁹ In this interview, Mo Yun-Suk used the Korean word *miingye*, which refers to a scheme to allure men using women’s charm and beauty.

¹⁰ See also S.-D. Kim; Chongko Choi. The leaders of this club were professional women; for example, Hellen Kim was a chancellor of Ehwa Women’s University as well as an editor of *Korean Times*, the nation’s first newspaper written in English. Park Sun-Cheon and Im Yeong-Sin were congresswomen. They were some of the women engaged in establishing the independent state of Korea.

highly educated and charming women and their luxurious parties to develop tropes of a “civilized and cultured” nation instead of a land of lower-class *gisaeng*. Although President Lee tried to distinguish the Nak-Rang Club from the “vulgar” *gisaeng*, one of the core members of the club and a close friend of Mo’s turned out to be a mistress of a US field-grade officer whose name was John Baird. This woman, Kim Su-Im (1911–50), was arrested under suspicion of being a spy for the North Korea by South Korean police in 1950.¹¹ She helped the communist defector Lee Gang-Guk by providing safe shelter and passing him important military information.

The Nak-Rang Club, as a gendered and classed site, shows how women’s beauty was exploited for political interests. Likewise, the GI base camp reveals how the beauty of the *yanggongju*—labeled as “industrial soldiers”—was politically manipulated.¹² Given that the Nak-Rang Club was initiated and sponsored by the Lee Seung-Man government, the state’s top-down regulation of the “unacceptable” extravagance (*sachi*) of middle/working-class Korean women was hypocritical. Despite the state’s promotion of frugality, ordinary Korean women consumed foreign cosmetics, perfumes, and lavish textiles such as velvet (*birodo*) and nylon¹³ to express femininity, modernity, and freedom of fashion—especially freedom from the *momppe*, the loose-fitting work pants that women had been forced to wear during the late colonial period (see figure 2-1). Among these women, *yanggongju* thrived on the perimeters of US military installations

¹¹ Kim Su-Im has been compared to Margaretha Geertruida Zelle (1876–1917), better known as Mata Hari, a Dutch dancer and courtesan who was convicted of being a German spy in World War I. As a close friend of Mo Yun-Suk, Kim was highly educated and able to speak in English, so she worked as an interpreter for the US soldiers and the US embassy in 1948. However, it is not clear that she was actually engaged in serious espionage acts, even though she was executed in 1950. Regarding Kim’s personal relationship with Lee and her historical background, refer to S.-H. Jeon; and “Kim Su-Im Spying Incident.”

¹²Regarding the state’s ambiguous designation of “industrial soldiers,” refer to my chapter 3.

¹³ Nylon was not as expensive as velvet, but it was used for extravagant dresses with scandalously transparent blouses that moved like silk.

and wore clothing that was culturally proximate to American clothes. They seemed to subvert the top-down regulations through fashion—specifically, through Western dress (*yangjang*)—according Korean feminist writer Park Wan-Seo (1931–2011), who reminisced about the lived experience in the 1950s:¹⁴

After the Korean War, when beggars and pickpockets wandered every corner of the streets and most Korean women still wore shabby *hanbok*, the appearance of *yanggongju* wearing Western suits (*yangjang*) with red lips not only attracted the public gaze, but became an easy target for extorting money and harassment. Young women wearing fancy custom-made Western dresses and merely showing bold red lips used to be misrecognized as *yanggongju*. (“U.S. Culture” 334)

Park’s anecdotal description locates the ambiguous social position of *yanggongju* in their experienced embodiment of fashionable adornments. Juxtaposed with most Korean women in their shabby *hanbok*, *yanggongju*—who wore refined custom-made Western dresses—symbolically and practically performed a distinct gender and class.

They might have been able to pass as respectable middle-class women. In actuality, such passing, and such gendered performances, was always marked by inconsistent cultural imagery. As an article in a magazine called *Ladies’ Trend* (*buinkyonghyang*) introduces a middle-class housewife’s interview, “Although I enjoy putting on Western dresses whenever going out or staying home, I am more careful when I go out wearing a Western dress because it easily gives *the impression that I am from a lower-class*” (S.-J. Choe 31, emphasis added). Amid a sea of

¹⁴ Wan-Seo Park (Park Wan-Suh)’s fictions and essays such as *The Naked Tree* (1970), *Warm Was the Winter That Year* (1983), and *Mother’s Garden* (1981), centered on traumatic experience from the Korean War and its aftermath while also reflecting her own experience. In the 1980s, Park increasingly turned toward problems afflicting women in patriarchal society while continuing to engage with the lives of middle-class Koreans through works such as *The Beginning of Days Lived* (1980), *The Woman Standing* (1985), and *The Dreaming Incubator* (1993).

shabby *hanbok*, Western dress signified respectability and stigmatization at the same time. This implies that women's sexual availability were differently articulated through Western clothing.

The alluring Western fashion was displayed as spectacle of urban modernity and consumerist capitalism in popular Korean cinema of the 1950s, particularly through women-centered melodramas produced by male directors such as Han Hyeong-Mo and Shin Sang-Ok. As the first generation of Korean fashion designers—such as Nora Noh, Choe Kyeong-Ja, and Seo Su-Yeon—participated in the production of costumes for female protagonists, Korean films in the 1950s and fashion industries were closely associated. Steve Chung makes a probing observation that “filmmaking and its extensive promotional apparatus became the best way to see the latest fashions, and fashion became a crucial means through which to emulate and embody the roles and fantasies films inspired. And it is precisely this mutual productivity that highlights the centrality of film and fashion to not only cultural but also political transformation” (121). Among other male directors, Shin Sang-Ok and Han Hyeong-Mo, whose films I focus on in this chapter, “produced work in a similar vein, setting films in contemporary, urban, and largely affluent settings, and maximizing the allure of the vast array of consumer commodities regularly paraded on screen” (Chung 130).¹⁵ Among their other films, *Madame Freedom* (1956) and *A Flower in Hell* (1958) focused on specific sites of urban spectacles such as a dance hall, a GI base camp, and *Myeongdong*, which was the center of beauty and fashion, leisure, and consumption and Western culture in the 1950s: dance halls, beauty parlors/salons, import boutiques, movie theaters, music cafes, and department stores were all concentrated there.¹⁶ *Myeongdong* was located in what, since the Japanese colonial period, had been called

¹⁵ Shin, especially, produced several women-centered melodramas during the late 1950s that were also commercially successful: *A College Woman's Confession* (1958), *Dongsimcho* (1959), *A Flower in Hell* (1958), *Sisters' Garden* (1959). Throughout these films, he embraced certain styles of Western cinema such as the Hollywood musical, gangster films, and Italian neorealism.

¹⁶ The first female Korean hairdresser, Oh Yeob-Ju, opened her hair salon at *Myeongdong*, and the pioneering women fashion designers Nora Noh and Choi Kyung-ja likewise opened their

“Jingogae”—a geographical space that was occupied by wealthy Japanese and that merged colonial Modern Girls’ consumerist desires, modern spectacle, and primary financial institutions.¹⁷ Until 1979 when Korean Stock Exchange was moved to *Yeouuido*, Seoul, *Myeongdong* was a hub of finance often dubbed as “the Wall Street.” The Korean daily newspaper *Dong-A Daily* described *Myeongdong* as follows:

The latest fashion of Seoul begins in *Myeongdong*. The modern styles of women’s clothing such as A-line, H-line, flare skirt, short skirt, Hepburn style, Mambo style. . . . *Myeongdong* displays all fashion styles imported from Paris, New York, and Tokyo . . . and modern boys and girls are proud of themselves as examples of such styles. (“A Day of *Myeongdong*”)

Not only as a center of Western fashion and beauty, *Myeongdong* was also a sociocultural location that converged Western popular culture such as American pop music and dance, gendered labor, and the consumption through dancehalls and luxurious department stores as illustrated in the quotation below:

As dance halls were built, social dance [ballroom dance] began to spread. That was the beginning of “Dance Fever [*chumbaram*].” Since the target of the dance halls was the US soldiers, Korean women were allowed to enter only with them. Among the luxurious dance halls in downtown Seoul were the Jeongjaok Dance Hall (currently the Midopa Department Store) and Mitsukoshi Dance Hall (currently the fifth floor of Shinsegae Department Store). (Y.-S. Park 206–8)¹⁸

boutiques there. In addition, a theater called Sigonggwon, currently the Myeongdong Art Theater, a center for women’s musicals and traditional shows, was also located at *Myeogndong*. See S.-M. Lee, *Miss Myeongdong*.

¹⁷ Regarding the research of *Myeongdong* from 1950s to 1960s as a cultural location of fashion and beauty, see Mee-Sun Kim.

¹⁸ The *Midopa* and *Shinsegae* department stores were located in *Myeongdong*.

As the first fashion boutique and beauty parlor were built at *Myeongdong*, Seoul, the dance halls were the places where the newest international fashion styles and accessories could be seen, and worn by well-dressed *yanggongju*, dancers, and college girls. Well-known dance halls were also where imported beauty commodities and Western pop music were consumed, and foreign currencies exchanged. Since the dance halls were initially reserved for the occupying US officials and soldiers, Korean women who wanted to enter had to be accompanied by US soldiers—something that was done by Korean women of various classes, including college girls and *yanggongju*. In addition, showgirls, singers, and dancers frequented the site as gendered laborers.

These specific spaces—dance halls, theaters, military camp towns, and entertainment clubs—were established as part of the occupation of the US military forces (1945–48) and represented the state’s implicit allowance of *extritorial* areas for US soldiers in South Korea. Within its limited physical and figurative spaces, South Korea’s social system was challenged by its homogenous fashion landscape, which could make it hard to distinguish class and background. The lack of diversity in fashion trends and the scarcity of materials after the war left ample room for lower-class/laboring women to *pass* as upper-class women, in a performance not only of empowerment and respectability, but of resistance against the state’s control and regulation of women’s fashion in everyday life. Like the example of the dance halls, fashion could for certain women provide considerable professional opportunity, whereas for others it might offer pure pleasure and satisfy curiosity about the new foreign culture.

I also look at the dance halls on the U.S. military bases because they were privileged as extritorial areas, remote from the somber reality of the 1950s, a period when the majority of Koreans were frustrated by hunger, poverty, and dislocation. Like the dance halls in the city, these places were culturally imagined as *liminal zones* or places of escape from reality. Only within these places could women possibly play with their sexuality through enticing bodily

movements, flirt with men, and potentially “become a different self” from the social position that they occupied. Victor Turner uses the term *liminal* to designate moments of discontinuity in the social space. These moments of “in-between-ness” represent liberation from the regimes of normative practices and performances in everyday life, according to Turner. In these moments, people,

were liberated from normative demands [and] were, indeed, betwixt and between successive lodgments in jural political systems. In this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen. In this interim of “liminality,” the possibility exists of standing aside not only one’s social position but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements. (13–14)

While these extraterritorial areas were spaces within the territory of Korea, they did not belong to the nation in terms of subjectivity, sovereignty, and citizenship. In relation to the political and cultural influences that the US military forces represented, these places became contested terrains for reconfiguring “what and who is a Korean woman.” In *A Flower in Hell* (1958), Juri, a *yanggongju* in a GI military camp, laments: “We can’t marry an American or one of our own. Which group do we belong to?”¹⁹ This statement embodies the precarious status of *yanggongju* in terms of citizenship and subjectivity when one lives in “geographically and physically suspended areas and belonging to no nation” (H.-S. Kim 187). These women subjects who partly defined themselves through the US Army Military Government and the Korean War were

¹⁹ *A Flower in Hell* (*jiokhwa*) is a 1958 film made by Shin Sang-Ok, featuring the popular actress (and Shin’s wife) Choi Eun-Hee as the female protagonist. Although the film failed to attract public attention at that time, Choi’s character “Sonya,” a wicked GI sex worker (*yanggongju*) with flamboyant displays of Western dress, produced one of the most impressive scenes in the history of Korean film, when both Shin and Choi were kidnapped to North Korea in 1978 by Jeong-Il Kim. *A Flower in Hell* shows the life of a seductive *yanggongju* (Sonya) who is in an intimate relationship with Yeongsik but seduces his younger brother, Dongsik, who comes to Seoul to bring Yeongsik back to their rural home.

intimately entangled not only with national politics of gender and class, but with transpacific politics of labor and ethnicity, which contradicted and diverged from the state's official policies.

Decolonization of Women's Fashion: From *Momppe* to Western Fashion

The historical period that I examine in this chapter is critical because of the political transition and sociocultural permutations that followed the Second World War and the Korean War. As Shunya Yoshimi explains, "the postwar domination of America in East Asia is, in a certain sense, a reconstruction of the Japanese imperial order that existed until the end of the war. . . . [Thus] the decolonialization movements in the various regions were ultimately subverted into the Cold War order and became part of the structure of American hegemony" (435). Likewise, as Elaine Kim and Chungmoo Choi contend, "because of the direct installation of the U.S. military apparatus at the end of World War II, South Korea, like many other former colonies, never had an opportunity to decolonize in the true sense of the word" (3).

Especially in terms of women's clothing, for instance, during the late colonial period, Japan implemented the National Mobilization Law in 1938 and regulated Korean women's clothes and physical appearance by banning the use of permanent makeup and fancy clothing, and even ceasing publication of women's magazines. As part of the standardization and simplification of women's clothes in wartime, Japan encouraged Korean women to wear loose-fitting *momppe* (*monpe*), not only for ease of engaging in physical activity in support of military training, but also as "patriotic acts" (T. Ahn). The Japanese colonial government persistently propagated the media with instructions for Korean women to wear *momppe*; for example, the newspaper *Maeil Sinbo* published several articles with such titles as "Women Should Always Wear *Momppe* When They Go Out and Don't Make Them Showy" (19 Aug. 1944). Such articles reveal that the patriarchy imposed on women's appearance not only the *momppe* itself, but also a uniformity: in not being too "showy," women were encouraged not to be too individualistic in

their choices. The Japanese colonial rules were intended to restrict Korean women's bodies for labor's sake.



Figure 2-1. Korean peasant women's momppe (on the right), juxtaposed with the flamboyant clothing of two yanggongju in Silver Stallion.²⁰

On August 15, 1945, Korea was liberated as Japan declared unconditional surrender. It was simultaneously divided at the Thirty-Eighth Parallel, with Soviet troops occupying the North, and US troops occupying the South. The southern half of the Korean peninsula was ruled by the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK, 1945–48), and the First Republic of Korea was established in 1948. Lee Seung Man was the first president, and he ruled until Park Chung-Hee's 5.16 (May 16) military coup in 1961. In this political transition, the presence of the US Army Military Government particularly affected Korean society's political systems, cultural values, and economy through the circulation of magazines, films, exhibitions, and pamphlets. The dissemination of propaganda through these media was primarily intended to educate Koreans about "superior" values such as freedom and democracy against the

²⁰ Jeong-Hyo Ahn's novel *A Silver Stallion Never Comes*, written in English and published in 1990, was adopted as a film one year later under the title *A Silver Stallion*, directed by the male Korean director Gil-Su Jang. The film earned international recognition by being given the Best Actress Award and the Best Script Award at the fifteenth Montreal World Film Festival in 1991.

communist North Korea. As Park Sunae et al. contend, “the transition period (1945–1961) represents the initial acculturation of Western culture, especially that of the U.S. in Korea. . . . These key years saw the domination by Japan broken and the shift toward Western culture set in motion” (39). Korean women’s clothing underwent substantial “decolonization” after the liberation in 1945. By contrast with women’s late adoption of Western dress, Korean male elites/intellectuals had begun to wear Western suits as early as the 1910s, as part of various enactments that embraced Western modernity and civilization (S.-J. Kim, “Reading”). Korean women’s clothes/bodies had been used as a crucial and ongoing site of patriarchal control and regulation based on the state’s varying political circumstances.

After the liberation, the 1946 administration established the Women’s Department (*bunyeoguk*). In December 1946, the US Army Military Government in Korea appointed four female leaders among forty-five legislative committee members of the South Korean interim government (Maeng 254). The women campaigned in support of women’s rights and gender equality. They specifically demanded equal suffrage and the abolition of prostitution and concubinage, and these demands were codified in the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, as declared on July 17, 1948. Along with making a strong appeal for sociopolitical equality during the liberation period, Korean women were also shifting in their beauty practices, as reflected in the following exhortation from *Ladies (bunin)*, a women’s magazine published in 1948:

Ladies, be liberal. Women can release physical freedom, too. . . . Choose your outfit day by day depending on your mood. The clothes will change your mood as well. . . . The change of make-up: this should be the most elegant enactment for women. (“10 Propositions” 15)

As Maeng Mun-Jae suggests, these propositions epitomized elite Korean women’s fervor and eagerness for empowerment and agency, which long had been repressed not only by Japanese colonialism, but by their country’s own patriarchal social system (254). As reflected by the new

sentiments espoused in such articles, Korean women aspired to the freedom of wearing their own clothes based on their voluntary choices, rather than being compelled to don the *momppe* as dictated by Japanese colonial rules.

Besides counting on material/financial aid from Western countries, Korean society during the postwar period heavily relied on the US military forces themselves, and 1950s Korea has been described as having a “PX (Post Exchange) economy.”²¹ As Lee Na-Young astutely observes, “camptown” (*gijichon*) prostitution was not only a large-scale activity but also one intimately related to the economic activities of Korean women. Some small villages—with their commercial districts of clubs, bars, brothels, convenience stores, pawn shops, barbershops, tailors, photo and portrait shops, and drug stores—were entirely dependent on the US military presence (N.-Y. Lee). The United States’ political involvement in the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule and in the Korean War precipitated the positive perception of America as a signifier of affluence and civilization. The cultural imagery of the United States, in the dreams of the impoverished majority of Koreans, would somehow also fill their stomachs and end the cultural barrenness of Korea’s postwar period (S.-D. Lee).

During the transitional postwar period, an ambiguity in women’s clothing, in relation to the formation of women’s modern subjectivity, increased in part because of two sociocultural phenomena: one is (movie) theater-going, and the other is dancing. As many Korean film scholars have argued, Korean film industry achieved rapid development during the postwar period partly as a result of the state’s favorable policies and promotion of Korean films.²² While

²¹ The PX in US military camps was initially intended to offer US soldiers subsistence items, but it was also one of the major channels for the domestic circulation of “USA-made” goods—from expensive cameras, watches, and even TV sets, to women’s high heels, clothing, and cosmetics—through the underground markets of Korea. See H. Lee, “Americanism” 149.

²² According to the Korean Film Archive, “since the 1950s, the number of Korean films produced had been on the rise. The average number of films produced per year in the 1960s was 150. The rate of successful Korean films had risen because audiences were more open to Western styles of popular culture, which revolved around the cinema.” Among many melodramatic films

Hollywood melodramas dominated Korean film industry, theater-going was such a gendered and classed kinesthetic phenomenon that middle-class housewives—the predominant audiences at the cinema—were dubbed “troops of rubber shoes” (*gomusinbuda*) (J.-M. Gang 98–99). Theater-going was also one of the few affordable, entertaining activities that could distract from the war and the somber reality. As a well-known male painter Heo Baek-Ryeon points out, the increasing numbers of films in a new style of melodrama were targeted at the emerging urban working-class women’s audience. Its members were exposed to Western popular culture, including fashion, through the increasing importation of Western cinema and circulation of commercial magazines:

The Korean film industry had ended up with disorderly productions and consumptions.

The number of Korean directors increased up to 140 in 1959. . . . Afterwards, the industry started to show a kind of filmic trend. One is an old-fashioned tear-jerker (*sinpa*) targeting middle-class housewives called “troops of rubber shoes.”²³ The other is modern melodramas for young women in high heels yet masking traditional mind-set inside (Ho 112; qtd. in Byeon 54).

By the 1960s, women outnumbered men in Korea, as the number of men had decreased because of the war; such demographic change was certainly reflected in the increasing numbers of urban women who appropriated modern fashion, such as high heels and Western dress, in conjunction with the audiences of middle-class housewives at performances of Korean theater and film. As Laura Bovone stresses, “fashion becomes an opportunity for distancing herself from her official

following the trend, *Madame Freedom* was the most successful, with a long run of forty-five days in 1956. Although 99 percent of Korean screenings featured foreign films, the 1960s was regarded as the Golden Era of the South Korean film industry. See KOFA 212–13.

²³ From the liberation to the late 1950s, the Gukgeuk Group, consisting of only female Korean actors, performed at *Sigonggwon* (currently the Myeongdong Art Theater) and generated a large fan base. Its repertoire consisted mostly of traditional pansori and narratives of Korea.

role and to allow her other roles an opportunity to emerge” (371). The appropriation of Western fashion, specifically represented by high heels, and of modern melodramas was a way for women to present their modern femininity and agency. They became new consumers of modern aesthetics, and they left behind the traditional femininity of the middle-class housewives, the “rubber shoes.”

Fashion and Nationalism: The State’s Simple Clothing Campaign

Faced with a shortage of relief supplies, the Lee government encouraged even cabinet members to wear “simple clothing” (*gansobok*) made with domestically produced fabrics/textiles. Against the backdrop of Korean women’s desire to wear lavish *hanbok* or Western dresses in everyday life as an embodied way to distinguish themselves, the state encouraged the standardization of women’s dress and thus sought to erase differences of class or to homogenize female appearance so as to impose traditional femininity. The Lee Seung-Man government and Park Chung-Hee military regime implemented the Simple Clothing Campaign (*uibokgansohwaundong*) and, to some degree, “democratized fashion” in ways that eroded class boundaries.²⁴ However, the state’s regulation of ordinary Korean women’s fashion and consumption starkly contrasted with its support for the aforementioned elite upper-class women’s social club Nak-Rang Club.

On November 18, 1951, the Lee Seung-Man government legislated the Law for Living Improvement in Wartime (*jeonsisaenghwalgaeseonbeop*). It published the following statement in the Korean newspaper *Yeonhab Sinmun*:

[The Law for Living Improvement in Wartime] will ban the personal use of foreign-made fabrics, woolen goods, and gold jewelry as well as their sale. The law also prohibits the sale and importation of foreign-originating cigarettes, women’s cosmetics, and regular

²⁴ The legislation of the Simple Clothing Campaign was implemented in 1951 and in 1961.

drinks including beer. Violators will face a heavy penalty. . . . Regarding this issue, the prime minister Jang [Jang Myeon, 1899–1966] seems very optimistic that the law will root out luxury goods [*sachipum*], which are unreasonable for wartime. (31 Aug. 1952)

The law regulated Koreans' everyday lives not only through the Simple Clothing Campaign (*uibokgansohwaundong*) but through the disallowance of “dancing and singing,” because such acts of entertainment were inappropriate for the exigencies of wartime. Regardless of the state's law, however, dance and different levels of dance halls flourished throughout the war as major entertainments and helped disseminate a measure of cultural modernization:

As the war drew on, the public [*minjung*] was demoralized and fell into anxiety and despair. . . . The appearances of people became more lavish and sumptuous. . . . Even after the war, the anxiety remained. . . . Amid the social confusion and anxiety, people were getting more unreasonable with the “dance fever” [*chumbaram*]. Korean society was disrupted by the importation of Western cultures. (*Dongayeongam* 40–41)

As upper-class elites in Korean society initiated dance parties, dancing was a way to perform modern culture and knowledge for middle- and upper-class women, but it remained gendered labor for the working-class women who were engaged in the entertainment industry.

The state's economic agenda was also implicated in an interview with Nora Noh, the first Korean fashion designer.²⁵ She remembers her first fashion show in 1956 in ways that imply an ambivalent use of political intervention to promote domestically produced clothes to the fashion designer's upper- and middle-class customers:

²⁵ Nora Noh (b. 1928) became the first fashion designer in Korea after returning from her fashion study in the United States. She opened her own boutique, “The House of Nora Noh,” at *Myeongdong* (1950) and held the first fashion show in Korea at Bando Hotel (1956). She is also well known for designing the Korean female singer Yun Bok-Hee's scandalous miniskirt, which led to a national fashion trend in the 1960s.

Returning from my fashion study in Los Angeles in 1949, I started my “fashion life” in the reality where Korea’s GNP was only \$87 and ordinary women’s everyday life garment was mostly *momppe*. When the war broke out, I moved to Busan. My job there was to make theater costumes and clothing for the EUSAK, such as a female singer Baek Seol-Hui’s attire for her shows. . . . I opened my first fashion show in 1956 at Bando Hotel, where the present Lotte Hotel is now located. I used only domestically produced textiles for the show; especially, I remember that the woolen fabrics made from “Goryeo Textile,” a domestic textile company, were quite good but they were a little bit unmalleable. The minister of commerce and industry watched my show sitting in the first row. (Noh 21).

As Noh recalls, her first show after her return from the United States featured women’s Western garments or “hybrid” forms combining Korean traditional clothing with Western gowns and dresses. Noh designed what was called the “Arirang Dress,” which gained considerable popularity as a Western-style evening dress embracing the elegant lines of a traditional *hanbok*. It was inspired by *hanbok* and made from domestic fabrics. After a winner of a national beauty pageant, Oh Hyeon-Ju, was given an award for wearing the Arirang Dress in the eighth Miss Universe international beauty pageant (1959), Oh began to parade around town wearing it, which made the dress more popular among middle- and upper-class women including the wives of Korean diplomatic delegates.²⁶

Yet, as Noh confesses in her interview, she used only domestically produced fabrics for the show that the Korean minister of commerce and industry attended. As many official records from the Lee government affirm, the state promoted the use of domestically produced commodities (*guksanpum*) by holding annual exhibitions of local products across the cities of

²⁶ The Arirang dress is designated a form of Korean cultural property. See “Arirang Dress.”

Korea as a spectacle for the public.²⁷ Such tactics indicate that the state advanced its nationalist and its national economic agendas through its exhortations about women's bodies and beauty. This effective state sponsorship suggests that fashion-making in the 1950s was intertwined with the political agendas that boosted the local textile industry and promoted local fabrics to the major customers of high fashion, mostly upper- and middle-class women, through fashion designers such as Noh. If the parades of actresses in simple clothes were meant to appeal to ordinary citizens, or lower-middle-class women, the state simultaneously tried to allure upper-class women through the high-fashion designer's show as a way of fostering domestic industries and commerce.

An article in the magazine *Yeowon* that approved of young Korean women who increasingly wore pants also supported the state's propaganda to mute women's extravagance (*sachi pungjo*) by highlighting pants' practicality and efficiency for labor, rather than just their aesthetic appeal:

A lot of young women are wearing pants recently. Especially what are called "Mambo Pants" have become popular among young women and they seem to be comfortable for physical activities as well. . . . In addition, they will increase the efficiency of their work when they wear pants rather than tight skirts or traditional forms of jackets and skirts [*chima jeogori*]. In this time when everything aims for maximal productivity and minimum consumption, pants for women are the best outfit. If all young people work hard wearing simple clothing like pants, they will look good as well as bring a positive outcome. (Seok 258–59)

²⁷ The annual exhibitions of local products were sponsored by the state and attracted public attention. Given that few spectacles were on offer during the 1950s, the exhibitions were major attractions, just like the cinema. For more photos and archival reports of the exhibitions, see the National Archive of Korea's "The History of Everyday Life through Official Records."

Although the article accentuates mambo pants' practicality, these pants were also one of the trendy fashion items at that time, when the Hollywood films of Audrey Hepburn, who often wore pants, were increasingly being shown in Korea.²⁸ These Hollywood films produced various fashion trends worldwide as local populations imitated the actresses' styles, including the use of mambo pants. Yet Westerners generally embraced this fashion for their convenience in facilitating bodily movements while dancing, not to assist the laboring body as did *momppe*.

While the law of "velvet limitation" was passed in 1957, allotting one velvet outfit per person per year, the state-driven propaganda encouraging women to wear simple clothes was once again promulgated by law in October 1961 against the backdrop of the *Après Girls'* undiminished desire for new fashion. The Park Chung-Hee government even exploited well-known actresses and celebrities to promote frugality and simple clothing. For example, the state held several public events such as a parade of Korean actresses wearing "simple clothes" (*gandanbok*) (see figures 2-2 and 2-3) in order to minimize women's use of flashy and showy clothing. Positioned as cultural performers outside the boundaries of their theatrical roles, "as beautiful yet accessible women, actresses represented the perfect solution for breaking into new markets and encouraging new patterns of consumer behavior," as Marlis Schweizer elaborates (8). However, rising Korean movie stars were also icons of modern fashion and Western glamour, as manifested in their theatrical roles. In effect, actresses replaced professional fashion models at that time in the modeling of custom-made high fashion.

Although the state used them to promote simple clothes to ordinary Korean women in everyday life, actresses were, by their sociocultural position, situated ambiguously both as endorsers of the political agenda and as theatrical professionals. Despite the ambivalence,

²⁸ During the Korean War, American films represented more than 50 percent of the imported foreign film market. By the end of 1954, the number of imported American films continued to increase; ninety-four films (72 percent of the total number of imported films) came from the United States. See KOFA (196–97).

actresses—who represented a new status awarded to talented individuals—gained social influence and power through a wider circulation of media, including the increasing dissemination of television shows and the production of a new broadcast station in the 1960s.²⁹ Through the parades, female celebrities tried to appeal to a mass audience as surrogates of the state, and they used the attention and charisma that celebrity endorsement can bring to political causes. Given the militant nature of the Park Chung-Hee regime (1961–79), actresses’ political endorsement was not considered a voluntary act, but the parades did enable such political slogans to reach a wider public via a form of spectacle and entertainment rather than through political demonstrations or campaigns. However, a moment of subversion occurs from the distance between the actresses’ roles as celebrities and fashion models and their roles as surrogates of the state. As Korean actresses were the primary models in fashion magazines and fashion shows before professional fashion models existed, they were perceived as bearers of urban glamour, spectacle, and modernity. The political parades of Simple Clothes and the promotion of frugality were contradicted by their public image.

²⁹ Dong-A Broadcasting System, the second private broadcasting network in Korea, opened in 1963. Operated by Dong-A Daily, it contributed to organizing and developing comprehensive programs of music, life information, and editorial cartoons.



Figure 2-2. Parade of Korean Actresses for the Simple Clothing Campaign (1960)³⁰



Figure 2-3. Advertising Pamphlet for Women's Simple Clothes (1960)

³⁰ Figures 2-2 and 2-3: Courtesy of the National Archive of Korea (*gukgagirokwon*); *The History of Everyday Life through Official Records*, pp. 202–13 (#DA0803989).

Performing Après-Girls: Embodiments of Unruly Bodies and Americanization

In ways that were discordant with the state's intervention into the realms of women's fashion and consumption in everyday life, those called Après Girls were categorized as abnormal and deviant in relation to not only their surface appearance but also their pleasure-seeking leisure activity. Here, I want more specifically to flesh out how these Après Girls were materialized through the women-centered melodramas in the 1950s against the backdrop of the state's regulation of women's fashion and export-driven economic agenda. Although the state heavily depended on economic aid and support from the United States, it prohibited Koreans in general from indulging in US popular culture. Especially after the 5.16 coup, the Park military regime criminalized even going to dance halls, because the foreign culture (*oerae munhwa*) that people consumed there allegedly corrupted their morality. However, the state exempted *yanggongju* and EUSAK entertainers from these regulations, as their cumulative incomes were greater than that of the manufacturing sector of Korea in the 1960s. As a result, they were considered "industrial soldiers" as the nation's industrialization was intensified.

Under these paradoxical and ambiguous state regulations, society might desire the bodies of *yanggongju* to be marked (figure 2-1); as Kim Hyun-Sook illustrates, "the Western dress and make-up serve to legitimate the brand as a 'yanggongju.' [She is] imagined as 'showy,' 'gaudy,' 'noisy,' 'garnish,' and 'colorful,' pejorative views that render her more a commodified object of play than a self-determined subject" (184). The "excess" of Korean women's femininity, and the corporeality of the Après Girls, as manifested in their embodied performances of fashion and beauty, could be understood as markers of class. As Beverley Skeggs argues, "the working-class have a long history of being represented by excess, whilst the middle-class are represented by their distance from it, usually through association with restraint, repression, reasonableness, modesty and denial" (99).

Given the transgressive traits of the *Après Girls*, however, such a simple dichotomy does not capture the way that middle-class housewives such as Madame Freedom also were identified with sexual excess. What do the *Après Girls* then embody? What did the *Après Girls* mean to Korean women in the 1950s? I contend that *Après Girls* offered seductive masks to Korean women who went through the sociocultural shifts of the postwar period and allowed them to masquerade by manipulating the ambiguous boundaries of each role. Although each role within these masquerades was correlated with specific behaviors, the umbrella term *Après Girls* blurred the boundaries among the masks.

However, such a blurring made being identified as an *Après Girl* even more precarious and dangerous. Regarding to Ahn Junghyo's novel *A Silver Stallion*, Kim Hyun-Sook points out as below,

When Ollye becomes a "UN Lady," she discards the plain peasant clothes that hide her body, donning colorful Western dresses that expose her legs and arms in public for the first time. Her bare face is made over with powder, eyeliner, and lipstick. High heels, permed hair, a few broken words of English, and the drinking of alcohol further *masquerade* Ollye as a "modern UN Lady" who inhabits a landscape quite different from the rustic village world that has abandoned her. (183–84, translation in original, emphasis added)

Ollye transformed from a respectable mother of the protagonist Mansik to a "UN lady" (*yanggongju*) by changing her clothing and makeup and revealing her body, which tells us how malleable the boundary between a mother and a UN lady was. Her disposal of her plain peasant clothes, such as the baggy *momppe*, encapsulates her challenge or resistance to the Confucian patriarchal community, which repressed Ollye's sexuality and isolated her from her rustic village by designating her as an "abject body." Judith Butler illuminates the apparatus of abjection by

considering how certain bodies—white heterosexual males—come to matter as centralized within social discourse, whereas others do not. As she puts it:

The abject designates here precisely those “unlivable” zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the “unlivable” is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. (*Bodies* 3)

When Ollye was raped by the US soldiers, the leader of the village as well as the rest of the peasant women excluded her from the community as a dirtied and damaged body. She was not considered to be an innocent war widow anymore. *Silver Stallion* shows through Ollye’s masquerade as a UN lady a “process of *abjection*, an attempt to circumscribe and radically differentiate something that, although deemed repulsively *other* is, paradoxically, at some fundamental level, an undifferentiable part of the whole” (Shimakawa 2, original emphasis). Her transformation involved a masquerade as a performance of “becoming” rather than “being.” In this regard, the flamboyant appearance of two *yanggongju* per se is described as a rupture in the social structures of the isolated village:

Two strange women came up the riverbank from the ferry. Their clothes looked scandalous. The boy had never seen anything like them in West County. Even during his occasional trip to the town with his mother, Mansik had never seen anybody dressed as outrageously as these two. At first Mansik thought they were twin sisters because both of them were in such odd but identical attire—short blue-black skirts that exposed not only the bare skin of their calves but the whole round shape of their hips, and brightly colored blouses without any sleeves at all that revealed the ugly marks of cowpox shots on their shoulders for everybody to see. Their peculiar hair, in permanent waves, resembled upside-down bells, and both of them wore pointed, glossy leather shoes with high heels as sharp as toe blades unlike the beautiful and elegant white or turquoise rubber shoes

with exquisite flower patterns he was accustomed to seeing. (J. Ahn 64, original translation)

The fashion of the two “strange women” was marked as *excessive* and *unruly* in relation to traditional women’s clothes, which were rendered as “elegant” and “beautiful.” While Mansik viewed the clothes of the *yanggongju* as “scandalous” and “outrageous,” Ollye saw “the purple and red colors of their blouses were like butterflies. Butterflies flying free” (J. Ahn 67). Unlike Mansik, Ollye sees the colored blouses as an embodiment of freedom, a personal choice of fashion through which she as a woman could belong not only to a family, but to a community or nation. The colorfulness of their fashion and their audacious self-identification as “Yankee wives” and “whores” express an autonomy and agency that Ollye lacks. The scene (see figure 2-1) juxtaposes the two *yanggongju* and Ollye in a frame that allegorizes the 1950s’ ambivalent location of Korean women: they “occup[ied] the liminal space conjoining the indigenous and the imperial, the national and the international,” and they “combined and reconfigured aesthetic elements drawn from disparate national, colonial and racial regimes to create a ‘cosmopolitan look’” (Barlow et al. 246). Ollye’s dark-gray baggy pants, originating from Japanese colonialism, are culturally indigenized as a peasant woman’s everyday clothing, while the two *yanggongju* have permed hair, red lips, a purple jacket, black mesh gloves, a tight knee-length skirt, a red square handbag, a red umbrella, a white flowery dress, and so on. The women’s opposing fashions present disparate aesthetics of (inter)nationalism. The unresolved dichotomy of fashion in the cinematic scene offers an apt metaphor for Korean society’s political and cultural binaries within and beyond the national border during the postwar period. Likewise, the dance hall and the GI camps were suspended as exterritorial spaces within/beyond Korean society and its political governance, as Jin Lee writes:

For a long time, the entertainers of the EUSAK were incarcerated beings away from the real world. The celebrities of the EUSAK were prohibited from performing for ordinary

Korean audience as they used to perform in the EUSAK because the law banned singing in English on the public stages for Koreans. Some signers were forced to sing songs encouraging savings, frugality, and the eradication of extravagance, which the state tried to deliver to ordinary people. (179)

The entertainment industry where I put my foot in looked like a utopia: a paradise overflowing with dollars; war orphans earning more money than elite salarymen; Americans admiring certain Koreans for their talents; a world connected from Seoul, Hong Kong, Manila, and Tokyo, to Las Vegas. An ideal world of meritocracy [*silreokjuei*] overshadowing blood and education. (145)

The almost utopian world of the EUSAK was presented as an egalitarian space, contrasting with the elitist Korean society that privileged Confucian values such as class-based higher education and heritage, which essentialized one's status. The confined world of the US Army Military Government thus offered one of the few places in which Korean women could seek class mobility based on their talent; and it also offered fragmentary glimpses of democracy and the opportunity to appreciate American popular music, dance, and shows while eliding the Korean society's notions of class, race, and nationality. That liminal space rendered women suspended/excluded from their actual society; whatever they could be in that space—which was culturally extraterritorial, like an embassy that was not subject to the nation's laws or culture—was incommensurate with what women could be outside that space within the nation.

This is partly the reason that in films such as *Madame Freedom* and *A Flower in Hell*, the seductive bodily movements of dancers in the military camp are consumed merely as spectacle rather than as gendered labor. As a social phenomenon “Madame Freedom,” or a middle-class domesticated housewife, shows, aside from having to meet the social demand that emerged from the shortage of manpower, middle-class Korean women sought their individual

identities by working outside of the socially imposed roles of wise mothers and good wives. On the one hand, for Madame Freedom and middle- and upper-class college-girls, the dance hall was one of the few locations where one could encounter US culture, or publicly present women's femininity and sexuality through a well-groomed appearance and cutting-edge fashion. As exemplified in the film of *Madame Freedom*, the female protagonist Seon-Yeong finds that the experience of "going to dance halls" allows her to uncover her socially repressed femininity/sexuality through her encounters with male counterparts, including college boy Chun-Ho and married man Mr. Han. On the other hand, in the same dance-hall scene, the camera focuses on the seductive bodily movements of a professional dancer, Na Bok-Hui (see figure 2-5).³¹ The same experience of "going to a dance hall," for women entertainers, was one of attending a site of labor to showcase "exotic" spectacle through choreographic displays. While *Madame Freedom*, both as a novel and a film, triggered a contentious debate in Korean studies, the middle-class female protagonist, Seon-Yeong, has always been at the center of this debate (rather than the featured women entertainers), not only as an embodiment of modernity and feminine spectacle but as an abject body to be expelled from heterosexual normativity. I want to foreground the voiceless female subjects such as the dancer and singer whose agency is only performed through their corporeality and to investigate how the various types of gendered laborers experienced Western modernities in different modes and intensities.

Two scenes in *Madame Freedom* are worth reassessing in this context; one is a scene in which Paik Seol-Hui (1924–2010) sings at Seon-Young's college reunion party (see figure 2-4). Paik was a professional singer and was featured in this film as a member of the social club that Seon-Young attended. The other is a dancing scene that showcases one of the most popular

³¹ In fact, it is important to note that the dancer's actual name has not been addressed in most discussions of the emblematic cinematic scene in *Madame Freedom*, suggesting the ways that she has been treated primarily as an abstraction or symbol rather than as a professional dancer.

young female dancers of the time, Na Bok-Hee (see figure 2-5). She appeared in this film as a sensual mambo dancer backed by a big ensemble called the Park Jeong-Geun Band, which was professionally active at that time in real life. As many Korean cultural and literary scholars have attested, the genre of Korean popular culture, especially in the field of music in the 1950s, fetishized what it treated as the “exotic” aspects of US culture. For instance, many popular Korean songs during this period—such as “San Francisco” (1952), “American China Town” (1953), “Arizona Cowboy” (1955), and “Lucky Morning” (1956)—were titled in English.



Figure 2-4. Paik Seol-Hui sings “Avec Saturday” in Madame Freedom (1956)

Likewise, in this scene from *Madame Freedom*, Paik sings a song titled “Avec Saturday” released in 1956. The lyrics of the cheerful song depict a young woman’s excitement at the prospect of dating her lover on Saturday and having a good time together:

Coming this Saturday, I will be with you
That day is the date we promised to meet just two of us
Just thinking of seeing you
My heart is so racing, avec Saturday
Exciting Saturday
The Saturday of youth

Wearing an elegantly polished and flower-patterned *hanbok* made with *birodo*, Paik Seol-Hui sings about a woman's desire and aspiration for youthful, heterosexual romance. The spectators are all middle-class housewives, but their styles are mixed; they wear a *hanbok* or a Western dress suit. Some women don a brooch, instead of a breast tie, a more traditional form of a *hanbok*. The singer goes around her listeners, touches their shoulders, and stares amiably at them, instead of standing upright and staring at the camera while singing. During the song, Yun-Ju converses with Seon-Young about a diamond ring and a pearl necklace that a member of the social club wears. Partly through the song, the scene stages aspirations of beauty, romance, and social mobility that were at the center of *Madame Freedom's* appeal to female audiences at that time.



Figure 2-5. Na Bok-Hee's Mambo Dance in Madame Freedom

Similarly, in the dance hall, after the eleven-person male band finishes playing, a solo female dancer's performance begins with a long shot; the female dancer comes down the seven steps one by one, in time to a Mambo music beat that is played by the big band. A black satin one-shoulder dress perfectly fits the dancer's voluptuous body. Just as the camera moves vertically into a close-up, it shows us fragments of her body in sequence, moving from her face and

shoulder to her torso, hips, legs, and bare feet. The bodily movements, which are highlighted through the physicality of the choreography—which accentuates her permed hairdo and the white rose pinned to her left ear, theatrical make-up, elbow-length black satin gloves, glittering jewelry, bare feet, the busily swinging golden tassels of her dress, and her vivid yet exaggerated facial expression—reflect not only the theatricality of her performance, but the transgression of conventional gender norms and traditional definitions of femininity. The dancer’s corporeal sensuality and sexuality are highlighted in her showy and daring movements. As shots of Seon-Young staring at the dancer with admiration interrupt the sequences of the dance, Na’s physicality and corporeality conjure the persona of the *Après Girls*, whose gendered bodies express agency, sexuality, and empowerment, in contrast with the identity of Seon-Young, who personifies Madame Freedom.

What is noteworthy in these two scenes is that the performances of singing and dancing are presented not simply to provide pleasure for the male audience, but to foreground the women audience’s encounters with Western modernity and sexual freedom through the eyes of Seon-Young. The scene in that context requires Seon-Young’s gaze to intersect with the seductive sequences of the dancer’s movements. The conjunction of modernity, femininity, and dance recalls when the female body in choreographic display emerged as a key conduit for the expression of new physical, social, and sexual freedom. These theatrical performances, and the singing and dancing of the two female entertainers in the cinematic narrative, situate them as a locus of the tension between patriarchal social values and Korean women’s desire for westernized modern experiences.

In *A Flower in Hell*, Sonya and her friend Juri are both *yanggonju*. Unlike Juri, however, who desires a traditional woman’s role, Sonya is an incarnation of women’s transgressive femininity and an archetypal *femme fatale*. She seduces her fiancé’s little brother Dong-Sik, who came to Seoul to bring his big brother Yeong-Sik back to their home. Unlike Juri,

who wants to settle down with an ordinary man (Dong-Sik) away from where she lives, Sonya does not desire “marriage” as the normative consummation of a heterosexual relationship. She seems free from patriarchal norms and expresses her desires even though they contradict social norms and morality. Her apathy for the traditional women’s roles is embodied in the volatility of her costumes—she wears only western dress, including a silky black halter-top dress, mambo pants, swimsuit, flare skirt, and so on—as well as in her bold makeup and oversized jewelry, and the way that she seduces her brother-in-law by playing up her sexuality, sways her hips when walking, chews gums, smokes, and hums. As Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog contend, “in the discourse on costume, dress, like an expression of emotion, seemed to grow out of the mysteries of the body. This close association with the body helped to construct costume as behavior, an indicator which in popular usage could subsume the social, moral, and psychological” (187). Sonya’s many changes of costume in this film might reinforce her character as a femme fatale who “harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable” (Doane, *Femme* 1). The deadly woman, and her body, is embodied as a site of seductive spectacle and danger through her bodily practice, or her changes of dress.

In terms of spatiality, Shin, the director of *A Flower in Hell*, attempted to satisfy audience’s voyeuristic desire for veiled spaces such as the GI camp shows, night clubs, and dance halls. Indeed, Shin’s production filmed the real locations of the dancers in the GI base camp (*Dongducheon*) in pursuit of cinematic realism. Its scenes often showed the neighboring area, with its markets, stores, jeeps, *yanggongju*, the rumblings in English, and American soldiers passing by like a documentary film. Among the scenes, particularly, the film concentrates on a group of girls dancing to jaunty mambo music, and on a solo dancer’s slim and supple body and her corporeal movements on the stage (see figure 2-6). The camera lingers on the solo dancer, who wears an angel-like white satin strapless gown with a trail of feathers swaying along her hips. She steps down from the stage and approaches the audience of

American soldiers. Her captivating bodily movements produce intimacy, however transient, through the interaction between the dancer and the male audience. The proximity of the dancer to the audience creates an effect of physical closeness, or sexual availability.



Figure 2-6. A woman dancer at the GI camp in A Flower in Hell (1958)

The camera focuses on the dancer's body as fragmented—slim, white legs, slender waist, enticing face—to satisfy the real audience's curiosity and voyeuristic desire to see “behind the fence.” While the film was shot on site to express a realistic milieu in the city of the 1950s, a place like the GI base camp does not represent quotidian reality at all. Instead, it is embodied as a place of temporary suspension or discontinuity from social norms. Likewise, *A Flower in Hell* contrasts the uncanny glamour of Sonya's costumes in *Myeongdong*—a geographical site of privileged glamour and spectacle in Seoul—with other regions of Seoul that are more shabby and desolate. For instance, although the camera focuses on Sonya's revealing body as she wears a swimsuit on a beach, what is seen in the background is a dreary and shabby space of Seoul as a remnant of the Korean War. What then does this film try to tell us through the stark contrast? The gap between the urban glamour that is embodied through the cinematic focus on the woman's body and fashion/commodities and the obscured background of the shabby landscape

implies another gap: that between Korean society as it then existed and the future that the nation desired. I have attempted so far to show how this gap was represented by women in the 1950s, the *Après Girls*. Just as Sonya was embodied as an object of desirability and despicability at the same time, the disparate classes of the *Après Girls* represent the cultural imagery that was fabricated from the unbridgeable gap between the desolate reality of the 1950s and the reconstruction of gender and class identity.

In fact, the locations of the GI base camps were not marked on maps of Korea because these locations were considered to be confidential military information at that time (Nam). Although the places existed in real life, national security needed them *not* to exist. They were located within the national territory and yet outside national sovereignty; they were places of pleasure and curiosity for foreign culture as well as sites of gendered labor. What they embodied through the spatial contradictions was the very predicament of the *yanggongju*, who were positioned outside of gender normativity and morality as bearers of urban glamour and social stigmatization.



Figure 2-7. The Last Scene of A Flower in Hell (Courtesy of the Korean Film Archive)

In the last scene of *A Flower in Hell* (figure 2-7), Sonya pursues Dong-Sik (her brother-in-law) to escape her troubles but is shot by Yeong-Sik (her husband) as a punishment for her betrayal. She is wearing her black halter-top dress as she collapses, slowly immersed in the mire. The dark mud engulfing her body might be an alternative signifier of the base camp, which young *yanggongju* tried unsuccessfully to escape. As this scene implies, it was an inextricable impasse for Korean women as well as the nation under the specific historical circumstances.

What did corporeal performance—dance or dancing—embody in relation to women's femininity and class during the postwar period in Korea? Although I have used the term *Après Girls* to designate the divergent classes of women that emerged through the war, the term itself fails to capture the diversity of the collective and the multiple ways that women presented femininity and social status through their gendered labor while countering the state's regulations. As elite, upper-class Korean women introduced dance to present their high education and social status in Korean society, dancing became something that was culturally imagined as a performance of modern culture and knowledge for middle- and working-class women. What I want to accentuate is the social contradiction of such cultural meanings, which existed alongside dance as gendered labor for working-class women in the entertainment industry or for the prostitutes working on the US bases. The seductive bodily performance of working-class women was thus, like the dance and dancing of the other classes, a critical channel for transmitting Western cultural modernization and Americanness.

Chapter 3. Redressing Femininity: The Ambiguity of Industrial Soldiers, Gendered Labor, and K-Beauty during Park Chung-Hee's Military Regime (1961–79)

Although the female bus attendant (*yeochajang*) of South Korea's (hereafter Korea) industrialization period has had her labor replaced by advanced technology—a recorded announcement of destinations and a credit card for charging fares—a monochrome photograph (figure 3-1) invokes the past, its visual references conjuring the sonic.¹ Her exuberant voice, shouting out “all right” as a broken English *orai* every morning, her uniform in a burgundy shade—consisting of a jacket with a white collar, pants with a money belt around the waist, and a beret—this imagery evokes nostalgia of the bygone era. Such laborers' uniforms were particularly ubiquitous in the urban landscape of the 1970s and were a convenient means of classifying people's professions. The attire was a visual marker not merely of one's workplace and occupation but of education and social class. The ubiquity of uniforms as regulated dress under the military regime suggests a linkage between national politico-economic projects, embodiment of femininity, the construction of identity as a laborer, and material culture in the form of dress. In this chapter, I examine these linkages in relation to women's fashion and beauty culture in 1970s Korean society. Against the backdrop of the military regime's top-down dictation and surveillance of young Korean women's quotidian looks, proletarian women sought ways to attain alternate identities through self-fashioning outside of the socially sanctioned attire.

Social imagery of working-class young women as disseminated in popular media—commercial films, tabloid journalism, and some literary representations—was often highly ambivalent, and the boundaries that identified working-class women were quite fluid and frequently transgressed. This social confusion and ambiguity regarding the representation of

¹ All translations in this chapter are mine unless otherwise indicated. Bus attendant jobs were initially limited to men, but they have been staffed by women since 1961.

proletarian female laborers stemmed from the military state's paradoxical gestures toward the "industrial soldiers" as well as increasing circulation of popular media, which played a crucial role in creating the ambiguous parameters of working-class women laborers. These women likely chose to navigate popular culture (and its visual culture) as a resource in order to demand acknowledgment of their feminine identities. As I will show, popular and in-house beauty magazines played a critical role in suturing various backgrounds of unmarried Korean women, reproducing "beauty" images that implicitly contributed to fostering working-class women's masquerades of class and identity. The unprecedented circulation of popular media in the 1970s provided a favorable backdrop for the everyday masquerades, which offset the homogenous embodiment of "sound and healthy" laborers that the state imposed.



Figure 3-1. A female bus attendant pushes passengers into the bus (photo credit: <https://koreablog.korea.kr/677>)

A recent Korean news articles urged the appreciation of the sacrifice that was made by these female bus attendants, a sacrifice that helped foster the miraculous economic development of Korea. Korean society looked down on these women and even criminalized the pocketing of collected fares by female bus attendants ("Symposium"). These attendants were mostly uneducated lower-class young girls in their late teens or early twenties, who had migrated from

provinces to Seoul to survive poverty. Although they worked almost nineteen hours a day, their salary was extremely small (“A Day”). Moreover, they had to endure social discrimination as well as sexual harassment from male passengers. Because of their physical and menial labor, their loud voices, and their unsophisticated uniform, they were located outside of femininity, respectability, and the idea of “beauty.”

Not only female bus attendants, but young women laborers more broadly—especially factory workers—were exploited as cheap laborers to achieve rapid national industrialization and yet were never perceived as a subject of respectability and desirability under the Park Chung-Hee military regime. As Ruth Barraclough astutely contends, female factory workers signified not only gender ambiguity but also sexual availability, and they “were condemned as unfeminine while also exposed to extreme sexual harassment in factories and on the streets of industrializing Seoul” (5). From the early 1960s to the late 1970s, the number of Korean women working in the labor-intensive light-manufacturing industries notably increased, and they came to represent more than half the workforce in industries such as electronics, textiles, and ready-made shoes (J.-K. Lee; S.-K. Kim). While young women who worked at factories were encouraged by the state to become “industrial soldiers/warriors,” they simultaneously remained members of the country’s most vulnerable and peripheral social class.² The label *industrial soldiers* was applied far beyond these women factory workers, or so-called factory-girls (*gongsuni*), and even to women who provided sexual labor.

Although these women were discriminated against in everyday life because of what they did and where they worked, the state tried to promote a positive vision of female factory workers

² As Kim Eun-Shil contends, “the project of industrializing the nation was metaphorized as a war against the old Korea, which has been stained by poverty” (182). The term *industrial soldiers/warriors* should thus be understood in Korea’s specific cultural and historical context.

and even celebrated the image of labor through various embodied experiences.³ The state thereby seemed to include them as legitimate members of society by framing them as laborers (*nodongja*) in order to emphasize their contribution to the national economy; for instance, the state also designated Korean sex workers working in GI camps or for *Gisaeng* Tourism⁴ as industrial soldiers, since their incomes helped earn foreign currency for the national economy.⁵ According to Korean male journalist Lee Seung-Ho's personal remembrance,

In the year 1974, I was 15 years old. One spring day, my gym teacher told us; our sisters who sell their bodies to American soldiers are patriots. The dollars our sisters earn improve the economy of this poor country. You should not point a finger at them by calling them “yanggongju” or “yuenmadam.” (186–87)

Such an anecdote was intimately associated with the state's ambiguous regulation of prostitution. As Lee Jin-Kyung elaborates, “contradicting its promulgation of “Laws on the Prevention of Prostitution” in 1961, the Park Chung-Hee government set up a series of laws, regulations, and legal mechanisms throughout the 1960s and '70s that promoted the sex tourism industry and were indirectly designed to facilitate the mobilization of working-class women into the sex industry” (89).

³ The state's export-led industrialization was celebrated through various everyday life rituals, festivals, and anniversaries, such as slogan competitions and the disbursement of cash rewards. The state especially propagated its export-driven agenda through films, songs, and speech contests that were meant to inspire laborers. See J.-M. Gang, *Contemporary*, vol. 3, 27.

⁴ The term *Gisaeng* Tourism referred to sexual service laborers who catered to Japanese businessmen under the military regime. As Na-Young Lee also notes, the state intervened and even controlled these sexual service laborers, as well as Korean sex workers in GI camps (which were debasingly called *Yanggongju* [prostitutes in GI camps]), as a way to promote national industry and acquire foreign currency (H.-Y. Lee and N.-Y. Lee).

⁵ As Katharine Moon writes, “For the Korean government, *kijich'on* [GI camp town] prostitutes were an indispensable asset, as ‘personal ambassador,’ in its early adaptation to the changing security policies of the United States in the early 1970s” (127). Korean sex workers in GI camps embodied ambivalent sociopolitical positions that oscillated between “industrial soldier/personal ambassadors” and prostitutes.

As a vignette to unravel my argument of this chapter, it will be useful to introduce an excerpt of the novella “A Child Raising a Star” (*Byeoleulgireuneunai*), written by Korean male writer Lee Cheong-Jun (1939–2008). This novel is about a boy who is looking for his older sister. The narrator, a friend of the boy, tries to help him find the older sister, while becoming sympathetic to the boy’s solitude and yearning for the lost family. The excerpt below is the narrator’s imagination of what the sister looks like, as he anticipates that he could be possibly enter a serious relationship with her if he helps the boy find her. His imaginings explicitly show how Korean women laborers were hierarchically classed under the male gaze:

No, it doesn’t matter whether she was not an office worker (*hoesawon*), only if she was a virgin who had not yet learned to like the smell of men. Of course, it would be nice if she was a cosmetic saleswoman or a factory girl working in an industrial export zone. If I can be more selfish, it would be better if she was a salesclerk at a market, which has recently appeared everywhere in towns, or a telephone operator. If not all these, I wouldn’t complain even if she was just a bus attendant (*beoseuchajang*) or an errand girl at a beauty parlor. (C.-J. Lee 245)

The male imaginary posits the working-class woman’s body as an object of different degrees of desirability; typically, the degree of desirability is hierarchically determined by what she does. While the most desirable woman is an office worker, bus attendants or errand girls working at beauty parlors have the least desired social prestige. As the proximity of respectability of the women’s professions determined the degree of desirability, working-class laborers tried to groom their appearances to “not look like” factory girls, bus attendants, or errand girls. The government regulated and identified female laborers in this manner not just to protect national interest but to curtail women’s freedoms. Working-class women had become self-sufficient and appeared in public embodying “what they desired to be” through their fashions; for instance, when a women’s short skirt (or miniskirt) was circulated as a symbol of Western culture,

freedom, and subversion of authority in the mid-1960s, the state declared the wearing miniskirts to be a debasement of public morals. The state thus reinforced its mundane surveillance of the street by regulating the length of the skirts and, ultimately, young women's bodies.

The ambiguous embodiment of working-class women's status was therefore caused by the collision, struggle, and tension between the state-imposed label of industrial soldiers—or the sociocultural image of despised laborers—and young women's desire to escape compulsory identification with these public images. Hence, this chapter attempts to illuminate the extent to which the cultural value of unmarried proletarian women was continually (re)produced through everyday acts of consumption and the production of beauty, which often defied the state-imposed image of industrial soldiers.⁶ As E. P. Thompson contends, class can be seen “as a disposition” (312). I argue that women laborers used fashion not only to enact quotidian performances to “redress” their identities and agency, but also to develop theatrical performances that simulated and evoked a middle class in search of liberation from the struggles between the authoritarian state and women laborers. Rob Schorman has asserted that “fashion is inherently both ambiguous and ambivalent, providing the means of creating identities that juggle opposing values and competing perspectives” (14).

This was the moment, as I explore later in this chapter, when K-Beauty (Korean Beauty) was initiated not only as part of a culturally specific beauty practice in Korean women's everyday lives, but as part of a state-sponsored national industry. As Kathy Peiss puts it, “Beauty culture . . . should be understood not only as a type of commerce but as a system of meaning that

⁶ The embodiment of the factory girl as economic, social, and sexualized had existed since Korea experienced industrialization as a Japanese colony (1910–45). According to Barraclough, the image of the Korean factory girl (*yeogong*) appeared as early as 1919 in daily newspapers, novels, and magazines as an exemplar of a new, modern type (13). Barraclough examines the process by which factory girls became cultural figures of immense political significance in modern Korean literature and Korea's industrializing society.

helped women navigate the changing conditions of modern social experience” (6). A unique Korean beauty culture, dubbed K-Beauty in the era of globalization, was forged along with the development of a domestic beauty industry as well as the boost of export industry. This entrepreneurial process was evident from the early 1960s to the 1970s, when the military state tried to build up its economic independence through export-led industrialization, instead of solely relying on foreign aid.⁷ On the other hand, women laborers sought not only pleasure from these public self-displays but also social respectability. To that end, female laborers consumed the material images of the middle class by reading beauty magazines, wearing clothing and makeup that was accessible and affordable, and adopting socially respectable middle-class values, which were tied to such luxuries as modern apartments, higher education, and leisure activities. That is, K-Beauty has long been intertwined with gendered labor and the deeply rooted class ideology and nationalism that help drive Korea’s industrialization.

As Nan Enstad indicates, however, the public displays of working-class female workers in middle-class guises reflected not just a simple “imitation of middle-class identity but an appropriation of a valued set of class codes” (13). Along with the increasing circulation of popular magazines, and the growing female audience for visual media, including imported Hollywood films, in the early 1960s,⁸ the spectrum of middle-class values was widened and relentlessly presented to the public. This saturation provided the public/audience a fantasy that could purportedly be attained. Accordingly, women factory laborers sought respectability by “consuming” middle-class values and artifacts—that is, by fetishizing modern housing, lifestyles, fashions, leisure activities, and beauty practices as a way to procure social respectability and status. According to Iris Marion Young, fashion imagery enables a woman to engage in a variety

⁷ See footnote 18. Amore exported its cosmetic Ohseuka to Thailand and established a beauty center there in 1964.

⁸ See Korean Federation of Film Archive.

of pleasurable (if in some ways problematic) practices, particularly those through which she fantasizes an unreal identity or situates herself as a desirable being:

Part of the pleasure of clothes . . . consists of allowing [their wearer] to fantasize images of women in clothes, and in desiring to become an image, unreal, to enter an intransitive, playful utopia . . . turning oneself into a picture, an image, an unreal identity. . . .

Fantasizing is not wishing, hoping, or planning; *it has no future*. The clothing image provides the image of situations without any situatedness. (208, my emphasis)

As Young points out, fashion offers an ephemeral moment of autonomy in which one can fantasize oneself as a desirable being, while contravening the compulsory identifications the state imposed. Fashion also might have stimulated a desire for *presentness* in Korean women laborers, a desire that effectively countered the *future-oriented social ethos* of Park's military regime. As Choi Chungmoo explains, "The capitalistic modernization project that South Korean military regimes carried out attempted to emulate the metropolitan materiality. At the same time, these modernization projects demanded the sacrifice of South Korean workers in the name of the nation" (12). The regulatory regime easily justified the sacrifice and endurance of Korean laborers as necessary to advance the nation's economic agenda.

With a perhaps unavoidably bitter irony, *K-Beauty* was initiated by laborers' sacrifices and class struggles, and yet it still allowed them to dream of attaining respectable selves as well as a better future. This process is related to what Walter Benjamin describes as the utopian element in popular culture; for him, products such as fashion please the working class because they offer a fleeting fulfillment and anticipation of a potentially emancipatory reality. As Angela McRobbie explains, Benjamin believed that such "utopian hopes for emancipation come to be embedded right inside the cultural objects and artefacts, from the point of their inception and design, and how these 'wishes' have to be heeded in the act of refashioning the future"

(*Postmodernism* 112).⁹ Although the glamour of K-Beauty as it is circulated through the internet and (social) media easily overshadows Korean women's proletarian, culturally specific lived experiences and habitual beauty practices of the 1970s, it is important to note that Korean beauty culture has indeed intersected with gendered labor, desires of class distinction, and export-driven economic projects. This chapter therefore demonstrates that Korean working-class women's everyday beauty practice in the 1970s helped suspend class struggles, while simultaneously providing a moment of emancipation and freedom. For this analysis, I will illuminate how working-class women laborers could strategically perform modern beauty culture (and attain the image of the idealized woman) to present themselves as desirable. Yet, their experienced embodiments of idealized feminine beauty should not be understood as simple subordination to the patriarchal military regime's gender norms. Rather, working-class laborers' embodiment of modern beauty constituted an everyday performance of the freedom and independence that they had acquired through their economic capabilities, as well as through their emancipation from the domestic sphere, even though their wages remained relatively low and the idea of emancipation remained rhetorical at best. Therefore, I will also demonstrate how present-day beauty culture (K-Beauty) was fostered along with the state's export-oriented industrialization and support for the domestic cosmetic market in the mid-1960s and 1970s in terms of law and finance.

On the one hand, K-Beauty practices were initiated and promoted as a form of theatrical performance for a growing female theater audience beginning in the 1960s:¹⁰ theater served as a place to rehearse and simulate female audience's fantasies of surface transformations and alternative selves. Accordingly, as I will argue, along with the sociocultural impact of K-Beauty

⁹ See also Buck-Morss 114–20 for an elaboration of Benjamin's *passagenwerk*.

¹⁰ Regarding the increasing numbers of women audiences in the golden age of South Korean cinema, refer to my chapter 2.

on women's everyday life through the wide circulation of commercial and beauty magazines, the theatrical aspects of K-Beauty buttressed the real-life beauty performance of proletarian young women, giving them a utopian illusion that they were achieving alternate identities, agency, and respectability. On the other hand, women wage workers' everyday life performances of middle-class images and identities allowed them to seek pleasure as well as respectability; they transformed their appearances and commodity consumption, consequently disrupting class distinctions. Images of middle-class housewives and young college girls usually conjured ideal femininity and standardized "attractiveness." By contrast, the embodiments of unmarried proletarian laborers, mostly domestic service laborers—such as bus attendants, elevator girls, bartenders, cosmetic saleswomen, factory workers, sex workers, show girls, and maids (*sikmo*)¹¹—that suffused popular visual media and print media were rendered unfeminine/unappealing or hypersexual/promiscuous, and were significantly differentiated by class. This hierarchy of female images was notably consistent with that of fashion. Kim Seung-Kyung observes that most fashion "trend[s] started among middle-class college women and passed down to working-class women" (63). Kim traces a popular fashion trend that initially circulated among college girls—a ribbon hair accessory—that then dispersed rapidly among factory workers in the export industrial zone (EPZ). As such, women's fashion trends manifested themselves in a top-down system; women laborers might imitate the clothing, accessories, and even habitual gestures of college girls as embodiments of middle-class existence and "trendiness." Appropriating the middle-class images of college girls also might have empowered

¹¹ Immigrant single women were largely restricted to service labor—sometimes including sexual service labor—because the manufacturing industry could not accommodate the overflow of immigrant women laborers from rural areas. Much as the boundaries of these jobs were represented as transgressive and fluid, women's bodies easily slipped discursively into one category: that of a prostitute. Hence, the military state often categorized a wide range of young lower-class women as "potential prostitutes" and tried to police them in the name of rescuing these "women in danger." See Ha.

working-class women from rural areas and increased their sense of belonging to new urban life. Many natives of Seoul openly despised women laborers who immigrated from rural areas for their unsophisticated appearance and their “menial” jobs, calling them “country girls” (*chonnyeon*) and *Gongsuni*. As many essays, confessions, and testimonies by women laborers have demonstrated, women laborers had to try to not look like factory girls in order to avoid social stigmatization.¹² As part of these everyday struggles, women factory workers would often change out of their blue uniforms when leaving work, even if only to make a single phone call; they habitually carried books, or at least magazines, when they went out during breaks so they would not look like factory girls.¹³

Marginalized by social class and gendered labor, proletarian women used their bodies and seemingly irrelevant quotidian beauty performances to disrupt the military regime’s control over them. Contrary to many critics who situate women laborers’ bodies as only the site of state power and oppression, I consider them as new political/cultural agents of a “soft power” that implicitly and sometimes explicitly undermined the military state’s repressive rules. For instance, for the sake of the national economy, the state discouraged Koreans from consuming imported goods (*oejepum*), which were regarded as luxury goods (*sachipum*). In addition, economically disenfranchised women in the 1960s and 1970s saw their low-wage jobs as a way to gain freedom and independence from patriarchal normativity. These working-class women’s

¹² To document this claim, I make use of factory workers’ essays, or *nodongsugi*. This term refers to essays written by workers to address their own workplace experiences. These essays were published through liberal journals such as *Daehwa*, a monthly Korean journal, beginning in the mid-1970s. Many of these essays have recently been collected by Korean scholars such as Won Kim, who studies women factory workers during the Park military regime using a micro-sociocultural approach (see *Women Factory Workers* and *1970 Modernism*).

¹³ According to Young-Jae Lee’s description, company emblems were frequently inscribed on laborers’ uniforms, which made it easy to distinguish their workplaces. Some companies assigned different uniforms to different departments, such as office or factory work. Consequently, some women factory workers chose not to wear their uniforms in public spaces. See Young-Jae Lee 79; and Koo, *Korean Workers* 190.

economic independence and their masquerade to reconstruct their femininity and corporeal identities through fashion could be seen as a form of *rebellion* against the military state's control and surveillance of, say, young women's skirt length in everyday life.

Based on these sociopolitical circumstances, I discuss what social conditions came into play in the factory workers' fashionable masquerades of class, which stimulated the desire for class ascendancy and respectability. In this chapter, my analysis relies on two archival resources: the in-house magazine of the cosmetics company Amorepacific (1945–), a representative magazine of the Korean beauty industry; and *Sunday Seoul* (1968–91), a representative tabloid of 1970s Korea. Although the publisher of *Sunday Seoul*, Seoul Newspaper (*Seoul Sinmun*), claimed that it was a cultural magazine (*gyoyangji*) that reached forty million readers—encompassing white-collar men, housewives, and wage workers—it could not refute criticism that it aimed to gratify the sexual fantasies of male readers and glorify the state's political agenda.¹⁴ According to Kim Dong-Won, a Korean media critic, *Sunday Seoul* played a significant role in triggering the “3S Politics” of the Jeon Du-Hwan regime (1980–88), which succeeded Park's government. “3S” refers to screen, sports, and sex, which Jeon's government used as a tool to assuage people's political dissent (S. M. Park 83). Jeon's merciless suppression of the Korean democracy movement in 1980 would later come to symbolize the violent excesses of his authoritarian regime.

However, *Sunday Seoul* catered not only to the male gaze, but also to the desires of young women for upward mobility, desires that were driven by the growing consumerist impulse in Korea and stimulated by advertisements for apartments, women's (imported) cosmetics, makeup of new colors, and Western fashion. The illusion of social mobility therefore was

¹⁴ *Sunday Seoul* published in excess of 230,000 copies weekly in 1978 and earned a monthly revenue of 100 million won (approximately \$100,000) by 1975, a record in terms of sales and commercial revenue. The beauty magazines of Amore, the enormously successful Korean cosmetics company, were distributed for free. See the Board of *Seoul Sinmun*'s 100 Years.

strengthened in the 1970s by the increasing dissemination of popular magazines—emblemized by weekly magazines and in-house cosmetics magazines—which, as Schorman observes, “helped formulate new middle-class values that became more visible, and, to a certain extent, *more manipulable* through ordinary beauty practices and consumption” (1, my emphasis). For these proletarian female workers, the manipulability extended beyond the everyday enactment of middle-class aesthetics; their class-crossing performances were acts that subverted the distinctive demarcation of class ideology and gender normativity that the military state regulated.

Particularly under Park’s “Seoul Development Project” (*Namseoulgyeabalgaehoek*), which began in the early 1960s, traditional Korean-style housing and farmland were rapidly being transformed into a complex of Western-style apartments around the Gangnam district. *Sunday Seoul* tracked the transition of urban residents who relocated from traditional houses to apartments and promoted the “Han-River (*Hangang*) Mansion” as modern housing for the urban middle class. One advertisement describes the complex as representing

The dream of young women, Deluxe Apartments. The era of ready-made has just begun. As fashion changes from custom-made to ready-made clothing, apartments are in fashion. Let’s look at the interiors of Han-River Mansion, *Jin-Yang* apartments, *Dae-Wang* apartments. . . . (10 Jan. 1971)

The advertisement’s phrasing explicitly shows how housing and clothing get conflated under consumerist desires. Because of housing policies in the 1970s, apartments began to be constructed that embodied a newly rising urban middle class. As Valérie Gelézeau also expounds, “Apartment complexes have stood at the core of the material and social transformation of Korean cities: not only did they shape a considerable part of the urban extension from the 1970s, they also helped shape the values and behaviors of the urban middle class—and especially those of its upper fringe” (“Changing” 297). The current (twenty-first-

century) gigantic and luxurious apartment complexes concentrated in Gangnam area were established in the 1970s as an explicit index of social class.¹⁵ Commercial and beauty magazines conflated consumerist desires with women's fashion and beauty practices. Later in this chapter, therefore, I examine how *Sunday Seoul* played an important role in disseminating the ideal images of beauty, or attractiveness, not only through the mushrooming public appearances of Korean young actresses and celebrities from the 1960s to 1970s but also through the representation of ordinary Korean beauties ranging from May Queens to Office Queens. Achieving a certain physical attractiveness, in this regard, was extensively recognized as a way to narrow the sociocultural and psychological gaps among the categories of single Korean women in terms of class and status. The public airing of Korean actresses' personal lives, including their extravagant marriages with wealthy men, not only appealed to the curiosity of female readers/audiences but also fostered gendered, middle-class values.

Park Seong-A claims that *Sunday Seoul* showed only modest and neat middle-class single women as cover girls (175). This claim, however, contradicts what some people recall as a provocative and stimulating adult magazine that catered exclusively to male readers. Of course, the magazine focused on young women's facial/bodily attractiveness and emphasized their (sexual) availability to increase its circulation among men. Contrary to Park's argument, however, the arrangement of images in *Sunday Seoul* covered women from all walks of life, not just middle-class women. In this regard, this affordable, ubiquitous popular magazine could sustain the proletarian performers' masquerades, as well as their fantasy that they could attain an alternate identity in everyday life by consuming and appropriating the various bodily images

¹⁵ This development took place even before the iconic term *Gangnam* was coined. What is now called *Gangnam* was at the time called *Yeongdong*. Under the military state's urban development project, the urban center of Seoul was transformed from *Myeongdong* and *Jongro* (as I address in my chapter 2 as a center of fashion and youth culture during the 1960s) to *Gangnam*. I will discuss the way in which the Gangnam district is embodied in relation to Korean women's fashion and beauty practices in chapter 4.

and embodiments of middle-class values and culture. Indeed, it also widely covered working-class laborers' daily lives, their hardships as professionals, and their difficulties as female laborers relegated to the lower social classes. Of course, the magazine introduced readers to elite women professionals such as schoolteachers, bankers, researchers/professors, and their formal or casual dress codes as well as their wages, dates, and potential future husbands. The January 1971 issue of *Sunday Seoul*, for example, included interviews with women train attendants who made appeals to male customers who were ill-mannered and had bad attitudes toward them. As one interviewee said, "it bothers me when male customers treat me like their wife or a bar girl." Another interviewee, a woman bus attendant, complained about some male customers who forced the bus attendants to sing a song on a bus (10 Jan. 1971, 32–33).

With reference to the presentation of beauty, *Sunday Seoul* likewise sutured heterogeneous and conflicting images of Korean women from different classes and social statuses in terms of their education, job, income, and family background. For example, the segment "My Amazing Daughter" (*ttaljarang*) introduced daughters who were mostly college students in Korea or abroad and who had middle-class family backgrounds. Almost every "daughter" was described as having the potential to be a "good wife and wise mother" and was represented as a traditionally idealized image, rather than in terms of her physical attractiveness. Meanwhile, the feature also dramatized the professional struggles of factory workers, bus conductors (*beoseuchajang*), sex workers (*hostesses*), and women bartenders, whose lives were depicted in opposition to those of middle-class women. These heterogeneous images of single Korean women of different classes and social statuses—many of whom otherwise would have contradicted, been excluded from, or been marginalized in the social structures of everyday life—embodied a new image of beauty (*mi-in*). Hence, it is inaccurate to allege that *Sunday Seoul's* readership was restricted to "uneducated working-class males" or

that it solely catered to the male gaze, as some researchers have claimed.¹⁶ Instead, its heterogeneous female images served important roles not only in establishing permeable class boundaries, but in producing consumerist desires among female readers.

In addition, based on various forms of beauty pageants staged on different media platforms, from live performance to popular magazines, I move from the May Queen of Ewha Women's University (EWU) as an embodiment of elite Korean women's intelligence and pulchritude to the Queen of the Office, a pageant that targeted ordinary working women, and in which male colleagues and bosses selected female office workers to appear on the monthly covers of *Sunday Seoul*. I document how these beauty competitions in the 1970s were intensely hierarchical and represented a projection of the patriarchal gaze. What I further try to show, however, is how much the beauty system affected the mundane life of working-class women in terms of how they exerted agency and reconfigured their identities. Popular magazines often became a crucial channel to present the quotidian masquerades of different groups of proletarian women, and to some extent promoted class mobility, or at least class ambiguity. In addition to addressing the class-nuanced hierarchy of these beauty competitions in terms of women's lived experience and visual representation, I focus on the "class ambiguity" of a cosmetic saleswomen (*miyongsawon*) and a woman factory laborer in *Sunday Seoul*. The class ambiguity of the beauty contestants stemmed from the way that their ambiguous middle-class looks were effectively laid over their status as lower-class service laborers.

Performing K-Beauty: The Military State and the National Beauty Industry

¹⁶ See Park Seung-A 175; and Lim and Park 99. In addition, by insupportably limiting the readership of these periodicals, such critics devalue these periodicals as sites of research that illuminate the heterogeneous images of single Korean women, as well as their desires, during the nation's period of industrialization. What are often regarded as vulgar commercial weekly magazines, such as *Sunday Seoul*, need to be reevaluated as significant and complex media sources if we are to understand the sociocultural conflicts and paradoxes that formed the intersection of aesthetics and class during this era.

In the 1970s, the state's urbanization project and rapid industrialization were accelerated, the results of which began to be visualized through the transformation of urban landscapes, accompanied by proletarianization on a massive scale, turning millions of farmers and their sons and daughters into wage workers in urban industry. Although some deemed South Korea's rapid industrialization from the 1970s to the 1980s to have produced the "Miracle of Han-River," such socioeconomic transformations brought about intensive and disruptive demographic relocation to and concentration in urban areas such as Seoul, Masan, and Pohang. Likewise, as Kim Kyung-Il documents, South Korea underwent an intensive socioeconomic transformation from being an agrarian economy to a manufacturing economy, a shift that was promoted by the export-oriented industrialization during Park's regime (66). However, as Moon Seungsook illustrates,

Although Park's regime subscribed to the idea of "modernization" to "build a prosperous and strong Korean nation," . . . he tended to believe that the unchecked influx of Western values and the indiscrete imitation of Western institutions . . . led to not only social disorder but also the weakening of Korean national consciousness. Therefore, from the beginning of his regime Park was conscious of counteracting Western liberalism in the mist of rapid modernization. (37)

Park's regime took politically ambivalent positions toward the US economy and culture. After the Korean War (1950–53), Korea's sociocultural urban landscape was shaped by unilateral cultural flows and economic support from outside, especially from the United States. However, Park's military regime regulated and restricted the liberal US popular culture and media by defining this culture as "decadent" and tried to control young Koreans who consumed it. Among such invasive cultural and economic influences, of serious concern was the overflow of imported cosmetics (*oeje hwajangpum*) coming from GI camp exchanges (the PX) and smuggled goods circulating illegally on the black market. Moreover, partly because imported women's cosmetics

were considered to be the exclusive property of middle-class housewives and college girls during this time, a great number of cheap replicas were circulated illegally to tap into the “aspirational” lower-class market, weakening the competitiveness of the national beauty industry.

These practices intensified the national dependence on the importation of Western goods. The government, therefore, prohibited the importation of specific goods by establishing the National Reconstruction Supreme Commission (*Gukgajaegonhoeui*) in 1961. It attempted to promote the consumption of domestic cosmetics and to foster the national beauty industry through financial and technical support:

In the early 1960s, whereas imported cosmetics took over the vanities of upper-middle-class women, ordinary women used domestic cosmetics (*guksan hwajangpum*). . . . One of the serious obstacles for national modernization is Western luxury goods (*sachipum*) from PX and smuggled commodities. Therefore, the National Reconstruction Supreme Commission implemented a law prohibiting the selling/buying of imported goods on July 4, 1961. Imported women’s cosmetics were banned as one of the particularly regulated nineteen items. (*50 Years* 155)¹⁷

The state’s strong prohibition law served as an important impetus for the growth of Korean beauty industries and conglomerates such as Amore (*Taepyeongyang*). Called Amorepacific since 2002, Amore in the 1960s was one of Korea’s leading women’s cosmetic brands, and it increased its competitiveness by establishing technical partnerships with French cosmetic company Coty, and Japanese cosmetic company Shiseido. Amore contributed enormously to enhancing the quality of domestic cosmetics, which were later exported to Thailand and

¹⁷ All references to *50 Years* were generously provided by the Amorepacific Archive located in Ohsan, Gyeonggido, South Korea. It was established in 2012 and opened to the public since 2018. It houses a wide range of the company’s archival materials dating back to 1945, as well as more broadly those of the Korean beauty industry, presenting the company as a pioneer of what is currently called K-Beauty. I discuss Amore in greater detail later in this chapter, based on my archival research at Amorepacific Archive in summer 2018.

Ethiopia under Park's export-oriented economic policy.¹⁸ As such, as Park Sang Mi observes, the South Korean government in the 1970s "consistently supported large conglomerates [*jaebeol*] with targeted, state-economic policies" (71), while simultaneously emphasizing "frugality" as a way to restrict the consumption of "foreign-originating" (*oerae*) forces and commodities (even while it also censored many Korean popular films and other media products) (77). In a similar context, the virtue of "frugality" was encouraged as part of the state-sponsored rediscovery of "tradition" and resistance to Western influence, which arose along with the New Village movement (*saemaedul undong*), which itself promoted women's virtue.¹⁹ An emphasis on frugality formed part of the state's attempt to favor local cosmetics in the domestic market over imported beauty commodities (*oejepum*); the regime's overall aim was to rebuild national power and leverage not only in domestic markets but also in global markets.

However, most Korean middle-class women still desired French, not domestic, cosmetics. The Korean cosmetic industry still struggled to "catch up" to the imported Western brands and their beauty commodities. Despite the desire of middle-class women consumers for imported cosmetics, domestic cosmetic companies such as Amore grew enormously as the state's politico-economic agenda was advanced, eventually exporting their products overseas to such countries as Ethiopia and Thailand in the late 1970s. Along with the Park regime's export-driven industrialization project, the state's political agenda for nationalism played a significant role in promoting the development of the local cosmetics industry. That agenda was reaffirmed in Amore's commemoration speech, which was published in the first edition of the in-house

¹⁸ Amore exported its own cosmetic Ohseuka to Thailand and established a beauty center there in 1964.

¹⁹ The nationwide development campaign called the New Village movement in the 1970s urged people to rediscover the value of the Korean spirit and tradition to help further national development. Among these values, "frugality" (or saving money) was emphasized as a woman's duty; women were urged, for example, to remain at home and support male labor in order to build up wealth for the state. See S.-M. Park 77–78.

beauty magazine—and the very first Korean beauty magazine—*The World of Makeup* (*Hwajanggye*). The company explicitly tried to stimulate national consumerism among readers:

Reckless Koreans who blindly follow imported goods (*oejepum*) are now paying attention to our locally produced commodities, whose quality has become very competitive compared to imported cosmetics, and this has helped stabilize our national economy and people's livelihood.

However, unfortunately, the Korean cosmetic industry is still dependent on imported cosmetics. Therefore, along with our continuous efforts to improve the quality of our products, we need to prevent imported Western cosmetics, which circulate through the local black market. For this, the government will also strongly support the local cosmetic industry. . . . Today, our company has decided to publish a monthly beauty magazine, *Hwajanggye*, to spur the development of the Korean cosmetic industry. In addition, we hope that this magazine will be a crucial medium to disseminate cosmetic usage and proper, commonsense beauty routines. By doing so, we aim for our readers to not neglect national spirit and awareness by prohibiting their bias toward Western luxury goods or imported cosmetics. (*50 Years* 118–20)

The sacrifice of working-class laborers represented a kind of investment in the future, and in their political and ideological belief that a more equitable and prosperous era would supersede the present struggle: the sacrifice was predicated in some ways on an illusion of social mobility and a progressive future that had yet to arrive.

The state tried to mystify Korean workers with utopian success stories of “self-made men” (*jasuseongga*) who achieved great fortunes from nothing. The extensive circulation of these success stories in the mass media played a significant role in ingraining these largely

untenable fantasies of upward mobility and class fluidity in Korean society.²⁰ In fact, many of Park Chung-Hee's public speeches during the 1970s acknowledged the sacrifices of factory workers, who were assured that they finally would be rewarded for their efforts in the 1980s. He promised "future reward" within a decade, which would recompense factory workers for their "blood and sweat" (112). The social ambience of the 1970s compelled workers to endure present sufferings and toils for a hypothetical future: Park cajoled his countrymen, claiming that he wanted them

to understand that both improvements in workers' lives and the growth of corporations depend on our national development, so I ask for your cooperation to take pride and responsibility for the establishment of the nation. I can assure you that the rapid growth of economy due to the continuing expansion of exports will provide *a prosperous future* for our three million workers. (112, emphasis added)

The performativity of the future-oriented utterances in Park Chung-Hee's public speeches to a certain extent buttressed a *utopian illusion* that the future that would repay present sacrifice was not only contingent but imminent; the state's subtle manipulation blurred the boundary between the future and the present, or between illusion and reality. Ironically, the state's tactic relied on the primary attribute of K-Beauty in the 1970s. And yet, K-Beauty certainly did not flourish solely in the service of patriotic consumerism. It was also a theatrical practice that could create an alternate identity in everyday life, especially when the state otherwise imposed gender normativity on women laborers and reinforced a monolithic image of them only as laborers.

²⁰ Seoul in the 1970s was caught up in a fever of "becoming middle class." Many commercial magazines published passionate stories about "self-made men" who had become wildly successful either in Korea or abroad. Most of them were young Korean men who achieved their success from nothing. Among these magazines, for instance, *Sunday Seoul* (1968–91) published a series titled "Pre-Billionaire" (*yebi jaebeol*) to introduce self-made Korean men who had amassed great fortunes in real life. It also provided useful information regarding how to save money while on a white-collar salary. See, for example, *Sunday Seoul*, vol. 5, no. 25, 1972, p. 93; and vol. 5, no. 27, 1972, p. 87.

In addition, beauty became more accessible even to working-class women laborers though beauty classes and cosmetics promotions that were launched by domestic cosmetic industries. Noteworthy is that some women factory workers recalled that they worked in the factory and cosmetic sales simultaneously. These two jobs were opposed in terms of their visual representations: whereas a woman factory laborer was typically visualized as a young girl in a uniform and a safety helmet, a cosmetic saleswoman—or “beauty evangelist”—was usually presented as feminine, elegant, and professional. In 1964, for example, Amore’s marketing was based exclusively on door-to-door sales.²¹ That is, Amore was the first domestic cosmetic brand to be sold only through a door-to-door sales system. The company educated its saleswomen about new products, beauty practices, techniques, and new fashion/beauty trends that would promote sales. The company’s representative cosmetic saleswoman (figure 3-2) looks like an office lady whose fashion is very formal, professional, and feminine; she is wearing a black blouse, a knee-length skirt, and black mid-heel shoes; sporting a neat hairdo; and carrying a square-shaped cosmetic bag.

²¹ Besides publishing the first Korean beauty magazine, *Hwajanggye*, in 1958, Amore made a name for itself as pioneer in the construction of K-Beauty in a few other regards: it was the first company in the Korean cosmetic industry to employ a large force of saleswomen and beauty consultants (1963); to introduce door-to-door sales (1964); to establish its own beauty salons; to open public beauty classes; to initiate color makeup campaigns; and to patronize Korea’s national beauty pageant, *Miss Korea*, beginning in 1957. According to Amorepacific’s archive, the company made great efforts to educate its saleswomen and beauty consultants, from enhancing their appearances as professionals, to informing them about social etiquette and global fashion/makeup trends through a variety of pedagogical programs. For more details on the history of the company, visit the online archive of Amorepacific (in works cited).



Figure 3-2. An Amore cosmetic saleswoman in 1964 (photo courtesy of Amorepacific Archive)

The beauty classes led by Amore's beauty consultants (*miyongsawon*) became extremely popular among young women and were often offered at theaters and wedding venues as a way to publicize color makeup campaigns (see figure 3-3).²² As advertised in the *Korean Pharmacy Newspaper (Yakup Sinmun)*,

On May 22, our *Gangleung* agency opened a beauty class for our customers along with *A Courtesan with a Bachelor's Degree (haksawagisaeng)*, a new film yet unreleased, at Dongyoung theater free of charge. Before the film began, our [Amore's] beauty consultants offered the audience a makeup class. (June 1966, 9)

²² Amore seems to have recruited beauty consultants with more "professional" qualifications, according to a job posting in *Korea Daily (Hanguk Ilbo)*, 29 Nov. 1971), as seen below. The qualifications emphasized single women's physical youthfulness and decency, as exemplified by the age/height restriction, and focused on appearance rather than on any relevant education/background. Amore sought "laborers" whose education did not need to extend beyond high school. These women should be single, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, with a decent appearance and a healthy look, a height that was more than 158 but less than 168 centimeters, and the ability to be employed for more than three years. However, according to an archivist of Amorepacific, physical attractiveness was a more important qualification than education.



Figure 3-3. Amore's beauty class in a theater in June 1971 (image from *50 Years* 156)

Given that the 1960s were the golden days of Korean film production and consumption,²³ it is reasonable to assume that the makeup/beauty class provided female audiences with visual pleasure and spectacle, as well as a utopian illusion in encouraging them to imagine transforming themselves through the fashion/beauty images displayed on stage and screen. The experience of theater-going or of being at the (movie) theater can be interpreted as an act of consuming a modern fashion and urban spectacle through Hollywood fashion icons and Korean actresses. Under the context of women-centered Korean melodramas and stardoms of particular actresses since that 1960s, the Troika of Actresses—three actresses who enjoyed immense popularity²⁴—monopolized the appeal of female celebrities and attracted enormous audiences of female spectators, making the theater an ideal site for promoting new commodities and fashioning consumer behaviors. Not only did audiences access these rising Korean film actresses. Stars of Hollywood films were likewise perceived as signifiers of Western glamour and

²³ I discuss the Korean film history after the Korean War in detail in chapter 2.

²⁴ The three iconic actresses were Ji-In Yu, Yun-Hee Jeong, and Mi-Hui Jang. For more on these actresses, see <https://brunch.co.kr/@snobberys/64>.

desirability, and they were primarily marked by their physical attractiveness through clothes, makeup, and hairstyles. Cinemas offered female spectators the chance to be part of another, glamorous world in contrast to their own lives. In this respect, a theater is a geographical location of masquerade, which designates the distance between the woman (the actual self) and the embodiment of the feminine ideal and glamour. The masquerade fulfilled these women's need to undertake mundane maneuvers to remove the despised mark of laborers. Such an ephemeral masquerade happened even in reading beauty magazines, as Marlis Schweitzer astutely elaborates, "magazines and newspaper articles rich in detail about star actresses' private [rail] cars, wardrobes, pets, and most recent public appearances created the impression that the theater was a dream world of luxury and romance" (101). Indeed, magazines maximized the effect of being in a theater to sustain the continual tension between the mimetic and the actual; situating the beauty consultants as actors onstage, the makeup classes allowed the audience to intimately experience the illusory aspect of theater as a place to rehearse and simulate new beauty practice and alternative identities. The boundary between the actual and the imaginary was blurred as the theatrical rituals were iterated.

In terms of spatiality, a theater space carries multiple literal and metaphoric meanings by intersecting with corporeality, materiality, and temporality. As Joanne Tompkins sharply explains, "This layering of theatrical space accrues additional meaning when incorporated with the socio-cultural world beyond the walls of the theater" (538). Against the backdrop of the social stigmatization and disrespectability of women laborers, they might have sought a utopian escape by being in a theater. Literally and figuratively, the theater produced a desire for transcendence that provided female audiences with the pleasure of escapism and the fantasy of one's own femininity. The appeal of such cinematic fantasy, dependent on the spatiality of a theater, was therefore conflated with Amore's makeup class and promotion of beauty. Caught between the exigencies of the present and the illusions of the prosperous future, the women

workers continuously tried to mark their presences while simultaneously unmarking their “*gongsuni*-like” visual features. Women performed the everyday yet transient masquerades not only because they had gendered desires to attain new looks, class ascendancy, and respectability, but because they sought to resist the repressive and constraining state-imposed embodiment of female workers.

Crowning Queens: From May Queens to Office Queens in Popular Media

As the primary school education had been legally mandated since 1953, the percentage of Korean women’s school attendance had risen by the 1970s. However, as of 1975, only 2.4 percent of Korean women over the age of twenty-five had finished college, while 77.1 percent had completed only the mandated elementary-school education (S.-I. Woo 7). The presence of college girls therefore had existed as more cultural imagery than substantive beings. Against the backdrop of a Confucian preference for a son over a daughter at that time in the Korean society, a college girl, as a representative of a certain social class and status, was perceived as epitomizing material affluence and respectability. Despite the miniscule number of college girls in Korean society in the 1970s, their representation as pure, intelligent, and middle class rendered them ideals of femininity and pulchritude and dominated a variety of media. In fact, among the many beauty pageants of the 1970s, Ewha Woman’s University (hereafter EWU) had been selecting May Queens every year since 1927. Although other colleges in Seoul emulated the May Queen event, during the 1970s EWU’s May Queen was recognized as the queen of queens, or the “authentic” queen. Hence, many commercial magazines and daily newspapers spotlighted the annual process of selecting the EWU May Queen and her coronation. The May Queens became not only the object of media attention but also elite public figures who embodied both intelligence and physical attractiveness.

According to Shin Geon, “while ‘new women’ [*sinyeoseong*] during the Japanese colonial period (1910–45) represented woman as modern individuals, ‘elite women’ during the

industrialization period embodied women as national subjects [*gukminjeok juche*] whose modern knowledge and high education should return to the nation and the society” (66). In a similar vein, as elite women, Korean college girls were required to be “wise mothers and good wives [*hyeonmoyangcheo*]” to help build a modernized and “healthy” society. College girls were encouraged to improve themselves and to maintain their charm and femininity to sustain their “marriageability.”

According to EWU descriptions, a May Queen had to be a devoted Christian;²⁵ earn a GPA higher than B; demonstrate strong leadership; represent the “Ewha spirit”; and stand no more and no less than 160 centimeters (“May Queen”). May Queen contenders faced a high-stakes competition, as all forty representatives from across the university departments were examined by a committee that consisted of faculty and alumni. The examination required contestants to make a one-minute speech and participate in dress and walking contests (*Jungangilbo*, 10 May 1967). The candidates had to wear light makeup, white blouses, mid-length black skirts, and black or white mid-heels. At the coronation, the May Queen elegantly walked on a red carpet wearing a glamorous white *hanbok*, a traditional women’s garment, followed by the rest of the elected twenty-nine EWU contestants, who were called “maids” (*siyeo*), and whose role was limited exclusively to supporting the queen (figure 3-4). Each year, when the new queen arrived at the end of the red carpet, a shiny tiara was transferred to her. In Beverly Stoeltje’s estimation, “focusing on women’s appearance and placing women in competitive display event that licenses the public gaze on them, beauty contests utilize the principle of competition to determine the ‘best,’ the woman who comes closest to the ideal image

²⁵ According to Andrew Eungi Kim, the vitality of Christianity in South Korea stemmed from the church’s role as a principal agent of economic, political, and social modernization. Christian missionaries were the first to establish a complete system of education, which included some of the nation’s top universities (for instance, EWU), and they were the first to implement a modern curriculum as well. Politically, Koreans also first became acquainted with several key values that mark modernity—such as freedom, democracy, and equality—through Christianity.

of a woman in a given context” (18). However, as Stoeltje also emphasizes, the competition is based largely on capitalist ideology and is “a mechanism for creating distinction between winners and losers, elites and commoners” (26). Likewise, in the case of the May Queen, the media interpellated the twenty-nine women following the queen at the coronation as—only—supportive “maids.” Beauty contests indeed embody struggles over power to control and contain the meaning mapped on the bodies of competitors.



Figure 3-4. The coronation of the May Queen at Ewha Womans University (1976) (images from <https://blog.naver.com/s5we/220999161592>)

As Rebecca King-O’Riain proposes, “beauty pageants are not only places where queens are chosen but where they are *made*. In this sense, they [beauty pageants] can be seen as cultural forms of collective self-identity as well as embodied production points of cultural identity” (75). The enthusiastic media attention paid to the May Queens and their popularity with ordinary audiences were manifestations of a socially embedded elitism in Korea that privileges higher education. This hierarchical structure permeated both the realm of the beauty pageant and that of the real world, and it reflected a kind of “compressed” collective Korean

desire for class ascendancy in the 1970s. Whereas the coronations of the May Queen helped transmit standards of hegemonic femininity and beauty both through the media and through one's everyday life, the *Sunday Seoul* popularized a different form of beauty queens, the Queen of Office, whom they crowned by printing the smiling faces of "the prettiest, kindest, and most popular" office girls as cover photos (figure 3-5).

As *Sunday Seoul's* "how to apply" section explains, each company or organization was to recommend three employees who were single and pretty and had more than a high-school education. Based on recommendations, presumably from its male readers, *Sunday Seoul* proceeded with its own evaluations and selected a final candidate for each cover photo. The magazine also included short interviews with these office workers, covering topics ranging from the candidate's profile—family background, education, and job—to her height, weight, and ideal male type. As such, Stoeltje explains, "the young women are presented to the public, stripped of their privacy; knowledge of them is offered to the audience for their consumption" (24). In more general social perception, these office workers featured in *Sunday Seoul*, often called Office Ladies or simply OL, were homogeneously presented as college graduates who had middle-class family backgrounds.²⁶ One of the winning models was an announcer for MBC, a local private broadcast station, who had graduated from EWU and who beat forty other competitors (*Sunday Seoul*, 4 June 1972, 55). However, the Office Queens who appeared in the *Sunday Seoul* had rather heterogeneous backgrounds in terms of class, relative to the idealized public representation of office girls; for instance, Goh Jeong-Ae (figure 3-5, left) was a twenty-two-year-old bus attendant and high-school graduate. She was described as "voluntarily" having decided not to go to college, even though her single mother wanted her to do so. She is

²⁶ OL were relatively low-paid secretaries or women laborers whose appearances and attitude were considered to be more feminine. This attitude was also fostered by Japan's sociocultural environment during the 1970s and 1980s. See McVeigh 197.

represented not only as a “dutiful and good daughter” who prioritizes family over her education and career, but as a good laborer enduring a tough job, who sees her work as “rather more pleasant than expected.” By contrast, the juxtaposed image in figure 3-5 is of Lee Jeong-Ja, who is also twenty-two, but who is a college graduate and flight attendant for Korean Airlines (*daehanhanggong*).



Figure 3-5. Queen of the Office. Left: Goh Jeong-Ae (twenty-two), a bus attendant (Samjin Express); right: Lee Jeong-Ja (twenty-two), a flight attendant (Korean Airlines) (images from Sunday Seoul, 14 Jan. 1973, and 4 Feb. 1973)

While Goh’s short description emphasizes how she feels about her job and what a dutiful daughter she is, that of Lee, and the accompanying full-body shot, highlights her physical attractiveness and epitomizes the hegemonic femininity of a single Korean woman. Furthermore, Lee’s depiction also illustrates the charm of her “purity” (*cheongchoham*), which stems from her unadulterated status as a professional. In contrast, women laborers who were professional and skilled employees were not considered attractive; only innocent, nonlaboring, middle-class women’s bodies were the objects of desire and attraction. Such

hierarchal, class-based aesthetics were built on the stigmatization of proletarian female workers' bodies.

Where then is the exact location of these proletarian women in between the world of representation—in which the extent of women's desirability was determined by her job—, and the reality—in which constructed “beauty” blurred the boundaries of class and played a critical role in determining desirability? Caught between the two different realms, proletarian women would use masquerades to groom their appearances to achieve a certain degree of beauty and social mobility, while also suppressing the signs of their despised labor. Likewise, the two different Queens of the Office (figure 3-5) embodied different categories of class and proximities to womanliness. While the two images both conjured the Queen of the Office, what they embodied through their juxtaposition in the magazine undermined the hierarchical power structure of beauty in the real world. *Sunday Seoul* sutured these two conflicting images of women to a single notion of beauty (*mi-in*). Along with Park's politico-economic agenda during the 1970s, such ruptures and fissures between theatrical representation and everyday life stimulated the new logic of social mobility, or class ascendancy: that of beauty and consumer capitalism. In the following section, I address how working-class women factory laborers defied the state-imposed gender/labor normativity through corporeal practices of beauty in everyday life.

Redressing the Femininity of Working-Class Korean Women through the Staging of Ambivalence

As noted by Hagen Koo, the ambiguous cultural images of unmarried factory workers during this period continuously oscillated between “industrial soldiers” and *Gongsuni* (*Korean Workers* 13). The conflicting cultural identities of the factory workers also partly dispossessed them of their femininity, or of the charm of womanliness. In the passage below, a factory worker is described as a tomboy-like woman whose voice is loud, whose walk is inelegant, and whose uniform is unfeminine and therefore does not appeal to men's desires:

The loud voice of factory girls is far from the “femininity” that society talks about. . . .
But, because of the noisy machines in factories, we need to speak loudly when we are trying to say something. Our behaviors are often clumsy and inelegant when we walk through the machines with uniforms. Who are we if our femininity is deprived and if we are only left with the disrespectful name *Gongsuni*? Is this a reward for our hard work?
(Jang 43)

Women factory workers were considered to be neither ideal future brides nor objects of sexual desire. The femininity and sexuality of women factory workers were easily suppressed or eliminated; the women laborers were eager to retrieve their femininity by consuming beauty and changing their appearance outside the factories. In the following passage, the worker even takes on two jobs to afford an expensive, custom-made coat; she tries to identify with middle-class values by consuming fashion and leisure activity:

I always carried some books and notes in my hands when going out to look like a college girl and to hide that I was a factory girl. I even did two jobs to earn a double salary by selling Amore cosmetics. But, I wasted all the money that I earned on buying clothing. I wore a custom-made coat that was 30,000 won even though it was triple my salary. . . . I also enjoyed going to beer bars regularly after work. (N.-S. Gang 185)

The factory women laborers’ uniform itself played a role in not only symbolizing social hierarchy, but in “instilling a sense of solidarity and identification” (McVeigh 205). On the one hand, it was a dress for the purpose of classification: it identified the role that the person performed. On the other hand, a uniform was intended to normalize the laborers’ individual personalities or identities from the position of the state or company. It was an emblem of the state’s regulation and standardization of the laborers. The performativity of changing from a uniform into one’s own clothes after work connotes not only the working-class women laborers’

privilege to claim their own agency and femininity, but an act of defiance of the patriarchal ideology, which tried to normalize the image of female laborers.

Many women factory workers tried to get office jobs, which were much more respected though less remunerative:

I wish I could be an office worker. If I could bribe someone to get that position, I would. I know that I can earn more money here with over-time, since office jobs don't have any over-time pay. But money isn't everything. I hate the way people call us *Gongsuni*. They don't say anything like that to office workers. Even though a factory worker is respectable, it is still low-status. I try very hard not to look like a factory-worker. I try to wear clothes like office workers, but people somehow know that I am a *Gongsuni*. (S.-K. Kim 60, Kim's translation)

As the passages above confirm, women factory workers tried, but found it difficult, to masquerade as office workers. Although the working conditions and the wages of office work (*saengsanjik*) were similar to (or even less desirable) than those of factories, factory workers desired to be OL, or at least to look the part, because office ladies were deemed to be feminine and respected. Women factory workers sought to transform themselves into office ladies by revamping their corporeal identities and bodily practices. As Schorman states, "Fashion is central to identity construction because it is inherently personal and social at the same time—literally serving as the boundary between self and society—and because it enables people to reconcile several categories of cultural identity simultaneously" (9). In addition, as revealed in interviews with women factory workers, fashion played a significant role in constructing the boundary between self, others, and society in public encounters outside workplaces:

[1] While waiting for a commuting bus after work, I ran into people of different companies nearby. At the bus stop, people saw each other. So, I always changed into my custom-made clothes after work.

[2] When finishing the work of the day, I wrapped a pretty scarf around my neck at least. Nobody would recognize me as a factory girl if they saw me outside of the factory. One time, a man passing by followed me for a date because he knew I was a college girl. (H.-J. Jeon 63)²⁷

As such, public encounters with strangers outside the factories represented a form of masquerade that generated cross-class appeal by and of factory workers. These women created their own feminine images through fashion and liberated themselves from the socially denigrated images of factory girls. Through these self-displays as “desirable feminine beings” and their surface imitation of middle-class bourgeois identity, these wage workers reclaimed their agency and femininity in public spaces. The habitual bodily practices of the women factory workers allowed them to use cross-class performances in daily life to prove themselves to be desirable beings. Although Judith L. Goldstein specifically focuses on women’s makeup practices—versus the broader aesthetic practices of beauty that I discuss here—her argument is relevant. As she attests,

The make-up discourse assumes that a rupture between self-as-object and self-as-subject, and between the desired self and the socially perceived self, is possible. . . . This legitimization of fantasy would seem to require modes of personalization to support images of standardization. The makeup discourse has to support a woman’s desire to legitimate not only “who she is,” but also who she would like to be. (147)

According to Goldstein, beauty discourse fundamentally legitimates this rupture by providing a context for surface transformations: through beauty practices women negotiate the duality between self as object and self as subject, or between who she is and who she desires to be.

²⁷ I am indebted to Hye-Jin Jeon for the interviews of the women factory workers that I use in this chapter.

While Korea in the 1970s was moving toward becoming a consumer society, women's fashion was also in transition, moving from custom-made to ready-made clothing. While custom-made clothing was still considered to be a privilege of the middle class, ready-made clothes were regarded as cheap working-class fashion; for example, blue jeans were implicitly acknowledged as a fashion that demarcated working-class laborers. According to Song Hyo-Sun's confession, an etiquette lecturer told a group of young secretaries, "please don't wear denim. It makes you look like a *Gongsuni* and not look like a person of culture" (117). As Kim Won contends, such assertions reaffirm that the dominant discourse treated women factory workers as uncultured and unfeminine objects.

In addition, commercial weekly magazines and women's fashion magazines during this period provided strict advice about how to achieve a certain class-based look and image, along with captions such as "college fashion" or "campus mode" (figure 3-6). They even offered specific information concerning the custom-made clothing boutiques that provided the wardrobes for photo shoots, as well as instructions for how to make certain styles or dresses. As the image on the right in figure 3-6 shows, readers were instructed on such topics as how college girls who want to host guests could make affordable home wear.



Figure 3-6. Left: "College Fashion"; right: "Campus Mode: The Smile of a Hostess—Home Wear of College Girls You Can Make for 2,000 Won [under two dollars]" (Sunday Seoul 1971)

Sunday Seoul regularly spotlighted “pretty college girls” and their fashions in a section called Campus Star. As the images in figure 3-6 show, the magazine visualized normative college girl fashions and even advised working-class women readers about how to affordably create these outfits themselves. This evidence reaffirms my argument that these commercial magazines served as a ground to forge cross-class fantasies. *Sunday Seoul* did not simply cater to male sexual fantasies as some researchers have claimed, although it did shape and support the military state’s ideological fetishization of an export-driven manufacturing economy by proffering exemplary images of working-class laborers and their sacrifices. In fact, it also substantially appealed to young working-class women readers by presenting idealized images of the fashion of middle-class college girls. While the increasing circulation of fashion magazines and the urban dissemination of class-based fashion and beauty images fortified class boundaries, fashion magazines simultaneously created illusions of class mobility, not only through their rhetorical discursive effects, but through women readers’ emulation of these tropes in real life, as well as through the purchase of such magazines themselves. As Leslie W. Rabine elucidates,

The fantasies generated by fashion magazines (or videos) do not confine themselves to the page (or screen). They are actually acted out by readers on their own bodies. Imitated from magazines, movies, or videos, and worn in daily life, fashion erases the boundary between the “real” and the “fantastic,” between the private escape of fantasy and public intercourse. The pleasure of looking at the photographic images forms one part of a continuum with the pleasure of re-creating the body and *the pleasure of masquerade*. (63, my emphasis)

Fashion destabilizes the boundary between the illusion and reality of class in its emphasis on mutable appearance, but it recreates that boundary with respect to how the body relates to its sociopolitical others. In that light, the self-displays and *pretensions* of the factory workers in

their fashion masquerades represented attempts to narrow the gap between the class realities and illusions of their everyday lives.²⁸ Likewise, according to a 1979 article in the Korean newspaper *Kyeonghyang Daily*, a cosmetic saleswoman's appearance evoked a sense of beauty and womanliness that could be compared to that of a flight attendant:

The classic case among the salespeople visiting from door to door is that of cosmetic saleswomen whose appearance resembles a neat flight attendant. Unlike other salespeople, they are welcomed by housewives who are left alone and get easily bored during the day. Mostly in their early twenties, they possess a lean and slender body that is the object of envy, attention, and admiration from the middle-aged housewives who once had fair skin and a slim body. . . . As an exemplary model of the cosmetics they are selling, they should have not only porcelain-like skin, but a slender body; in the worst cases, therefore, some cosmetic saleswomen are asked to undergo plastic surgery by companies. ("Truth")

Though cosmetic saleswomen were in appearance markedly contrasted with middle-aged housewives, the youth, fair skin, and slender bodies of the former were appealing enough for customers to purchase the cosmetics. Privileged surface features included fair white skin and slender bodies, reflecting middle-class aesthetics. As Laura Miller notes, "Pale skin was valued during the premodern period among male and female nobility, but over time the white face became a marker of ideal womanhood for middle-class women" (4). Much as the "lean and slender body of the saleswoman" was considered a characteristic of ideal femininity and a charm

²⁸ I am greatly indebted to Suk-Young Kim's argument in her article "Dressed to Kill" about how the North Korean state attempted to mediate the gap between ordinary North Korean women and theatrical characters in visual media. Kim also elaborates on how fashion in North Korean visual media reflects concurrent ideological transformations. Although the South Korean political landscape changed dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s, distancing itself from that of North Korea, I develop some of my work specifically based on Kim's understanding of the dynamics of fashion, femininity, and state control.

of womanliness, fair white skin also became a standard of physical attractiveness. As representatives of the cosmetics company, saleswomen were required not only to maintain a decent body shape and youthful skin but to promote the company's makeup campaigns to brand the enterprise and themselves as professional "ladies." In this context, the ladylike dress code, makeup, and slenderness marked not only saleswomen's femininity but also class privilege. As Goldstein intones, "make-up . . . makes possible the visualization of a public face which encoded, and still encodes, class as well as gender and 'personality'" (146). At least in terms of their looks, these saleswomen were compared to flight attendants, who needed an education beyond high school and whose social position was more respected.²⁹

The appearance of the cosmetic saleswoman articulated class ambiguity because she emblemized middle-class looks and lower-class work at the same time. As Kim Ju Yon explains, "ambiguity emerges when unfamiliar bodies take up familiar behaviors, when the relationship between body and behavior becomes an open question and consequently takes on a *theatrical* character" (6). Likewise, the ambiguity of the cosmetic saleswoman comes from these class conflicts and tension between the body (looks) and its behavior (works). The ambiguity prompted and in some ways required women to traverse class demarcations, or perform masquerades; they did not pursue permanent bodily alterations, but they did engage in role-playing as professionals.

Figures 3-7 and 3-8 show two different attires that working-class women laborers could wear as professionals. Figure 3-7 is a photograph of women workers in a uniform of jacket with white collar and white hood, as they attend a 1977 ceremony to celebrate the achievement of the national exportation demand, which was 10 billion dollars. Figure 3-8, in contrast, exhibits

²⁹ *Sunday Seoul* introduced twenty-year-old flight attendant and college student Myeong-Hee Lee as Queen of the Office in 1968. She was selected as a queen of Korean Airlines. The article not only described her height and weight but compared her facial characteristics to those of a French doll. See *Sunday Seoul*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1968, 23.

Amore beauty consultants in the navy-colored uniform of a jacket and a skirt. Unlike the laborers' uniforms (figure 3-7), the Amore jackets accentuate the slim waistlines of the female bodies, just as the knee-length skirts highlight the women's legs. These two uniforms embodied different layers or versions of femininity: while the former asserted women's position as laborers or "industrial soldiers," the property of the state, the latter underscored the feminine attributes of women's bodies.



Figure 3-7. Women factory laborers in a ceremony to celebrate the national exportation achievement, 1977 (photo courtesy of Monthly Joseon (wolganjoseon), Feb. 2017)



Figure 3-8. A new uniform for the young beauty consultants at Amore in 1969 (photo courtesy of Amorepacific Archive)

These two archival photos explicitly demonstrate how wardrobes can affect the construction of women's corporeal identity and femininity. As Sean Metzger elaborates, While a garment, like skin, orients the eye toward the body, clothing involves layers of intertwined and overlapping meanings produced through the psychic and material investments that enable everyday activities. Such practices take the form of lived experience—work uniforms that incorporate individuals into a brand—and representations in media. As a regular and repeated process, the act of dressing functions as a performative modality that produces subjects through attire. (*Chinese Looks* 14)

Metzger further points out that such repetitions of dress are “habitual in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of a *habitus*, or socially constructed bodily disposition” (“Queer” 54, original emphasis). However, Park's military regime framed the gendered bodily embodiment of a laborer (*nodongja*), especially women factory workers, in terms of their standardized uniforms; these clothes desexualized the female laborers' bodies, denied their femininity, and obliterated

their individuality. In other words, these women were considered to be a collective rather than individuals—national property working to support the state’s export-led industrialization. In contrast, the Korean cosmetic beauty industry, and specifically Amore, invested in women laborers’ uniforms as a way of affirming that these women could represent hegemonic femininity, even though they also were recognized as working-class laborers, which meant that they were not “authentic.”

Against these conflicting positions, factory workers could acquire an alternative public self via masquerade. As the sociocultural landscape rapidly shifted under modernization, and as these changes conflated with the growing desire to be urban middle class, the stratifications of the working class also intensified—but distinguishing between classes could paradoxically become more challenging. When internal class differentiation was heightened, the emphasis on reading interior truths from surfaces also increased. Being a hairdresser or a cosmetic saleswoman did not require higher education.³⁰ Instead, those entering these fields needed to be young and physically attractive because their job was to represent the brands that provided beauty services to customers. As feminist Korean writer Park Wan-Seo describes below, trainees in hair salons were mostly young girls who chose not to work at factories. As mentioned earlier, however, the city of Seoul was unevenly developed and thus geographically segregated in terms of class along the state’s urban development project. The spatiality of the beauty parlor/school thus came to embody class ambiguity as follows:

[The beauty parlor’s] frequent customers were usually new town residents. They were very lofty and extravagant and were very eager to become beautiful. As a result, the salon was very profitable. . . . The trainees at the beauty school [*miyonghakwon*] were either middle-school or high-school dropouts, and they had one thing in common—the

³⁰ See footnote 22 regarding Amore’s 1971 newspaper advertisement recruiting beauty consultants.

desperate need for money. They shared the same concern about whether to work at a hair salon after finishing this beauty school or to work in a factory. However, such shared concern was recently disrupted. While I started off at this beauty school with an ambitious goal to attain a “bread-and-butter” education, somehow new students from the wealthy town thought of this school as a mere charm school. (W.-S. Park, 24 Oct. 1979)

The young women trainees were not educated properly, and yet many needed to become the bread earners of their families, as many young lower-class Korean daughters did at that time. The passage reveals a sharp contrast in how the beauty school was represented, depending on “who” occupied it; as Sara Ahmed attests, “spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body” (9). Such schools offered professional spaces for uneducated lower-class single women to survive everyday life, but they were also “charm schools” meant to enable middle-class single women living in the new wealthy town to attain favorable marriages. As an alternative to working in a factory, working in a beauty parlor could give lower-class young women the opportunity to masquerade through a social space that was ambiguous and yet privileging.

In sum, I have attempted to foreground the bodily embodiments of women factory workers in relation to everyday fashion and beauty performance as empowering enactment. Their everyday masquerade relies on their autonomy and agency rather than on an inauthentic or disguised enactment. Rather than framing them as repressed victims of the regulatory military state, I see them as autonomous subjects who are seeking their own ways of liberation and escape from the regulatory regime. Fashion represented this liberation. However, one might question their potential as political subjects, or activists, in the South Korean Labor Movement of the 1970s—activists whose role has been obscured in an elite male-centered dominant discourse. They were certainly “real warriors” who fought for their survival and well-being. I

hope to develop my current research into factory women laborers as activists in the Korean labor movement in the 1970s.

Chapter 4. K-Beauty in the Twenty-First Century: Digital Media, Plastic Surgery, and Imagined Class Mobility in Contemporary South Korea

In recent South Korean (hereafter Korean) society, a few buzzwords about young Korean women's appearance and patterns of consumption have arisen from the (mostly male) online community.¹ One is Soybean-Paste Girl (*doenjangyeo*), which refers to a young Korean woman who overly consumes foreign-made luxury goods (*myeongpum*), and the other is Gangnam Beauty (*gangnammiin*), which indicates a young Korean woman who has undergone multiple plastic surgeries and thus has an "artificial" face. These neologisms of "virtual beauties" were quickly disseminated beyond the online environment and stimulated social debates in real life as they explicitly convey misogyny toward contemporary Korean women's beauty practices and obsession with luxury brands. The two seemingly different terms share some attributes; they not only emerged from the online community and embody young Korean women's nonnormative femininity in relation to appearance but are geographically related to the Gangnam area of Seoul as a symbolic and imagined space. Bridging the two virtual beauties, Gangnam converges an array of consumerist desires through global high-end luxurious fashion commodities, beauty practices, medical technology (including plastic surgery), the most expensive apartment complexes in Seoul, and a privileged educational infrastructure.² Gangnam is a place coveted by Soybean-Paste Girls for its allures and enticements and, simultaneously, a womb of the

¹ The terms have initially circulated through an online community called DC-Inside and a webtoon platform on Naver, a major South Korean web portal. The DC comes from digital camera aficionados, which might shed light on the gendered nature of technology usage and webtoon creation/consumption.

² Having recently gained worldwide fame from global media, the song "Gangnam Style" from Korean pop singer Psy is a terse tribute to the urban youth. Not only that, however, as Jung In Kim illustrates, the song "reverberates in a city where, improved looks were seen as providing an edge in a high-pressured society. As shown by the recent popularity of plastic surgery (South Korea has the world's highest operation rate), good looks are also part of Seoul's character: there is intense competition for jobs, education, and even partners in marriage" (370)

artificially modified face of Gangnam Beauty, as it contains the highest concentration of plastic surgery clinics in Korea.

These two models and their corresponding cartoon-based virtual embodiments do not simply reflect gender conflict in the country's neo-Confucian society. Instead, these visual embodiments and neologisms are performative in constructing for Korean women an identity that is considered nonnormative, ambiguous, hybridized, deviant, and even freakish in terms of looks, gender, race, and class. I contend that the textual and visual embodiments of Korean young women's nonnormative femininity and their experienced embodiments of beauty have helped formulate certain aspects of K-Beauty, and that a network of these performances creates class distinctions and maintains social privileges. In this chapter, I attempt to demonstrate that these neologisms and visual embodiments are complicatedly entangled not only with Korea's severe economic precarity, class immobility, and social stratification—which have accelerated since the Asian Financial Crisis (1997–98)—but also with the *disparity* created by unequal development of cultural and economic advancement that is derived from *compressed modernity*.

As Chang Kyung-Sup delineates, “compressed modernity is defined as a civilizational condition in which economic, political, social and/or cultural changes occur in an extremely condensed manner . . . [and] the dynamic coexistence of mutually disparate historical and social elements leads to the construction and reconstruction of a highly complex and fluid social system” (“The Second Modern Condition?” 446). While Korean society has experienced condensed economic modernization and development to the extent that it has been dubbed the “Miracle of Han River,” how much has it culturally modernized? I argue that the network of performances of women's corporeality, femininity, and beauty culture embodies *ruptures* that stem from the imbalance between the belated cultural modernization and the rapid economic development. While new Western culture and consumer capitalism have aggressively taken

over, the traces of the Korean Confucianism and Colonialism Old still linger and are manifested through the façade of female bodies.

At the level of the local economy, Korean military regimes—particularly the Park Chung-Hee government (1961–79)—attempted to use foreign aid to establish an industrial infrastructure and to implement export-led economic policies. These efforts did not, however, fully liberalize the national market. The subsequent Jeon Du-Hwan government (1981–88) also restricted the consumption of imported goods (*oeje*) as a way to protect the local economy. As Laura C. Nelson elaborates with regard to the early 1990s phenomenon of *Gwasobi*, or excessive consumption, South Koreans' individual consumption was never prioritized above the national economy and general prosperity. Relying on Confucian ideology, which treats frugality as a moral virtue,³ the South Korean government tried to prevent ordinary Koreans from engaging in *Gwasobi* by depicting it as a social ill. This tactic is evident in one of Park Chung-Hee's speeches in 1966:

Our total effort put into achieving the historic task of the modernization of our fatherland is not for the benefit of certain individuals, not for certain groups. It is for the benefit and glory of the present as well as our [future] prosperity. . . . In this sense, I urge you to think of the society and the nation before temporary excessive profits or the profit of "my company" or "my factory." (J.-H. Park 24).

As Nelson indicates, the government linked consumer nationalism not only to individual consumption (as well as corporate business), but to the national identity in a way that was

³ The Korean military state imposed frugality as a feminine virtue through political campaigns as well as legislation. Particularly, the nationwide development campaign called the New Village Movement (*saemaoul undong*) in the 1970s urged people to rediscover the values associated with the Korean spirit and tradition to help further national development. Among these values, "frugality" (or saving money) was emphasized as a woman's duty; women were urged, for example, to remain at home and support male labor in order to build up wealth for the state. For specific details, see my chapters 2 and 3.

incommensurate with that of individual. However, the Asian Financial Crisis initiated major shifts in the Korean economy (and beyond. The debt crisis was not limited only to Korea and had regional and global implications). As Song Jesook aptly describes, “particularly in the South Korean case, big conglomerates and their strong ties to government were criticized (despite their contribution to the country’s rapid economic growth) for causing ‘illiberal’ flow of money and goods and the resulting collapse of the national economy” (12).⁴ After the debt crisis, the post–International Monetary Fund (IMF) period saw even more dramatic increases in the importation of foreign goods and a slackening of social sanctions against consuming foreign luxury goods (Koo, “Changing”). In the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis, South Korea became fully integrated into the economically globalized, neoliberal world order, which is predicated on privatization, deregulation, and minimal governmental intervention.

Globalization not only affected the South Korean economy. It provided an opportunity to reconstruct a new forward-looking national brand, or Koreanness, that no longer relies on images of the Korean War, poverty, foreign adoptees, and political dictatorships. In 1993, under the first civilian president in more than thirty years, the Kim Young Sam government (1993–98) promoted *seggyehwa* (globalization) reform as a “way of projecting and enacting a new national identity and role conception, moving away from and beyond inter-Korean competition to the center of the action not only in the Asia-Pacific region but also in the world community” (S. Kim, “Korea’s *Seggyehwa*” 244). As Samuel S. Kim explains, the untranslated Korean word *seggyehwa* “was meant to describe Korea’s unique concept, encompassing political, economic, social, and cultural enhancement to reach the level of advanced nations in the world” (“Korea and Globalization” 3).

⁴ In South Korea, the Asian Financial Crisis resulted from a combination of the limits on state intervention in liberalizing the market and the unexpected mass withdrawal of foreign short-term hedge funds. During the crisis, the Kim Dae-Jung government steered the South Korean state toward becoming a more flexible, capital-friendly postdevelopmental state. See J. Song.

As it has left behind its lingering past, South Korea has become a powerful brand in the global market, especially in the distribution of beauty as a concept and commodity, and it both originated its own trends and circulated tropes back to the West. It is no longer difficult to find cosmetics labeled “made in South Korea” on the shelves of US Sephora stores, which even feature a section with catchy phrases such as “Korean Chic” or “K-Beauty.” In China, where imports of Korean cosmetics surged more than 250 percent in 2015 compared to the previous year, and accounted for nearly a quarter of the country’s beauty imports, Korean beauty products are even trendier (Rosen). It is undeniable that the emerging “Korean Wave” (*Hallyu*) has contributed to making South Korea globally visible in terms of female beauty culture and practices. As Joseph Nye and Kim Youna rightly illuminate, “Korean Wave is not just a cultural phenomenon but fundamentally about the creation of soft power, nation branding and sustainable development, albeit with its limits, through transnational meaning-making processes” (12). Especially since the onset of the Korean Wave in the 2000s, the global influence of Korean beauty has grown exponentially. The export of Korean women’s cosmetics, which represented a mere \$142 million in revenue in 2002, exceeded \$2.9 billion in revenue in 2015 (Foundation of Korea Cosmetic Industry Institute). As part of its fast-growing influence, the beauty aesthetics of South Korea have been distributed and reproduced by millions of global women “followers” of Korean beauty on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, along with rather intensive transnational circulation of K-pop and K-drama. According to Gordon Fairclough in the *Wall Street Journal*, South Korean stars are credited for establishing Korean ethnic features as a standard of beauty across Asia. A Chinese actress, Zhang Yuqi, for instance, reportedly underwent plastic surgery to look like Song Hye-Kyo, one of the most popular actresses in Korea (“Chinese Actress Zhang”).

Despite all the celebratory and exuberant aspects of K-Beauty as a national brand and in light of the expanding national cosmetic industry, K-Beauty is not so *chic* if we look into its

politico-economic implications within the national history. It is engaged not only with women's beauty and femininity but also with Korea's enduring politico-economic issues. As mentioned earlier, along with the Asian Financial Crisis, Korea experienced the IMF crisis in 1998, and the government's response, which comprised a series of neoliberal economic reforms, changed the nation's socioeconomic stratification and structure. According to Park So Jin and Nancy Abelmann, South Korea in the 1990s before the IMF crisis was characterized by the burgeoning of a postauthoritarian civil sphere, increasing ascendance of the middle-class, and rising consumerism. However, the aftermath of the economic crisis caused massive layoffs; a drastic rise in the number of irregular workers; and dramatic disparity in income distribution, which significantly affected the nation's class and gender structures. As Hagen Koo sharply contends, the effects of the financial crisis on South Korean society "are not simply pushing down the majority of middle-class people below the class boundary, but introducing an *internal differentiation* within the middle class and muddling the meaning of middle class" ("Changing" 4, emphasis added).

Koo's argument provides a critical backdrop for my analysis of Korea's unquenchable consumerism, and the ways that it has come to be a primary generator of class identities. The most severe socioeconomic effect of the financial crisis was economic bipolarization, which put the middle class in an ambiguous position; that is, it caused people to question whether a middle class really existed in Korean society. If it did, who was eligible to claim this status? These questions deeply resonate with my argument that the Soybean-Paste Girl and Gangnam Beauty came from the desire for class distinction. According to French geographer Valérie Gelézeau's research on the urban formation of Korea—especially in terms of the construction of apartment complexes of Gangnam—the status that Korean middle-class identifies with is rather closer to that of upper-class or ruling class of the society. She notes that the Korean word for middle class therefore translates into *bourgeoisie urbaine* in French, but in actuality Koreans who self-

identify as middle class are more likely to be lower class in relation to the income standards in Korea (116–17). As I will elaborate, since the definition of middle class is ambiguous and has been constructed by the Korean military regimes alongside the state’s urban development, Koreans’ desire for class distinction should be understood within a specific and unique cultural context. Koreans’ tenuous and ambiguous socioeconomic status—particularly among Korean women in their twenties and thirties—may make them more obsessed with distinguishing themselves from others and with self-identifying as desirable in terms of social class and status through appearance enhancement and excessive consumption.

As Korean society experienced the economic insecurity that made the society/people more class conscious, more class-tinged neologisms have arisen; for instance, in English, one who is born into a wealthy family is said to have “been born with a silver spoon in one’s mouth.” In a similar vein, Korean has recently incorporated terms to designate a new class hierarchy, such as “gold spoon” (*geumsujeo*), “silver spoon” (*eunsujeo*),” and “dirt spoon” (*heuksujeo*), giving rise to what has been called “spoon class theory” (*sujeo gaegumnon*).⁵ One who is born with a gold spoon is guaranteed a privileged education, a prestigious job, marriage, and wealth as a result of their family’s socioeconomic power. Such neologisms, initially emerging online, represent Korean society’s rigid and fixed notion of class, and the relative deprivation of the middle/lower class. As one Korean editorial worries, South Korea might be on its way back to being a hierarchical society in which one’s wealth is inherited from family (“‘Gold-Spoon’ and ‘Dirt-Spoon’”). Because of this socioeconomic stratification, the desire to present one’s identity in everyday life is intensified in performances of social status. As a news article in the

⁵ This theory initially appeared around 2015 in online communities. See South Korean domestic news articles discussing issues of the gold spoon, e.g., “Gold-Spoon Children”; “The Increase of 10- to 20-Something Real Estate Owners.”

Gyeonghyang Daily reveals, young South Korean women in their twenties are more vulnerable to economic precarity than Korean men (S.-J. Park).⁶

Accordingly, in this chapter, I deal with the question of Soybean-Paste Girls and Korean society's insecure economic situation (which disproportionately affects women in their twenties) through a focus on four women college graduates who appear in the 2009 novel *My Black Mini Dress*.⁷ While it is a work of so-called chick lit, which has been criticized for commodifying and trivializing feminism and glossing over real social and political issues (McRobbie, "Postfeminism"), it also portrays the most pressing issues of women's lived experiences and embodiment in relation to a new type of femininity. These job-seeking college graduates are called the 880,000 Won Generation,⁸ referring to their economic precarity, as represented by their general monthly salary (approximately \$700). As Eva Chen astutely elaborates, "More than just the Western brand-name commodities and Western-defined and locally endorsed values of beauty and femininity, [these] global Chick lit novels also propagate the idea of a neoliberal, global sisterhood of chic, empowered, consumerist and individualistically minded women who find freedom through consumption and progress in following Western commodities and values"

⁶ According to this article, the employment ratio of female college graduates was statistically at an all-time low in 2017. This is partly because Korean corporations prefer men because of issues of marriage and childbirth.

⁷ *My Black Mini Dress* was originally published in two volumes in 2009. It was written by Korean female writer Kim Min-Seo. Two years later, it was adopted as a commercial film directed by Korean male director Hur In-Moo. In this chapter, I largely focus on the novel because the film changed the characters and settings.

⁸ A recently published book, Park Gwon-i and Woo Seok-Hun's *880,000 Won Generation*, focuses on the social structure that renders today's twenty-somethings unable to live without parental support in South Korea. The figure 880,000 won (approximately \$700) refers to the paltry average monthly wage that these young people can expect to earn in casual or irregular jobs. Of course, this precarity among youth an old phenomenon that first emerged when higher education became widespread in South Korea. In the past, people expected to have an endpoint to formal education. But these days, young Korean people in their twenties delay joining the workforce even after graduation. See C.-H. Oh.

(215). Likewise, *My Black Mini Dress* showcases the increasing influence of global commodity capitalism and a neoliberal market rationality that touts the values of individual freedom and choice. Nonetheless, what I want to focus on is not just the celebratory neoliberal rationality but this narrative's deep reverberation with urgent regional socioeconomic issues and changing gender politics through the process of the women's mid-twenties growth into self-reliant "grown-ups." Through my analysis, I delve into the ways in which such female representation as Soybean-Paste Girls emerged from socioeconomic tensions and the conflict between a female desire to achieve upward mobility and the class stratification of Korean society. Certain class stratifications have been intensified and accelerated through not only the rapid economic development but also Korea's participation in an increasingly neoliberal world economy. I examine how the Soybean-Paste Girl can be understood as a social embodiment that is transgressive, theatrical, and performative. It *blurs* socioeconomic boundaries and contests class immobility and the static economy, by creating class ambiguity through women's appearance, or *masquerade*.

After my discussion of *My Black Mini Dress*, I turn to an investigation of the ways in which young Korean women's femininity is represented in relation to plastic surgery through the Gangnam Beauty. This character was initially depicted by a male Korean online-based cartoon illustrator, Mind C, through one of his webtoons, "Two-Dimensional Gag" (*ichawongaegue*). The female character gained popularity after the cartoon was uploaded at the Korean online portal Naver Webtoon in 2013.⁹ As Jin Dal Yong aptly explains, the webtoon, as a

⁹ Naver is one of the major South Korean web portals. It started to upload digitized cartoons in the mid-2000s, and it launched an English version and distributed webtoons in thirty countries on its tenth anniversary in 2014. As indicated on Naver Webtoon, 65 percent of its readers view its webtoons on mobile devices rather than on PCs, which means that these webtoons are effortlessly consumed and impose fewer viewing constraints than other forms of media. Moreover, many webtoons recently have been reproduced as TV series, films, and even musicals in South Korea, which implies that their narratives successfully represent contemporary young Koreans' everyday lives and subcultures. Therefore, my use of this emergent digital medium, which incorporates images and narratives, allows access to alternative perspectives regarding

new genre of media, “is a combination of cartoon (content) and Web (technology), which is archetypal case of convergence in digital technology. By merging digital media, *manhwa*, referring to comics and print cartoons in Korea, is fast becoming an all-encompassing technological regime that affords the users synesthetic experiences along a myriad of functions the media can perform” (“How to Understand” 181). After these webtoons received recognition in these online spaces, other major media channels, such as television shows, news broadcasts, and newspapers, started to pay attention to them.¹⁰ Although the Gangnam Beauty is materialized as two dimensional, her sociocultural implications are not depthless or superficial; she is rather entangled with the Korean young generation’s precarity, caught between the older generation’s economic privileges (that have benefited the young in the past) and the current economic recession, unemployment, and class immobility.

I contest the ways in which the Gangnam Beauty is embodied in its webtoon incarnation and its resonance with Korean women’s plastic surgery as a mundane beauty practice. Mind C’s Gangnam Beauty is de facto parody of Shin Yun-Bok’s (1758–1814) “Portrait of a Beauty” (*miindo*), a renowned painting of a Joseon Beauty in the late Joseon era (1392–1897).¹¹ The juxtaposition of these two Korean beauties from opposing time periods allows us to think about

culturally specific beauty practices and contributes to an understanding of the disjuncture between global and local circulation of visual representations.

¹⁰ The genre of webtoons and the two-dimensional virtual beauty probably exhibit the very features of postmodernism that Fredric Jameson identifies when he says, “the emergence of a new kind of *flatness* or *depthlessness*, a new kind of *superficiality* in the most literal sense [is] perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms” (9, emphasis added).

¹¹ Shin Yun-Bok is known for having developed his own style of painting by focusing on the ordinary lives, and the secular heterosexual romances, of the common people (*pyeongmin*). He thereby challenged the norms of the Confucian Joseon era in his choice of subjects. The way that he expressed Korean women’s sexuality and femininity was considered rather vulgar and obscene for a painter of *Dohwaseo*, an administrative office of Joseon. According to art critic Lee Yang-Jae, Shin was even dismissed from *Dohwaseo* because his paintings focused on the secular romances and heterosexual affections of ordinary people in their everyday lives. See Y.-J. Lee.

the notion of hybridity in terms of aesthetics, cultures, and temporalities. What also bridges the two virtual beauties are advances in digital technology and the rise of digital Korea— “characterizing the swift growth of digital technologies and their sociocultural implications” (Jin, “Construction” 716). As mentioned earlier, the use of technology is gendered in Korean society, and the rapidly advancing digital technology is deeply involved not only with sociocultural embodiments of Korean women but with the many spheres of social life that are (re) constructed around digital media. I aim to show that the Gangnam Beauty in respect to plastic surgery intersects with issues of race, gender, and class beyond spatial and temporal boundaries.

K-Beauty: Convergence of State Ideology, Technology, and Cultural Imagination

Before entering into the analysis of the Soybean-Paste Girl and Gangnam Beauty, let me begin with how K-Beauty has been constructed as a national and global cultural product. Sponsored by Park Chung-Hee’s military state (1961–79) for the sake of export-led industrialization,¹² the Korean beauty industry has grown so expansive that it even played a crucial role in smoothing out a Korea-China trade partnership ceremony in Beijing in 2017. As a representative of Korean cosmetic corporation Amorepacific (1945–), Korean actress Song Hye-Kyo attended the ceremony along with the president of Korea, Moon Jae-In, and K-pop idols Exo. This event was a significant political gesture of cultural exchange between the two nations. China, which had passed a law limiting the amount of foreign television programming in 2012, even used to describe the Korean Wave aggressively as an “invasion” (“China’s Ban”).

¹² See chapter 3 for a discussion of Amorepacific in the 1970s and my research into its archive.



Figure 4-1. President Moon Jae-In, Song Hye-Kyo, and EXO at the China National Convention Center in Beijing on Dec 14, 2017 (Photo courtesy of Blue House—Cheongwadae; see H. Lee, “President”)

Needless to say, as the term K-Beauty came into existence on the basis of preexisting national cultural products such as K-pop and K-drama, it explicitly implies the country of origin in its worldwide circulation. Ever since the *segzehwa* drive of the Kim Young-Sam government, the Korean state has sought to promote Korea through the articulation and legislation of cultural policy and the advocacy of cultural industries, with a renewed focus on identity, culture, and national branding as essential components of foreign policy thinking.¹³ In the case of medical technology—particularly plastic surgery—the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare announced a VAT-Refund program for foreign patients who came to Korea to undergo plastic surgery,

¹³ As Nye and Kim also address, for example, in 1999, the Kim Dae-Jung government (1998–2003) provided \$148.5 million in financial support to the cultural industry. Focusing on the so-called three Cs—Content, Creativity, and Culture—the government encouraged colleges to open cultural industry departments and provided equipment and scholarships. The number of such departments rose from almost none to more than three hundred by 2004. The Roh Moo-Hyun government (2003–8) encouraged “cultural diversity” and vitality as well as creativity. The Lee Myeong-Bak government (2008–13) urged the promotion of Brand Korea through popular culture, in a wide range of contexts from K-pop to Korean food, to enhance the nation’s image and soft power.

starting from April 2016. Even before then, the Korean government was deeply involved in sponsoring national medical technologies in connection with tourism, beauty and spas (including the flagship stores of Amorepacific), traditional Korean medicine, and the Korean Wave under the logo of “Medical Korea” as a nexus of national export brands. In support of such medical tourism, three Medical Tourism Information Centers are located in Seoul, Incheon, and Busan to facilitate not only medical treatment but also translation, visas, transportation, and tours. According to the website of Medical Korea, it promotes Korea as a competitive market of medical technologies and affordability:

Korea is emerging as a new leader on the global healthcare market through quality services, advanced medical technologies, relatively affordable medical costs, fast and efficient diagnostics and therapeutic services, cutting-edge hardware and IT-based infrastructure. (“Why Korea?”)

Besides receiving the state’s endorsement and explicit support, K-Beauty in the twenty-first century cannot be imagined separate from a series of concomitant Korean cultural flows such as K-pop and K-drama or from advanced digital media and medical technologies. As Kim Suk-Young elaborates on the significant role of technology in relation to K-pop,

Technologies that literally create K-pop idols’ bodies and bodily attributes, such as plastic surgery, auto-tune, and holograms, are celebrated as part and parcel of the creative economy. In this regard, the role of technology in K-pop might not limited to a mere instrumental way to celebrate creativity; the opposite might be true as well, with the K-pop industry’s creativity becoming a subtle form of mediation to ultimately celebrate technology. . . . This is the implication behind the marriage between imagination and engineering. (*K-Pop Live* 50)

Simply put, the trio—medical technology, K-pop idols (their original performances and bodily attractiveness), and advancements of digital media—converges in the construction of Korea’s

national export brand in the twenty-first century. As Korea is also often called digital Korea, it represents a globally important locus in the deployment and penetration of high-speed internet, and innovation in mobile and consumer digital technologies and practices; as a result, the society's real elements—its time, place, and even tangible commodities—come to lack a referential basis and are subsumed by a world (web) that distances itself from the material effects of the real. As the ubiquitous advertisements promoting plastic surgery around subway stations in Seoul seem to overwhelm the real life of the city, today's K-Beauty has extended beyond real time and space.

To sum up, the discourse of K-Beauty in the twenty-first century has been constructed through the conflation of the state's global promotion, advanced medical technologies, and digitalization of the cultural imagination. Another significant aspect of K-Beauty, however, is the national class struggle and the desire for class distinction that is embodied in the two virtual beauties that I examine in this chapter. I will show the imbalanced tension as well as the disparity between the local and the global in terms of the sociocultural implications of Korean beauty culture and practices.

My Black Mini Dress: Soybean-Paste Girls, Gangnam, and Class Distinction

The term Soybean-Paste Girl appeared in public discourse around 2006 and spread when an anonymous male internet user uploaded a comic strip to an online community with a description of “nine things you should do when dating a Soybean-Paste Girl.”¹⁴ The panels seem to describe a shallow, materialistic young South Korean woman who compulsively purchases Western high-end goods; goes to imported franchise restaurants and foreign-originating franchise coffee shops, especially Starbucks, as if she were a New Yorker; takes photos of herself with these purchases; enthusiastically watches *Sex and the City* and seriously identifies with the

¹⁴ According to Chu Joo-Hyeong, the male internet user introduced himself as an amateur web illustrator and uploaded the comic strip to the community dcinside.com.

four female characters; and engages in hard workouts so she can be like J-Lo (Jennifer Lopez). And yet, the narrative focuses more on what she desires than what the reader, as the presumed boyfriend of a Soybean-Paste Girl, should do on a date. What he needs to do is summarized as only three things: arrive thirty minutes early; support her expensive shopping financially; and take as many photos as possible while dating her.

In addition to such textual description, the cartoon offers an array of visualizations: the Soybean-Paste Girl always wears her sunglasses on her head; wears a short skirt and a revealing top; has a slim body shape; talks with someone by phone as if she were a very busy career woman; carries a small, foreign-made designer handbag; and holds a take-out coffee. The disturbing textual descriptions and visualizations often do not correspond to Korean women in real life and can be quite arbitrary. However, it is important to note the dynamic tension between the Soybean-Paste Girl's desires and the male anxiety stemming from men's newly subordinate role, which dramatically diverges from the dominant position that men long held in conventional heterosexual relationships as codified in South Korean society. What she desires to be—a New Yorker who consumes Starbucks coffee as part of her ordinary routine, one of the four women in *Sex and the City* who pursue liberal lifestyles and enjoy sex, or someone like J-Lo, who is famous for her curvy, glamorous body shape—exemplifies nontraditional sociocultural values, relationships, lifestyles, and even body types in the neo-Confucian society. In addition, as Song Jee Eun Regina aptly argues, “South Korean women see Starbucks as representing access to a more open and independent notion of Korean femininity, challenging a concept of gender as defined by the codes of Confucian patriarchy” (438). Beyond challenging traditional notions about gender, as Song further addresses, the consumption of Starbucks signals “a new cultural code symbolic of a privileged Western lifestyle” that also “reflects class dynamics as a performance of Americanism” within the construction of the Soybean-Paste

Girls.¹⁵ This female identification with white, upper-middle-class US culture is increasingly accelerated through global media consumption and transnational cultural mobilization between the United States and South Korea. Iconic Hollywood celebrities (like J-Lo or *Sex and the City*'s Sarah Jessica Parker) have in part represented themselves, at least through some roles, as empowering female consumers and socioeconomically dominant women, images that could threaten patriarchal male dominance. The Soybean-Paste Girl thus challenges the relatively weakened male socioeconomic power in contemporary South Korean society.

On a different level, such male anxiety also arises from the very arbitrariness and visual ambiguity of the Soybean-Paste Girls in terms of class. As an example, another image was subsequently uploaded to differentiate a Soybean-Paste Girl from a Aristocratic Girl (*gwijokyeo*), not only in terms of fashion, but through their subtle socioeconomic class distinctions and even their mores of dating/marriage.



Figure 4-2. Comparison of Soybean-Paste Girl and Aristocratic Girl (Photo source: Chu; and H.-S. Choi 9–34)

¹⁵ Given the fact that the first domestic Starbucks opened near Ehwa Women's University in Seoul, the consumption of Starbucks coffee was perceived as a gendered practice and closely associated with the construction of Korean women's femininity (see J. E. R. Song 2).

As figure 4-2 indicates, a Soybean-Paste Girl is imagined as a vain woman who prefers conspicuous luxury goods beyond her economic means and who seeks a good-looking man of stable social status, whereas an Aristocratic Girl is an original/authentic woman who can effortlessly afford the consumption of luxury fashion items and lifestyle as a “real” member of a privileged class. In this comparison, what is notable is that the Soybean-Paste Girl is embodied as a fake/disguising/inauthentic/imitative femininity in contrast with the “true” femininity of the Aristocratic Girl. Male anxiety arises when these two different embodiments of women cannot be distinguished from each other. More precisely, the anxiety is born in the moment when a Soybean-Paste Girl masquerades as a “real” privileged upper-class woman, an Aristocratic Girl. As Elin Diamond contests, “mimesis can be retheorized as a site of, and means of, feminist intervention,” and the “unstable triangulation” of mimesis, mimicry, and the true-real, suggests that “the sign-referent model of mimesis can become excessive to itself, spilling into a mimicry that undermines the referent’s authority” (62). In other words, representations of the Soybean-Paste Girl concern certain South Korean women but do not correspond to actual women; they reflect only a construction, fantasy, and impossibility. Regarding the notion of femininity, or womanliness as Joan Riviere puts it, however, no authentic femininity resides behind the masquerade as such:

The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the “masquerade.” My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (38)

Riviere focuses on the performativity of the masquerade, and her analysis implies that women simply play the role of a woman. As Pamela Pattynama also notes, “femininity is thus understood as being dispersed in an endless series of enactments, roles, representations, images, imitations and appearances” (288). The masquerade as a performance represents a self-determined and dynamic strategy through which women can identify themselves as social

agents in terms of class/cultural mobilization, and even through facial modifications achieved with medical technology.

The contrast between types grew even more hierarchical when a Soy-Sauce Girl (*ganjangyeo*) subsequently appeared as a counterexample to the Soybean-Paste Girl. Referring to a young woman who makes reasonable and practical choices (in contrast with the Soybean-Paste Girl's consumption of exclusive, high-end fashion commodities), the Soy-Sauce Girl emerged as an idealized female embodiment of a humble lifestyle. The Soy-Sauce Girl prefers affordable global fast fashion from SPA brands (Specialty retailer of Private label Apparel),¹⁶ practical household products, and public transportation. She is in pursuit of "cheap chic," whose style is more affordable ("Here Comes a Soy-Sauce Girl"; "Trend: Access"). The triangulation of these three girls—Aristocratic, Soybean-Paste, and Soy-Sauce—shows that these female embodiments form only a part of the endless repetitions and reflections of patriarchal mimesis. In Judith Butler's sense of performativity, agency is given not to "producers" but to "actors," whose "reiterated acting . . . is power in its persistence and instability . . . [this produces] a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power" (*Gender Trouble* 17). Butler's argument accentuates the repeated enactments rather than the subject per se, so that the agency is given to the iteration of an action. The Soybean-Paste Girl offers women a highly performative and empowering masquerade by masking class or by producing a new index of social class. The iterations of visual markers, corporeality, and showy self-displays of conspicuous beauty consumption construct imagined economic and cultural mobility.

Against the backdrop of such trifurcated tensions among the women embodiments, I demonstrate how the Soybean-Paste Girls are more concretely incarnated in *My Black Mini Dress* in order to further gauge specific regional socioeconomic disparities. In this novel about

¹⁶ Global fast fashion (SPA) brands are such as Japanese leading spa brand Uniqlo and Sweden-based fashion company H&M. See Park Eun-Jin for a relevant news article.

four college graduates living in Seoul, all the female characters invoke divergent dimensions of the Soybean-Paste Girl. These relatively well-off twenty-five-year-olds soon realize that their true place of belonging is in the aforementioned 880,000 Won Generation. The members of this economically precarious generation typically cannot find stable jobs or earn enough money to buy their own houses, and therefore they must rely on their parents to maintain the level of consumption to which they have been accustomed since early childhood. The protagonist Yumin works as a part-time writer at a broadcast television station. She represents something between a Soybean-Paste Girl and a member of the 880,000 Won Generation, but she seems maladjusted to her ambivalent socioeconomic status. She feels like she is caught between disparate social classes. As she confesses to one of her friends, “we are not qualified to have such privilege by ourselves. We can’t afford it. You have no job. I am just [a member of the] 880,000 Won Generation, but I am also *deonjangyeo*” (Min-Seo Kim 2:167, translations mine). Yumin starts to realize that, as a part-time writer, she does not belong even to the middle class.¹⁷ However, she never wants to appear as someone lower than middle class. As she begins to date Seok-Won, a wealthy Gangnam local, she often thinks of how she looks beside him:

Women don’t like the word *deonjangyeo*. But they like to be treated like one. It’s just an irony. . . . When I hopped in his new BMW, I saw two girls passing by through the window who kept looking around the area just like the first visitors to Gangnam. They also looked at me sitting in his car. I enjoyed their gazes very arrogantly. What did they think about me? Did they think I am a lucky girl who has a rich boyfriend, a Gangnam girl who enjoys her own wealth, or a member of the upper class who doesn’t need to live so hard? (Min-Seo Kim 1:90)

¹⁷ Refer to my earlier discussion of Valérie Gelézeau. I will return to my discussion of the middle class in relation to Gangnam later in this chapter.

Although the experience is sometimes unpleasant, Yumin somehow enjoys that she can pass as a Soybean-Paste Girl, a Gangnam local, and a girl from the upper class. She thinks that what makes her look like an upper-class Soybean-Paste Girl is her appearance, as emblemized by what she wears, what brands she chooses, where she lives, and even how prestigious her boyfriend's career is. She narrates: "What I love is 'me,' whose values are maximized through my wealthy friends, boyfriends, and luxury handbags and shoes" (Min-Seo Kim 2:46). Yumin's enjoyment helps explain why Sujin, another of the four girls, hides from her friends the fact that her family business has started to fail. Sujin would rather look like her previous self: well off, confident, and *doenjangyeo*-like. Here is an irony: women do not like to be called or perceived as *doenjangyeo* (i.e., a Soybean-Paste Girl) because of the contemptuous implications. But, as Yumin said, they instead "like to be treated like one." This discrepancy is because of the ambivalent quality of the *doenjangyeo*: although this female figure is a projection of the male gaze and thus carries derogatory implications, it also makes distinguishing one's exact social status difficult. As the women recognize such ambivalence, they perform in the gray area of *doenjangyeo* where their façades blur the boundaries of class. Despite her failing economic status and confidence, Sujin chooses to look like a Soybean-Paste Girl even though she cannot afford to do so. She expresses her anxiety by admitting that she "was so afraid that you guys would know about my situation" (Min-Seo Kim 2:57). Despite the bankruptcy of her family business, unemployment, and lack of a place to live, she tries hard to appear like her friends. The Soybean-Paste Girl offers her an effective *mask* through which to maintain her previous "self."

In addition to her façade, location plays a crucial role in performances of *doenjangyeo*: the girls must be in Gangnam. Yumin lives in Mokdong, Seoul, where the middle class used to live. The specific geographic location is one factor that determines Yumin's socioeconomic status as middle class. But she has always enjoyed being and playing in the Gangnam area. Yumin has

never hesitated to travel to Gangnam, even though it takes about an hour to get there by public transportation. She always feels alienated when people ask her where she lives, and even ashamed to be subjected to their patronizing attitudes:

“Where do you live?”

“I live in Mokdong.”

“Wow, you’ve come a long way. Isn’t it too hard coming over to Gangnam?” (Min-Seo Kim 1:33)

As the conversation implies, Yumin feels as if she has suddenly become a Country Girl (*chonyeon*), the sort who came to Seoul in the 1970s out of a long admiration for urban life.¹⁸ Despite her reserved nature—she has never admitted to feeling like this Country Girl—she shares that she has a high regard for and desire to be a part of “the area” because she wants to be like its residents, to attain their sense of ownership regarding the neighborhood when they effortlessly say it is “their” area. Yumin feels considerable physical and psychological distance from her friends and other random people who live in the Gangnam area. As Yumin narrates, “Gangnam is like an isolated island where I can never go without a boat that is called ‘friends’ who live there” (Min-Seo Kim 2:143). It seems that her psychological distance stems from her disoriented identification with her own socioeconomic class, and her confusion about where she really belongs within the social hierarchy. As she further narrates,

[The Gangnam neighborhood] Apgujeongdong has always been another world to me. It is now meaningless to bustle up about, since playing in this area has become an index of “I am the best,” since someone who happened to be born in this area was categorized as upper class, since people who simply worship this place have mushroomed. . . . I don’t

¹⁸ The nuance of Country Girl resonates with the female demographic changes that took place during the Korean industrialization period. For details, see chapter 3.

love myself. I don't love my future that I can achieve, either. I don't even believe in the future. (Min-Seo Kim 1:18)

Apgujeongdong is a core part of Gangnam and epitomizes Korean upper-class, luxurious lives. The space was once described as a womb that gave birth to the Orange Tribe (*orenjjok*) in the 1990s, referring to men in their twenties whose parents became wealthy by investing in real estate in the 1970s and 1980s, or to self-made elites who lived around the Apgujeong area (“Orenjjok Who Used to Yell”). They were characterized by their extravagant consumption of expensive imported cars and fashion goods, and their adoption of liberal behaviors, all of which was presumably influenced by their exposure to Western culture in their early education abroad. The *orenjjok* were socially imagined as an embodiment of a subcultural resistance to South Korea's conservative traditions and the Confucian values of older generations. The Apgujeong area also used to be culturally appropriated by the *orenjjok*, who were seen as domineering male figures who seduced young women with their wealth and imported cars (Ryo). In this regard, Gangnam in general reflects a desire to attain social distinction through educational privilege, housing, leisure, and so forth, as Gang Jun-Man elaborates (*Gangnam* 6–14).¹⁹ The geographical location has had multilayered politico-economic connotations from the period of South Korean industrialization to the rise of consumer cultures. Although Gangnam literally means a southern region of the Han-River of Seoul, it excludes a larger area of the region that comprises relatively low-income districts such as Noryangjin, Bongcheon-dong, and Silim-dong, as Lee Dong Yeun points out. This means that Gangnam is socioculturally symbolized and imagined as an impregnable place, to the extent that it has given rise to the local myth of Gangnam Invincible (*gangnambulpae*) when it comes to real estate investments (T.-K. Lee). The current district has undergone, so to speak, a face-lift, once one of the most neglected areas

¹⁹ Gang also contends that Gangnam itself is a premium brand that is consumed for social distinction, class, and privilege.

of Seoul, now its most desirable and alluring place. It was only a section of farmland until the 1970s, when the Park Chung-Hee government politically exploited and developed the area to obtain illegal election funds. As represented in a recent South Korean film, *Gangnam Blues* (2015),²⁰ Gangnam earned such glory because the government displaced innocent farmers and ordinary citizens whose lives were manipulated under the aegis of the Seoul Development Project (*Namseoul gaebalgyehoek*) from the mid-1970s.²¹ In order to make people cluster in Gangnam, the government transferred some of the most prestigious high schools from Gangbuk to Gangnam, currently dubbed School District Number 8 (*gangnam palhakgun*). As such, Gangnam is a fabricated space that was, from its beginnings, created by top-down political militarism and the political desire of the state. However, on the other hand, the national recognition of Gangnam in terms of social distinction has been stimulated through the neoliberal economic reforms of South Korea since the early 2000s, beginning right after the IMF crisis. Before that moment, as Laura C. Nelson aptly observes, the urban landscape of early 1990s Seoul exhibited considerable uniformity:

The imitative tendency generated a precarious seesaw between novelty and uniformity. The underlying sameness offered a stark background for contrast, and innovations, fads, and fashions stimulated curiosity, desire, and criticism as well as imitation. Novelties appeared and proliferated so fast that they soon became ordinary. (4–5)²²

²⁰ The film *Gangnam Blues* (*Gangnam 1970* in Korea) was directed by Yu Ha and released in 2015. The narrative focuses on two male orphans who are eventually entangled with political collusion and gangster battles amid the real estate development of 1970s Seoul. This film shows how Gangnam gained its current social powers from political manipulation, real estate speculation, actions of the authorities, and displacement of ordinary citizens.

²¹ Regarding Gangnam's real estate development, substantial research has been published in South Korea. See, for example, Son Jeong-Mok's five-volume *The Story of Seoul Development Project*, which well documented this process. See also Jeon; and An.

²² Germane to Nelson's observation is a comment from Jin Dal Young, who points out that Korea's advancement in digital technology relies on Korea's unique culture, which is "balli balli (hurry up or faster in Korean) culture." He also adds, "The 'me-too culture' (the *na-doo* culture)

Nelson points out that the same pattern is repeated in the architecture of Seoul. Rather homogenous residential areas of apartment complexes have become emblematic of the modernization of South Korea. Against the uniformity and ordinariness of Seoul's urban landscape, Gangnam emerged as a unique location that created social distinctions through the effective branding of luxurious apartments, businesses, fashion, education, and even the new identities of young generations. Among the area's business complexes, for example, Tower Palace, built by Samsung, one of the South Korean conglomerates (*jaebeol*) located at Dogokdong, became a symbol of wealth because it provided an array of convenient facilities, a luxurious interior, innovative security systems, and privacy for high-profile celebrities and high-ranking executives and officers.²³ In fact, Valérie Gelézeau's book *The Republic of Apartment* (*apateu gonghwaguk*) deals with the urban formation of apartment complexes in reference to social class and status. Her research astutely proves that Korean military regimes constructed the current homogenous residential forms in order to construct a middle class and for their political interests, as below:

The South Korean authoritarian state [Park Chung-Hee military regime (1961–79)] controlled the increase of population and provided ordinary salaried men with apartments in a large quantity whose prices were regulated for the national economic development. The state gathered the urban middle class in the apartment complexes and gave them benefits of property ownership, which made them politically support the military state. Because of the mutually beneficial structure, the Korean urban middle class was geographically segregated from the lower class. Korean apartment complexes

is rather peculiar because it means all people end up with the same taste, which has substantially contributed to the spread of digital technologies" ("Construction of Digital Korea," 718)

²³ Regarding the social meaning of the branding of apartments in South Korea and Gangnam, see Chae.

consequently embody the authoritarian industrialization structure and its attributes, which consequently produced class hierarchy and a homogenous cultural pattern.

(Gelézeau, *Republic* 114, my translation)

As she points out, Gangnam has been constructed under the military state's economic drives. Hence, its apartment complexes are not simply a residential form. Although they look generally homogenous in terms of their façades, they are differentiated in a very subtle way by entrepreneurial interventions of Korean conglomerates. The socioeconomic influence of Gangnam extends even beyond the region. After Rodeo Street (*rodeogeori*) of Apgujeongdong—named after Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles—became a destination spot, hundreds of small businesses appeared throughout the nation invoking some version of that name (Gang). Because Rodeo Street was developed as a utopian imitation of a site of Western consumerism, it has often been criticized as a center of dystopian hedonism. For good or ill, it has notably influenced the rest of South Korean society by serving as a conduit for the transmission of Western culture and economics in the incipient phase of the nation's acceptance of globalization and neoliberalism.

What the Soybean-Paste Girls desire is a conflation of a very subtle series of sociocultural implications. Their desire is not that simple and superficial: it is to appropriate the socioeconomic power and consume the cultural privileges that the area of Gangnam symbolizes through their corporeal presence in the space. In this respect, Gangnam is a *habitus* in the Bourdieuan sense, both for the Soybean-Paste Girl and for the Gangnam Beauty, who I will discuss later. It is the place where they navigate their sense of self and nonnormative femininity by consuming high-end fashion, medical technology, and socioeconomic power of the geographical location. According to Pierre Bourdieu, dispositions of habitus are acquired by the processes of imitation, repetition, and role-play in the experience of social interaction. Habitus includes

the unconscious dispositions, the classification schemes, taken-for-granted preferences which are evident in the individual's sense of the appropriateness and validity of taste for cultural goods and practices . . . [and it is] "inscribed on the body" through body techniques and modes of self-presentation. (Craik 4)

As Joanne Entwistle claims, the concept of habitus is associated not only with gendered practice but inevitably with class. In a similar fashion, a recent social craze, "Saving a Billion" (*sipeokmandeulgi*), embraced by South Korean salaried workers, especially those in their twenties and thirties, can be understood as way to role-play being middle class, or to represent oneself as having a certain class and lifestyle.²⁴ In other words, the billion symbolizes how vulnerable and precarious the myth of the South Korean middle class has been since the financial economic crisis, despite the state's investment in industrialization and urbanization. However, Soybean-Paste Girls and Gangnam Beauties diverge from this self-presentation not just in their showy public displays, but in their act of blurring that which is "real" and that which is performed, a process that produces a crisis of interpretation.

Mind C's Gangnam Beauty: Plastic Surgery, Cyborgs, and Hybridity

Joining the Soybean-Paste Girl is another virtual Korean beauty, the Gangnam Beauty. That term refers to images of young South Korean women, mostly in their twenties and thirties, who live in, or look "as if they should live in," the neighborhood of Gangnam; specifically, they have undergone multiple plastic surgeries to attain a certain type of face. The face of the Gangnam Beauty is marked by its extreme artificiality and is also identified by the woman's corporeal presence in Gangnam. Because she is associated almost exclusively with the spatiality where most of the plastic surgery clinics are concentrated in South Korea, the figure of the

²⁴ One online "Saving a Billion" club had about 12 million members as of August 2003. Many South Koreans in this club would share their own tips and successful personal stories about how to save one billion won of their salaries within ten years. See "A Shortcut."

Gangnam Beauty might in that location signify the *ubiquity* and *ordinariness* of a certain type of face modified through plastic surgery. In this regard, the Gangnam Beauty—which embodies ordinariness or even banality within Gangnam—presents a nonnormative femininity and extreme artificiality outside of the Gangnam area.

As the Gangnam Beauty emerged long after the Soybean-Paste Girl, it also incorporates many of the same features as its predecessor.²⁵ These two representations of women have shared nearly identical characteristics in terms of beauty consumption (except for plastic surgery, which pertains only to the Gangnam Beauty). That is, the attributes of the Soybean-Paste Girl are incorporated into those of the Gangnam Beauty. For instance, in figure 4-3 (*left*), one of the Gangnam Beauties carries a coffee in one hand. Although the coffee's brand is not explicitly indicated, it can presume to be Starbucks, because within this specific context the coffee implicitly signifies the predilection of Soybean-Paste Girls. Some commentators further indicate that the soaring building in this image represents the façade of the Space Needle in Seattle, where the first local Starbucks was established. If the tower does represent the Space Needle, then the location is ambiguous, since the drawing simultaneously shows a building with the area code of Seoul on a signboard for a plastic surgery clinic.

Along with the advancement of medical technology, facial modifications have become everyday aesthetic practices in contemporary Korean society. Gangnam Beauties are characterized by large and wide eyes with double eyelids, swollen lower eyelid circles (called *aekyosal*), voluminous foreheads, straight noses, chubby cheeks, full lips, fair/light skin, and a sharp jaw line (called a “V-line”)—features that do not directly align with those that might be expected of Westerners. Women attain these specific facial characteristics by undergoing multiple plastic surgeries and Botox injections that make the face appear rather artificial and

²⁵ The term Soybean-Paste Girl emerged in public around 2006, while Gangnam Beauty was first circulated around 2013.

excessive. The images of Gangnam Beauties represent artificiality (figure 4-3, *left*), as opposed to the image of idealized “naturalness” or Nature Beauty (*jayeonmiin*), which conjures a pretty woman who has never had plastic surgery (figure 4-3, *right*). The visual representations of Gangnam Beauty reflect a patriarchal male gaze: they reify the essentializing (and essentialist) notion that only “naturalness” can represent an authentic beauty and femininity. Traditional Korean society thus deems the face and body modifications or enhancements of Gangnam Beauties as *artificial*, *false*, and *simulated*—variations of an original form of a standardized notion of beauty. Not only the patriarchal Korean gaze is present, as the Gangnam Beauty in figure 4-3 is watched by a white, middle-aged Western man with blond hair, who seems confused by the “uniform” faces of the four Gangnam Beauties. This illustration seems to be set in a multivalent space where different races, genders, and architectures interact, and in some contexts are blended. Where is this place, and what does the presence of the Western male gaze embody in relation to the Gangnam Beauties? Does it imply Western anxiety that Korean women’s everyday practice of plastic surgery, or technology, will make women look all the same in an extreme way?



Figure 4-3. *Gangnam Beauties (left) versus Nature Beauty (right) by Mind C (Image courtesy of Naver Webtoon, 2013)*

The hybridization of the illustration might indicate the interplay between global and local forces. Such hybridization often make it difficult to designate the origin of a particular local cultural form because globalization is not a simple process of Western-driven homogenization but can reflect a more complex set of exchanges. The confusion and uncertainty of the middle-aged Western man in this respect might epitomize the very “untranslatability” or “incommensurability” of cultural differences in the hybridization process. On the one hand, Asia’s adeptness with technologies and machines has often evoked a techno-Orientalism that drives exotic and Orientalizing imageries of technology in First World countries. Techno-Orientalism is a specific articulation of the Orient as infused with technology, as Toshiya Ueno construes, “[it] is set up for the West to preserve its identity in its imagination of the future. It can be defined as the Orientalism of cyber-society and the information age, aimed at maintaining stable identity in a technological environment” (95). That is, such techno-Orientalism has stereotyped Asia as *other* and as an object of fetishization. In addressing techno-Orientalism, it is worth looking into the argument of David Morley and Kevin Robins even though they specifically associate high technology with Japaneseness. Such technological prowess is now not only limited to Japan but has extended to South Korea and China, as we have witnessed through K-pop’s presence in digital media. As Morley and Robins put it, “[Japan] has become synonymous with the technologies of the future—with screens, networks, cybernetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, simulation” (168). These Gangnam Beauties can thus be considered mere simulacrum, created through the practice of (medical) technologies under the Western male gaze and patriarchal gaze.²⁶

²⁶ As Koichi Iwabuchi points out, “the most well-known image of Techno-Orientalism is a paradoxical combination of traditionalism—samurai and geisha, etc.—and high-technology, which can be seen in Hollywood films such as *Blade Runner* or *Black Rain*.” It is an image of “paradoxical alienness” that suggests “a Western desire to enclose the otherness of Japan with knowable mysteries in order to control it” (52).

On the other hand, however, as Sue-Ellen Case astutely notes, the medical intervention that alters the body locates agency in the flesh/body by emphasizing the transformative process itself, rather than any gender play (*Domain-Matrix* 115). Case elucidates that “agency is located in the changing body”; this observation means that the choice of medical intervention for bodily changes can be perceived as a site of pleasure, “celebrat[ing] the technological moment—the medical intervention that promotes the change” (116).²⁷ Although Case’s claim focuses more on the changing body itself, I would further suggest that Gangnam Beauties, through the performance of cutting and the artificial construction of a new face, are “cyborgs” who use a specific form of agency to deploy medical technologies to enhance, modify, or “normalize” their appearances. Donna Haraway’s concept of the cyborg has helped contemporary feminists engage with questions of subjectivity and technology that go beyond the binary of artificiality and naturalness. As Haraway elaborates, “high-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. . . . In daily practice, we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras” (143). As such, the Gangnam Beauty does not exclusively embody Western beauty ideals and regimes; rather, she is a hybrid whose bodily expression and performance mixes Western beauty ideals and South Korean aesthetics through cross-cultural global encounters, conflicts, and negotiations. That is, the medical technologies do not merely extend Western beauty practices as an instrumental tool; they produce a gendered cultural subjectivity under the rubric of “cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, [and] chimeras,” designations that also signify a hybridized, fluid, transnational, and flexibly gendered body. Therefore, the consumption of plastic surgery as well

²⁷ Case examines the French performance artist Orlan, who engaged in a series of internationally renowned cosmetic surgery performances. Case claims, “the changing, live body is the node that connects the various technologies. Orlan performs a critique of the change while producing it” (*Domain-Matrix* 117). A retrospective exhibition about Orlan was held in Seoul at the Sungkok Art Museum from 17 June to 2 October 2016.

as its relevant cultural productions should be examined from multiple angles; beyond the concept of hybridization, plastic surgery has a complicated relationship with agency/empowerment, gender, class, bodily changes, ethics of medical technology, and the realization of a new relationship between human and machine.

Meanwhile, the Gangnam Beauty (figure 4-4, *right*) evokes the rapid changes in Korean aesthetics of beauty, or *miingwan*, because it is a parody of Shin Yun-Bok's classic portrait of an unknown *gisaeng* or *ginyeo* in the late Joseon Dynasty (figure 4-4, *left*).²⁸ *Gisaeng* (courtesans) was a special group or class of women whose members were socially allowed to imitate the fashion of upper-class women or wear even more opulent clothing, even though their social position was lower than that of commoners (*pyeogmin*) (Moon and Choi). Set side by side with such a premodern Korean beauty, the Gangnam Beauty highlights not only the artificiality of a face constructed by medical technology, but the specific performance being parodied. The cross-class dressing that only *Gisaeng* could engage in during the Joseon era reflects a theatrical practice that allowed them to *pass* for someone of a higher social status. The difference between the two women's images is that Shin's anonymous *Gisaeng* embodies normative femininity of the Joseon era while the Gangnam Beauty is the opposite: the Gangnam Beauty seemingly implies a Korean woman's virtual corporeality, which is constructed through more dynamic hybridization, conflict, and negotiations among divergent cultures and technologies. However,

²⁸ *Gisaeng* or *Ginyeo* were Korean female artists/courtesans during the Joseon era who worked to entertain members the ruling male *yangban* class, officials, and even kings. The highest ranking among these women, known as "government courtesans" (*gwangi*), provided entertainment to Joseon court officials in Seoul; they were recruited, trained, and employed by the government. As E. Taylor Atkins points out, the English word *courtesan* fails to capture the diversity of Korean *Gisaeng* culture and community. Under Japanese colonialism, these women were commodified as their faces and bodily attributes were exposed to the public through magazines and photographs. The object of patriarchal and colonial gazes, their "beauty" was easily judged and circulated as a commodity of Joseon as well as Japan. They had a certain freedom in terms of visualizing themselves in public (unlike middle- and upper-class women), but they were involuntarily represented in magazines and commodified through exhibitions by the Japanese government. For more details, see my chapter 1; and see Atkins 175–86.

the embodiment of the Joseon *Gisaeng* is not as simple as it looks. The social status and class of *Gisaeng* came to be more ambiguous and unstable particularly after the Gabo Reform (1894–96) and the political involvement of Japanese colonial power in the Joseon dynasty. What made the *Gisaeng* a public embodiment of beauty (*miin*) rather than entertainers or artists was Japan’s promotion of them as a commodity and colonized spectacle.²⁹



Figure 4-4. *Portrait of a Beauty (miindo)*, by Shin Yun-Bok (left), and *Portrait of Gangnam Beauty (Gangnam miindo)*, by Mind C (right)³⁰

²⁹ Japan published the “Compendium of Joseon Beauty” (*joseonmiinbogam*) in 1918 through *Gyeongseong Daily*, which was owned by the Japanese Government General of Korea. This photo collection of Korean *Gisaeng* publicized their personal information including facial/bodily attributes. Refer to K.-M. Lee.

³⁰ Yun-Bok Shin’s *Portrait of a Beauty* is exhibited at the Museum of Kansong in Seoul and owned by the Kansong Art and Culture Foundation.

The Gangnam Beauty is represented as an empowered consumer who carries an orange-hued Chanel purse and black sunglasses and wears black high heels.³¹ Given her appearance, the Gangnam Beauty could embody an economically affluent young woman who is able to consume such high-end fashion commodities. But since the accoutrements of fashion can deceive, disguise, and falsely simulate, the Gangnam Beauty's actual economic status is not necessarily consistent with her façade. As Joanne Hollows aptly points out, acts of consumption have been often derided for their feminine connotations. Fashion and beauty practices based on consumption have not only produced gendered identities but also reconfigured notions of femininity. In the era of postmodernism and consumerist capitalism, beauty practices and consumption have become critical sociocultural spheres for (re)defining a woman's sense of place in everyday life. As Diana Crane elaborates, one agenda of fashion is to present the subject as a "postmodern role player who produces a self through a proliferation of theatrical roles created through a judicious use of costume and masquerade" (204). Crane emphasizes the theatricality of fashion and beauty practices, and I draw on her work in my analysis of K-Beauty and its attendant acts of consumption and beauty practices, as channeling the theatrical attributes of *masquerade* through women's showy self-display, which generates social distinctions and privileges.

Such theatricality is apparent not only with the Gangnam Beauty but also with the Soybean-Paste Girl. It manifests its excessive, overflowing, and hyperbolic affect in terms of beauty consumption, appearance enhancement, and even facial modification. The excessive, exaggerated, and artificial aspects of the Gangnam Beauty and the Soybean-Paste Girl reveal the theatricality that blurs the distinction not only between normative and nonnormative femininity, but between virtual reality and reality. As Case construes, "theatricality exceeds

³¹ Although the image in figure 4-4 is not quite clear, the original illustration explicitly shows the Chanel logo on the bag and sunglasses.

theater as it exceeds traditional social boundaries. It marks the restrictions of the theater by spilling over its boundaries as it spills over the boundaries of ‘good taste’ or ‘proper comportment’ in the social realm” (“The Emperor’s New Clothes” 187). The excess that is evident in the appearance and consumption practices of the two female corporeal embodiments transgresses the boundary of patriarchal normativity.

Through circulation and dissemination, digital images extend far beyond the limited online space and even dominate the real social realm.³² This observation pertains to Korea’s advanced digitalized social environment; as Tomi T. Ahonen and Jim O’Reilly expound, South Korea has “the highest penetration of broadband internet, the highest usage of online video gaming, highest penetration of camera phones, highest penetration of 3G advanced cell phones, and the highest adoption of digital TV broadcasts to portable devices,” which makes the nation so digitalized that the real is overwhelmed by the virtual (175). Excessive virtual femininity now dominates everyday life precisely because the internet penetrates almost all of Korean society. Within this digital media environment, as Thomas Postlewait and Tracy Davis illustrate, “just as theatricality has been used to describe the gap between reality and its representation—a concept for which there is a perfectly good and very specific term, mimesis—it has also been used to describe the heightened status when everyday reality is exceeded by its representation” (6). The two Korean virtual femininities are everywhere; as Case elaborates in considering virtuality, “the ‘real time,’ in which both duration and ‘presentness’ occur, is countered by the digital image” (“The Emperor’s New Clothes” 194).

³² CNN once reported on South Korea’s remarkable smartphone usage and internet culture as follows: “From the weird to the wonderful to sci-fi stuff from a Samsung galaxy far, far away, here are things Korea pulls off more spectacularly than anywhere else. Want to see what the future looks like? Book a ticket to the country with a worldwide high 82.7% Internet penetration. Among 18 to 24 year olds, smartphone penetration is 97.7%. While they are chatting away on emoticon-ridden messenger apps such as Kakao Talk, Koreans also use their smartphones to pay at shops or watch TV (not YouTube but real-time channels) on the subway” (“Ten Things South Korea Does Better”).

The convergence of Korean society's compressed modernity, as mentioned earlier, with the overwhelming digitalized media culture of today—and the collision between economic development and cultural modernization—risks producing a fissure. As David Harvey might contend, the spatial integration and temporal condensation of political, economic, and cultural activities on a global scale became a generic feature of capitalist modernity in the early twentieth century. However, as Chang Kyung-Sup provocatively argues, explosive economic growth tends to create precarious social consequences that are unique to Korean society (“Compressed Modernity”); what I like to accentuate is the gap that arises when the speed of cultural modernity cannot catch up with that of socioeconomic modernization. In this regard, Mind C's Gangnam Beauty embodies the very rupture that is created by the unequal development of cultural modernization and economic advancement.

Going back to the Gangnam Beauty (figure 4, *right*), her corporeality is constructed through a more conscious, active gesture than that of the traditional beauty, through her accrual of the Chanel purse and sunglasses, black stilettos, and plastic surgery. Yet she still wears a *hanbok*, the traditional Korean female garment, which embodies hybridization not only as a mixture of the West and the East but as a convergence of temporalities and spatialities. To this point, Nestor Garcia Canclini's argument regarding the concept of hybridity seems germane to Korean society and its cultural productions because of what he calls “modernization without modernity.” He explains that the modernization and democratization of many Latin American countries have been achieved mostly by elites and have affected only a small minority of the population, so that cultural modernity cannot be properly attained when socioeconomic modernization remains unequally applied. Hence, according to Canclini, the disparity between modernism and modernization writ large has generated hybrid formations in all social strata:

this multitemporal heterogeneity of modern culture is a consequence of a history in which modernization rarely operated through the substitution of the tradition and the

ancient. There were ruptures provoked by industrial development and urbanization that, although they occurred after those of Europe, were more accelerated. (46)

Within the socioeconomic context of Korea, I contend that the two Korean virtual beauties and their nonnormative femininities have been produced from such ruptures, generated by the imbalance between rather belated cultural modernization and rapid economic development. This is in part because Western modernity has been experienced in different intensities and degrees by disparate classes of people. Cultural transactions—particularly between former metropole and colony—are far from unilateral or unidirectional because it is hard to fully capture the great diversity and autonomy of local cultural particularities. On the side of the West, the stereotypical perception that Korean women who undergo plastic surgery in pursuit of westernized facial attributes is nothing but proof of the remnants of cultural imperialism and fetishization of the Other.

Conclusion

I have drawn on the concept of *masquerade* as a way not only to resolve the tension produced from the unequal relations among gender, race, and class but to narrow the gap between what is projected as authentic and what is considered imitative, or between the reality and the representation, thus traversing the boundaries of class and challenging the normativity of femininity and the ideals of beauty constructed by social intellectuals, the state, and hegemonic mores. Despite temporal and spatial disparities, culturally coded Korean women's beauty ideals and norms of femininity have been reiterated in relation to women's class and social status.

Throughout the four case studies, I locate the concept of masquerade in a coded cultural legacy and knowledge transmitted through distance, space, and time. Here, I invoke the premodern novel *The Story of Chunhyang* (*chunhyangjeon*), transmitted from the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897), to help explain the relationship between women, class, and the performance of femininity/identity. It is a well-known classic love story, in which a young and beautiful, yet lower-class, female protagonist, Chunhyang, and an aspiring young male *yangban* (aristocrat), Mong-Ryong, fulfill their love by transcending the barriers that separate their social classes. Their love is a challenge to the Confucian patriarchy, particularly its class stratification. Born to a mother who was a *gisaeng* (a courtesan or a professional female entertainer) and a father of the *yangban* class, Chunhyang was not validated as a legitimate member of the *yangban* class. Despite the disparity in their social standing, this couple even today remains the incarnation of “unchanging love” because people admire Chunhyang's chastity, sacrifice, and endurance, virtues that Confucian society demanded of Korean women. As a well-known beauty, Chunhyang faces coercion to become a concubine to a regional governor, but she chooses instead to refuse the proposal and be imprisoned. Though she embodies physical beauty, she is described as prudent and modest, not virtues typically attributed to lower-class women.

Although she was born lower-class, Chunhyang conducts herself as mandated of the middle-class or noblewomen; in that moment, she becomes a theatrical character who articulates her identity by acting like a middle-class aristocrat woman, which also makes her ambiguous insofar as her role and bodily expressions became “unnatural.” In this way, Chunhyang is equivalent to an impersonator who challenges institutionalized authority and the static notion of class, and who performs viable roles that grant her both space to maneuver and the ability to resist singular interpretation.

Chunhyang may have achieved her upward mobility by imitating the qualities of ideal femininity imposed by Confucian society. Culturally transmitted from generation to generation, this gendered narrative has been iterated as a coded cultural legacy and memory of Confucian womanhood through various forms of media, in such genres as film, plays, and contemporary musicals. However, from a different perspective, Chunhyang could represent an ambitious and self-empowering woman who challenges social norms and class hierarchy, and the narrative could thus reflect Korean women’s desire to obtain class mobility or to subvert patriarchal normativity and convention. Chunhyang is therefore an ambiguous female character; while she reproduces the norms of femininity, she simultaneously challenges the Confucian patriarchy in term of class. As such, *The Story of Chunhyang* could project women’s desire for class ascendancy or reflect a fantasy that one could escape from a reality in which class was essentialized.

Yet how is a female character such as Chunhyang relevant to the present, in which Koreans claim no blood superiority or titles of nobility? One might think that this premodern narrative is no longer germane. However, as Diana Tylor elaborates through her influential book *The Archive and The Repertoire*, this narrative is an archival memory whereas the ephemeral and unreproducible performances of Korean women’s fashion and beauty revealed through my case studies are repertoires. As Taylor further addresses, these two levels are in a constant

interaction, and their transmissions are always mediated—as I have acknowledged by drawing from divergent media forms in each chapter. As far-fetched as the connection between the premodern Korean novel and twenty-first-century K-Beauty may appear, my case studies reveal that such Confucian understandings of gender, class, and femininity continue to actively inform notions of national womanhood.

Although I acknowledge many delimitations of my dissertation, I will further explore Seoul's transitions and permutations as a critical force in tandem with the changes of Korean women's beauty ideals and femininity through my future book project. Seoul has been a palimpsest on which divergent (trans)national powers have been inscribed, erased, and hybridized. Examination of Seoul's geographical transitions will foreground the convolutions of national history alongside the foreign power dynamics. More precisely, I will delve into the geographical trajectory of urban centers: from Myeongdong (what was called Jingogae) in the Japanese colonial period to Gangnam in the present. These urban centers are not the mere result of national industrialization but embody the imposition of multiple foreign powers on Korean society through the past century. Under Japanese colonialism (1910–45), the city center switched from Jongro to Myeongdong as part of a colonial urban reform project to display colonial power and showcase imperialistic desire. Myeongdong became an exclusive place of urban spectacle, in which strolling was a kinesthetic embodiment of male elites' way of seeing what we call modernity. During the Park Chung-Hee military regime (1961–79), the urban dynamics of Seoul shifted to Gangnam, where most of the area was (at the time) farmland. The real estate development was intended by the authoritarian state to financially support the subsequent presidential election. The Gangnam district has since become a new cultural hub of K-Pop, medical tourism/technologies, and Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) more broadly.

The challenge that remains is to figure out how closely these urban power transitions are tied to the experienced embodiments of Korean women's beauty and fashion: how has the city of

Seoul has been embodied in relation to Korean women and their beauty practices? In what ways will understanding Seoul's modernization in parallel with that of other cosmopolitan cities extend my current research further? I hope that I can resolve these questions in my future research.

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