

Two Layers' on New Women in Colonial Korea: The Case of Ch'oe Yŏngsuk (1905-32)

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Abstract This paper aims to examine the life, experiences, and limitation of Ch'oe Yŏngsuk, a notable New Woman figure subjected to colonial restrictions in Korea during the early 20th century, with empirical resources, including newly discovered archives from the Swedish National Archive and the Sigtunastiftelsen archive. While Korean women were able to receive a modern education from the late 19th century, Ch'oe studied in Shanghai and then went to Sweden in 1926 to study sociology, becoming the first Korean woman to receive a bachelor's degree in Economics. After her studies, she traveled extensively and met influential people. Despite her notable achievements, Ch'oe could not find a proper job and died in poverty a few months after her return. This paper seeks to shed light on her life during her stay in Sweden and her activities in the independence and feminist movements there. The relationship between her 'failure' after returning home and the constraints of the time, given spatially/periodically and gender-wise, will also be examined. It is also worth noting that her case is a symbolic example of the social constraints that elite women had to face at the time. Her contrasting activities and evaluations in Sweden and Korea show how constrained and suppressed a woman's life is by the time and space in which it positions.

Keywords Korean New Women. Ch'oe Yŏngsuk (Choi Young-Sook). Colonial subject. Colonial Korea. Independence movement. Elite women in Modern Korea. International student.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Biography of Ch'oe Yŏngsuk. – 3 A Restriction as a New Woman. – 4 A Restriction as a Colonial Subject. – 5 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

Ch'oe Yöngsuk's (1905/6-1932)¹ experience is a unique and remarkable case to examine the narratives on an intellectual female figure subject to colonial restrictions. From the late nineteenth century, Korean women were able to receive a modern education through missionary schools and private women's schools. Some of them decided to study abroad in order to acquire a modern education and encounter other cultures, improving their abilities for their country's benefit. Most of them studied in Japan, America, or China. However, Ch'oe took a different path. She studied in Shanghai and then went to Sweden in 1926, to study sociology in Stockholm. She was the first Korean woman to receive a bachelor's degree in economics. After her studies, she traveled to many countries and met influential people such as Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949).

However, Ch'oe has been largely remembered as a woman who died because of love until now. The novel *Shining on the Black Land* (Kang 2017) presented a fictional love story featuring Ch'oe and the Swedish Crown Prince, and the title of the collection of her own writings is *I Do Not Allow to Accept Your Love* (Ch'oe 2018). The word 'love' has become latched onto her life like a *scarlet letter*. Certainly, love is one part of Ch'oe's life, but people struggle to see beyond it, because too much importance has been assigned to that part of her life.

With the development of studies on the Korean New Women and a reexamination of their lives, people started to newly examine her life. Woo (2006) tried to shed light on Ch'oe's achievements to try to reconstruct her life. Choi (2012) referred to her as a unique yet symbolic example of the extent of the international experiences made by women from her generation. Lee (2018) discovered her life and activities in Sweden and pointed out that she acted as a bridge between Korea and Sweden. Some of her writings have been reprinted and translated into English (Ch'oe 2018; Choi 2013).

It is pointed out that Ch'oe's activities in Korea are short as the reason for her being forgotten. But, why did a successful elite woman international student fail and die in poverty after returning home? What specific limitations did the colonial situation bring to the New Women in Korea? The case of Ch'oe Yöngsuk, who was very active and liberal in Sweden but 'failed' in her home country soon after her return, clearly shows the restrictions and limitations imposed on New Women.

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¹ Also referred to as Choi Young-sook in a Swedish document and as Choi Ing-sook in other early documents from Sweden. In this paper, I will use Ch'oe Yöngsuk but keep Choi Young-sook when quoting the original texts. Japanese and Korean names are presented in the original order, i.e. surname (Ch'oe), then given name (Yöngsuk).

en in the colonial country. Kim (2011) pointed out the double oppression and limitations of modern elite New Women as the colonial rule and patriarchal social structure and it was their missions to overcome those oppressions. While this study focuses on New Women studying in the United States, it is possible that the two objectives mentioned here may apply to all elite female students study abroad at that time.

Another problem of the research on Ch'oe is the unequal treatment of evaluations on women elites abroad and their independence activities. The rediscovery of men independence activists who studied abroad continues. There is also a study of European students and their journeys during the colonial period. Considering that the goal of students who studied abroad at the time was to learn more knowledge for their home country, their research on them would be related to new discoveries about the independence movement abroad. However, both research on women's independence activists and elite women's independence activities are relatively behind. It is likely that research on it is becoming active in various aspects since the 2010s: *T'ongirüi kil, han'gukyösöng tongnibundongesö ch'atta* ('Seeking the Path to the Reunification through Korean Women's Independence Movement') and *3.1 undonge apchang sön yösöngdüi* (Women Who Led March First Independence Movement) were published in 2015 and 2019 respectively (Yi et al. 2015; Kim et al. 2019).

Therefore, this paper aims to rewrite Ch'oe's life with empirical resources, especially focused on her activities in Sweden with newly discovered resources. In Sweden, many of Ch'oe's records are stored in the Swedish National Archive (*Riksarkivet*) and the *Sigtunastiftelsen* archive. There is a file of a police report about her entrance into the country and visa application in the Swedish National Archive (Kungliga Utrikesdepartementet 1926) and documents related to Ch'oe's academic activities, preserved in both archives (Socialinstitutet i Stockholm, n.d.-b). Examining such elements, the paper will shed light on Ch'oe Yöngsuk's life during her stay in Sweden, and her activities in the independence movement and the feminist movement there. In addition, I will examine the relationship between her 'fail' after returning home and the constraints of the time given spatially/periodically (colonial Korea), and gender (woman).

2 Biography of Ch'oe Yöngsuk

Ch'oe Yöngsuk was born in 1905 in Kyönggi province. Her father was a businessman and had five children. Ch'oe was born as the third child, and she had two elder brothers and two younger sisters. Some records about her life before she went to Sweden are provided by the "Resume for joining Young Korean Academy" (YKA, *Hüngsadaniptaniryöksö*) (Ch'oe 1924). The YKA was a national organisation that Dosan An Ch'angho (1878-1938) established in San Francisco on May 13, 1913, to promote the independence and prosperity of the Korean nation. A branch was established in Shanghai in 1919. Ch'oe joined this organisation in 1924, when she was studying in Nanjing, with the support of Ch'a Risök (1881-1945) and Sönu Hyök (1882~?), who were famous Korean independence activists. According to her resume, she entered Ewha womans' high school, which was the first modern educational institute for women, established by American missionary Mary F. Scranton in 1866. After studying at Ewha womens' high school, Ch'oe went to Nanjing in 1922. In her writings, she mentions the fact that she felt closer to China than Japan as the reason why she decided to study there (Ch'oe 1932). However, the actual reason was the Japanese government's brutality toward the March First Movement in 1919. Her best friend had been captured and died in Jail (Stockholms Dagblad 1927). This loss was the critical reason that made her leave Korea and move to China rather than Japan. Ch'oe studied at the Ming Deh school in Nanjing and the next year she entered the Hui Wen school in Nanjing. The Ming Deh Academy was founded by the American North Presbyterian Church in 1884. From 1912 it was called the Private Ming Deh Girls' School. The Hui Wen Girls' School was founded by the Methodists in 1887 and was known under its subsequent name from 1902. During her time as a student in China, Ch'oe broadened her outlook and thought. In 1926, she took a firm decision to increase her knowledge in the West for the sake of her homeland. Her father sold his best rice field to support her journey (Dahlgren 1934). She received a Chinese passport and entered Sweden as a Chinese citizen (Stockholms Dagblad 1927).

To acquire new knowledge, Ch'oe decided to go to Sweden, leaving her family behind. The reason why she decided to travel to Sweden, rather than any other western country, was her admiration of the Swedish woman writer Ellen Key (1849-1926). Ellen Key is one of the rare Swedish writers on educational subjects to have achieved a truly international reputation. She was not only interested in education, but covered a wide range of fields through her work: literature and art, religion and politics, women's suffrage, the question of marriage, peace, and so on. Her considerable production is made up of essays and reviews, as well as books and shorter articles on these subjects (Lengborn 1993). Ellen Key was introduced to Japan in 1907 by a literature critic, Tayama Katai, and her books were translated

into Japanese in 1911 (Gu 2004). In Korea, she first became known when poet No Chayöng published the essay “Ellen Key: The leading figure of the feminist movement” in 1921. She was also occasionally mentioned in newspapers and journals in Korea.

Ch'oe was impressed by Ellen Key, especially her socialistic ideas. Finally, she decided to study in Sweden in 1925, and wrote her first letter to Ellen Key on November 7, 1925. Ch'oe called herself ‘your daughter’ and asked five questions, mostly related to economic/educational conditions in Sweden: she inquired about education and living costs, the Swedish language, and university regulations.

I heard of your estimable reknown a few years ago from one of my friends. From that moment I began to admire you with all my sincere heart and I have been very much interested to read those books which are written by you. I have never forgotten that, some day in the future, I must go to your country and learn from you. [...] As I told you, I have no friend in Sweden to lead me, I only rely upon you to help me as a little children rely upon their mother. Afterwards, I shall send you my picture if you want it.

I hope to read a letter from you as soon as possible. I am

Your sincerely,
Choi Yoong Sook
(Ch'oe 1925)

Ch'oe did not receive an answer from Ellen Key, so she sent two more letters to her. They are stored in Ellen Key's archive in Sweden. The third letter was written on 16 January 1926, and Ch'oe was rather anxious because of Ellen Key's silence. Ellen Key was actually on her sickbed, but Ch'oe had no way of knowing this. Ch'oe decided to study sociology at Stockholm University and left China in 1926. She had only two recommendation letters in her pocket and departed for her long journey. Due to this unique path she took, the Korean media also showed an interest in her (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1926). Unfortunately, Ellen Key passed away just a few days before Ch'oe's arrival in Sweden. But she was not demoralised by Ellen Key's unpredictable death and decided to stay in Sweden and carry on her studies.

It was not an easy journey to Sweden. One of Ch'oe's fellow travellers, a Chinese girl who also wanted to study in Sweden, gave up and returned halfway through the journey. Finally, Ch'oe arrived in Sweden in August 1926 and began her new life in the historic town of Sigtuna, which today is one hour's drive away from Stockholm. She stayed at a Christian institute called Sigtunastiftelsen. During her time there, Ch'oe entered Sigtuna Folkhögskola and began learning Swedish and Swedish history before entering higher education. In her Sigtuna period, Ch'oe was supported by her Christian connections with the KFUK (the Swedish branch of the YWCA, Kristliga

Föreningen av Unga Kvinnor) and by Swedish princess Elsa Victoria Cedergren (born Bernadotte af Wisborg, 1893-1996), who was also the chair of the KFUK. When Ch'oe arrived in Stockholm, she immediately contacted Elsa Cedergren, who she introduced her to Sigtuna Folkhögskola. Elsa Cedergren was interested in Asian countries, and she had visited Korea, Japan, and China in 1924. The KFUK also had a branch in Shanghai. All this explains why Ch'oe was able to begin a new life in Sweden so successfully.

Ch'oe also cooperated with other Swedish Christian associations. In 1928, she gave a talk on Korea at the community house (Folkets Hus). It was organised by Vita Bandet (White Ribbon)² and a leading people of Swedish women activists such as Emilie Rathou (1882-1948) were attended that day. The contents is unknown but it was about the condition in her home country and "attracted much interest" by audience (Svenska Dagbladet 1928).³

Ch'oe also attended a big conference in this period: *Kvinnoförbundets för fred och frihet Stockholmsmöte* (The Meeting of Women's Associations for Peace and Freedom in Stockholm). This conference was held on 1 January 1928 in Stockholm to discuss the importance of political, economic, social, and ethical factors for world peace. Hundreds of people took part in the opening ceremony, including prominent scholars such as sinologist Klas Bernhard Johannes Karlgren (1889-1978) and geologist Nils Otto Gustaf Nordenskjöld (1869-1928). Many celebrities and social activists too attended the event, such as feminist Mary Sheepshanks (1872-1960), Anna Wicksell Bugge (1862-1928), and female politician Kerstin Hesselgren (1872-1962) (Svenska Dagbladet 1928). Ch'oe recalled this conference in one of her letters and stated that she even wanted to go to Switzerland, as she had been so impressed by Sheepshanks's speech "The Colonial Policy of the Imperialists" and by a short talk with her (Chosun Ilbo 1928).

In 1928, Ch'oe entered the Socialpolitiska och Kommunal Institutet (Institute of Social Politics and Policy) in Stockholm. However, in Korea, it was wrongly reported that Ch'oe had graduated from Stockholm University (known as Stockholms Högskola at the time). The Socialpolitiska och Kommunal Institutet was closely related to the Social Politics and Economics Departments of the University of Stockholm. In 1920, a faculty was set up as a donation to establish a national economics and social policy professorship at the University of Stockholm by the Central Union for Social Work, which served

² Founded in 1897, was the Swedish branch of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which was an international sobriety organisation, based on Christian principles, that had representation at the UN. The WCTU was established as an international organisation in 1883 in Detroit, and the Swedish branch was opened in Stockholm in the 1880s.

³ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

as the head of the Institute for Social Politics and Policy. The curriculum reveals that students were required to complete 26 hours of social politics and economics during the spring semester at Stockholm University, in order to take national economic classes. In 1977 the Socialpolitiska was formally incorporated into the University of Stockholm and operated as an Institutionen för socialt arbete (Institute for Social Work). Ch'oe studied under Gösta Bagge (1882-1951) and Gerhard Halfred von Koch (1872-1948), who were famous professors and politicians with liberal views on economic matters (Socialinstitutet i Stockholm, n.d.-a).

At this institute, Ch'oe began to build her knowledge of social economics. One project she developed, as part of Prof. Bagge's seminar, was *Problemet om den mindervardiga arbetskraften* ('The problem of the inferior labor force'). She also had a connection with Stockholm University. She was a member of the Women's Association (Kvinnliga studentföreningen) of Stockholm Högskola before membership became mandatory in 1930. She prepared some events and introduced Korea to other people in the association (M.A. 1929; Styrelsen 1928).

Ch'oe had busy days filled with studying and organising/attending many events related to the women's movement and promoting Korea. During these activities, she also had to cover all the costs of her study in Sweden by herself. In her writing, she recalls that she did some language teaching, embroidered traditional Korean patterns, and submitted articles on Korean affairs to newspapers/magazines (Puin'gija 1932). She also worked for the Swedish Crown Prince and helped to catalogue his collections from his visit to Korea and translate them from Korean into Swedish. It was a tough task, but she recalls that it was also enjoyable although it was not easy (Ch'oe 1932b). She also received support from several people who helped her a lot. Ch'oe's patron Johan Gustaf Beskow (1875-1944) and the latter's wife Ester Åkesson-Beskow (1879-1970) provided their house for Ch'oe to stay in until her graduation. During her period of study in Sweden, she never forgot about the situation in Korea and tried to people aware of the suffering of the Korean people as a spokesperson for her home country (Lee 2021; 2022).

In this country [Korea] with its beautiful nature, its suitable climate and its abundance of produce, our ancestors lived for over five thousand years in peace and calm. But now, since 1910, the bloodthirsty Japanese imperialists have penetrated Korea, usurped political power and all our economic resources. (Ch'oe 1927)

When we heard that the congress in Paris [Paris Peace Conference] had spoken in favor of the freedom and independence of peoples, we believed that Korea too had become a free country. The students organised with demonstration rallies and we carried our own flags and we sang our own songs – our songs, composed by our poets. Praised our country and the day of freedom that came. [...] The Japanese shot down a few thousand and put a few hundred in jail. Most people still languish there, but many have died. [...] What we need is knowledge – much, much more knowledge. I fled from Korea to China and became a Chinese citizen. [...] Then I traveled back here a year ago and from here I should go to other colleges. We must learn how to become free men and free women and free nations. (Stockholms Dagblad 1927)

Ch'oe finally graduated from the Socialpolitiska och Kommunala Institutet in June 1930, and she was the first Korean woman to receive a BA in economics. A long time had passed since she had first embarked on her journey in 1922, and she could finally go back to her homeland and meet her family. After her graduation, Ch'oe went on a trip and visited various countries in Europe and Asia on her way back home. She traveled to Denmark, Russia, Germany, France, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, India, Palestine, and Vietnam. She met Chöng Sökhæ (1899-1996) in France, a member of the YKA, as well as other YKA members in Shanghai (Chöng 1931).⁴ She stayed in India for four months, and met Mahatma Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu. This visit is related to a close relationship between Ch'oe and Naidu. They had met in Stockholm and continued to exchange letters since then. Her visit to India caused a big change in her mind: while she only spent three months there, she was greatly impressed by Gandhi and Naidu and admired their activities. She especially discussed Korea with Naidu, who suggested that she stay in India and introduce more people to Korea (Ch'oe 1932a). The situation in India, which was suffering under imperialism just like Korea, and the activities of Gandhi and Naidu, who sought to oppose imperialism both internationally and domestically, crucially influenced Ch'oe's path (Ch'oe 1932a): upon her return to Korea, she consistently argued that her idea of the 'unity of people' had been inspired by India. She called for the establishment of a single organisation capable of uniting the people of the country, like the Indian Congress (Ch'oe 1932d). Naidu suggested her to stay in India and work there as a newspaper reporter, but she decided to return to Korea to see her family again (Ch'oe 1932a).

⁴ Like other YKA members, it seems that Ch'oe too kept in contact with the Shanghai branch and reported about the situation in Sweden. However, unlike other YKA members in Europe, she has been excluded from the history of the YKA: the volume *Hüngsadan inmul 101* in [The 101 People in the Young Korean Academy], published in 2015, makes no mention of her.

Her return received considerable attention in Korean society. *Chosun Ilbo* printed an interview, "Ch'oe Yöngsuk, the First Korean Woman Economist" on December 22, 1931. This article included a short biography of Ch'oe and described her as a talented woman who could speak five languages. Ch'oe published articles in Korean media with passion and attended symposiums with other women who had had foreign experiences. She aimed to share what she had learned in Sweden and India and encouraged the new generation of feminists in Korea (Kim et al. 1932). She was also involved in promoting village schools and improving the women's cultural movement in rural areas, together with Park Indök (1897-1980) and Hwang Esther (1892-1970).

Within a short time, Ch'oe was attending symposiums and talks with other New Women in Korea (Ch'oe 1932c; Chöng at al. 1931; Park et al. 1932). These activities are unsurprising, in the sense that she was expected to attend such events. Her opinions on women were all ways related to the labor issue:

In a country like Sweden, it is not necessary to distinguish men's occupation and women's occupation. A woman can be a police officer just like men; she can even be a detective or the member of an assembly. Women can do any kind of work. (Park et al. 1932)

Tragically, Ch'oe did not get the chance to spread her ideas in Korea for long, since she died in April 1932. She had to work in her small family store while pregnant; the poverty and tight schedules she experienced on her return led her to her grave. She passed away less than half a year after her homecoming. After her sudden death, Ch'oe received more attention from society because of her love story with her Indian husband than because of her achievements and dreams. After her death, her friends in Sweden, who had not been informed about the tragedy, were worried about her and wondered why they were receiving no letters from her. The memorial record quoted below was written by Harald Magnus Dahlgren (1861-1935), who was a teacher at Sigtunaskolan from 1926 and its director of studies from 1927. He was also a member of the board of the Sigtuna Foundation's humanistic educational institution from 1927 (Riksarkivet n.d.). Dahlgren made a request to find her to the Swedish envoy in Tokyo, Johan Hultman (1876-1953), and finally received news about her in May 1933, when she already passed away. To remember Ch'oe, the two men wrote an essay. Her friends in Sweden tried not to forget her. They described Ch'oe as an intelligent, talented, humorous, and warm-hearted person.

Young Sook was no ordinary person. Her intelligence was significant. In particular, one must be surprised at her language ability. She could speak and write not only in her mother tongue but also in Japanese, Chinese, English, and finally also Swedish. In an

incredibly short period of time, she became acquainted with our language, expressed herself, if not flawlessly, but was free without interruption. She had a good ear even for our slang words and every day turns of phrases. In her work with needle and thread, she showed a refined taste. Musically, she would sing her little national songs and could also play Mozart and Beethoven on the piano. Intuitively, she embraced us foreigners and our social habits and understood us well in both our seriousness and our humor. You would sometimes get a sense of the divide that different races and cultures are bound to create but, most of all, in the company of Young Sook, I felt how strong and the common human bond is that hold us all together. She not only had a fair intelligence but also a fair character. Within her insensitive outer person there lived a rather large personality. She was unusually true to the truth. Her inability to settle into something she did not like might sometimes lead to misunderstanding, and it is undeniable that her independence bordered on self-esteem. Her strong will, however, was combined with a warm and loyal heart, full of participation and gratitude. Lastly, she was a woman of conscience and a religious woman, who sought solace and courage in firm trust in God. (Dahlgren, 1934)

3 A Restriction as a New Woman

It is difficult to define Ch'oe in just one word. She was a Korean New Woman, a feminist, an economist, an independent activist, and a transcultural figure. Despite her short life, she challenged numerous assumptions and achieved great things. However, why was Ch'oe Yöngsuk forgotten after her death? Her early death, of course, is perhaps the primary reason, but what led to her death? She was healthy enough to travel from China to Sweden and endured an alien environment alone. In just four months after returning home, she collapsed due to overwork and malnutrition.

There have been few attempts to examine Ch'oe's life in Sweden since her death. According to magazine articles, there were diaries, letters, and photos she left. Nevertheless, they were never published. The news of her death was not delivered to Sweden until her Swedish friends conducted an inquiry, and her contact with Sweden was severed. Why did she fail to set roots in Korea and why did people forget her? In this section, I will elucidate the social background of Ch'oe's poor situation after her return by focusing on two restrictions imposed on her: as a 'colonial subject' and as a 'woman.'

Again, Ch'oe's early death may be the direct cause of her invisibility, and her death was caused by poverty. Borrowing her best friend Im Hyochöng's (1903~?) expression, 'poverty took her away.' No one expected that she would have a hard time getting a job, and people

wondered why she could not find a job despite all her rich experiences abroad. To understand this, we have to look at the economy and unemployment rates in 1931 and 1932. Graph 1 shows the unemployment rate of Koreans and Japanese in Korea. The Japanese government conducted a survey of the unemployment rate between 1930 to 1937. Though this does not include women as a research subject, it is still valid for showing the economic and employment condition in those years.

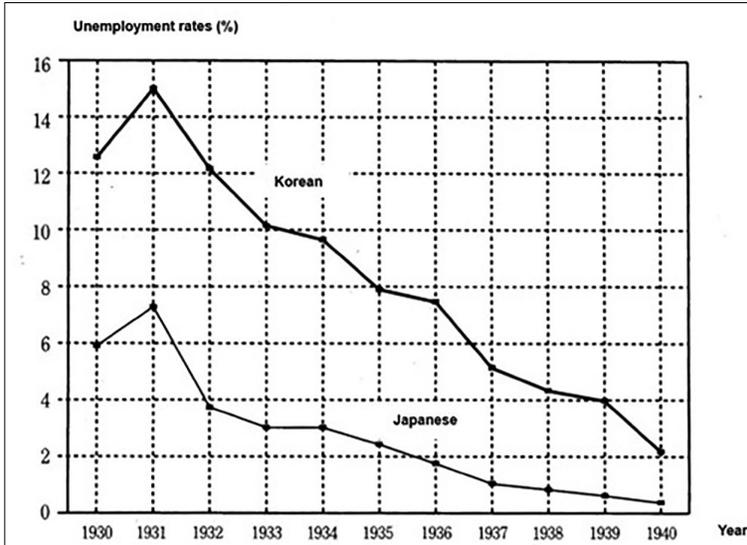


Figure 1 Unemployment rate by ethnicity. © Hō 1993, 10

From this graph we can see that unemployment rates were relatively high in the early 1930s. The early 1930s witnessed what has been called the 'Shōwa financial crisis' in Japan, due to the world-wide Great Depression of the late 1920s. As far as the unemployment was most severe in 1931, during this financial crisis. The unemployment rate in Korea for this year was 15,0 percent for Koreans and 7,0 percent for the Japanese. These are the highest rates from the unemployment survey conducted during the colonial period. The unemployment rate peaked in 1931 and then declined. And as the graph shows, the Korean unemployment rate is more than double that of the Japanese (S. Hō 1993, 9). When Ch'oe came back to Korea in November 1931, the country was at the peak of its economic crisis and the unemployment rate was at a record high. Furthermore, when it comes to the variable of gender, she had a severe disadvantage. There were few jobs for women during

that period. In the 1920s, working women were to be found in a few fields – doctors, teachers, journalists, nurses, and artists.

If we consider the limited job opportunities for the female gender in this economic turmoil, it is clear that women had to walk a more arduous path than men. Lee argued that there were three difficulties in being a working woman in the modern period. First, gender discrimination existed in all professions: the salary of female teachers was much lower than that of male teachers. Second, women were discriminated against as a minority: working women had to enter the male-centered social hierarchy, and they were segregated from the Japanese. Lastly, balancing family and work commitment was also extremely difficult (Lee 1999, 204).

When Ch'oe returned home, she had only two options: to become a journalist or a teacher. She considered becoming a journalist at first. However, according to *Tonggwang* (1932, 6), she had to change her mind because working as a journalist was not enough to support her whole family. Besides being a journalist, she also had the choice of becoming a teacher, as the increasing number of schools required well-educated teachers. However, it did not work for her either. Because she is one who was marginalised from the imperial Japanese system.

4 A Restriction as a Colonial Subject

As mentioned previously, the New Women in Korea were subjected to two restrictions, compared to the New Women in independent nations. Not only was Ch'oe a woman, but she was also a colonial subject involved in the movement for independence: two aspects that fettered her life in Korea.

There were some obstacles to embark on a teaching career. First of all, Ch'oe did not have a proper teacher's certification from the Japanese Government-General of Korea. This certification could only be issued by the Education Ordinance of Chosön (*Chōsen kyōiku rei*). According to this authority, Ch'oe did not qualify as a teacher. But there were still some cases of people who had become teachers after studying abroad (Lee 1999). Ch'oe's life abroad mattered, but so did her engagement in the independent movement. According to the Private School Ordinance (*Shiritsu Gakkō Rei*) published on 20 October 1911, the Japanese Government-General of Korea could fire any teacher whose name had been blacklisted. When a new teacher was hired, a report had to be submitted with his/her resume.

It is plausible that Ch'oe Yöngsuk's involvement in independence activities both domestically and internationally may have negatively impacted her employment opportunities in Korea. A similar situation occurred with Kim Maria. In an interview conducted shortly

after her return to Korea, she expressed her desire to pursue a personal project. However, due to her involvement in the independence movement, she was subjected to police surveillance and sanctions, preventing her from carrying out her plans. As a result, after returning from her studies in the United States, her activities were limited to Christian activities focused on the Women's Evangelical Association (Park 2015; Kim 2011). Before leaving Korea, Ch'oe had also participated in the March First Movement, and she was a member of the YKA in Shanghai. She had obtained a Chinese passport to study in Sweden, which means, as she said, she refused to be a 'Japanese national'. In Sweden, she had reported the brutality of the Japanese colonial policy and the suffering of the Korean people in many quarters, for instance by giving interviews, writing articles, and delivering public lectures (Lee 2021; Lee 2022). In this regard, there were not many places for her in colonial Korea.

Ironically, Ch'oe's rich experiences abroad became a disadvantage for her. Colonial Korea could not provide a stage for her to act freely. The different tones which Ch'oe uses in the two articles about her show how restricted her freedom of speech was. In the first article, Ch'oe mentioned that her reason for going to China was Japan's brutal colonial rule. She then changed her testimony by stating that she felt closer to China in the interview she gave a Korean magazine upon her return:

When we heard that the congress in Paris expressed itself for the freedom and independence of the people, we believed that Korea too had become a free country. [...] The Japanese shot down a few thousand and put a few hundred in jail. Most people still sit there, but many have died. My best friend died there a couple of years ago. [...] I fled from Korea to China and became a Chinese citizen. (Stockholms Dagblad 1927)

Unusually, I hated studying in Japan and preferred studying in China, and I admired that land. Therefore, when I first stepped into that land, I did not feel as if I was in a foreign country. When I entered school, I started having an interest in the place. (Ch'oe 1932b)

Ch'oe Yöngsuk, a colonial subject, could have been free from restrictions in Sweden. Thanks to this freedom, she actively engaged in activities such as giving lectures to promote Korea and contributing articles to show the reality in her home country. Ch'oe wrote about the restrictions imposed on the Korean people under Japanese rule in her article "Korean Youth" for the Sigtuna University magazine.

If I try to compare Korean and Swedish youth, it is just like comparing a bird in a cage with a free bird. When I write letters to my friends I usually write: "The happy Swedish youth." When I see dancing young people in Sweden, I think of my poor friends in prison. (Stockholms Dagblad 1927)

Ch'oe's ideology and ideals were spread freely outside of the colonial context. On the other hand, they brought restrictions upon her when she re-entered the constrained society of Korea. By speaking of 'a bird in a cage,' what Ch'oe meant was herself living in colonial Korea.

In colonial Korea, Ch'oe could no longer directly mention Japanese oppression or the independence of Korea but it was also impossible to completely erase her will. The series of "Gandiwa Naidu Hoegyön'gi, Indo e 4 kaewöl ch'eryuhamyönsö" (Memories on Gandhi and Naidu: Staying 4 months in India) she published in *Samch'ölli*, in 1932. These are also problematic because Gandhi and Naidu were the symbol of hope for the independence movement for Koreans and talking about them was a strategy of resistance (Lee 2004). A famous happening, when a student asked the question, "Is Korea the same as India?" and was severely hit by a Japanese teacher (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1927), implies that talking about India is regarded as a denial of Japanese rule. It is highly likely that even if she had not died early, Ch'oe would not have had her place in Korea like Kim Maria.

5 Conclusion

Ch'oe had concrete plans for the development of Korean society (Woo 2006; 308-9) and was actively involved in her ambition abroad. She not only gave talks about her unique experiences as a woman but also sought to contribute and apply what she had learned in Sweden and India. She gave lectures in economics (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1932) and for a brief time became involved in a project for the creation of village schools and in the movement to improve women's education in rural areas. Nevertheless, Ch'oe is now one of the symbolic figures in Korea. She was included in the book *Portraits of 63 Korean Modern Women* (Kim 2015), and her writing about India has been translated into English (Choi 2013). While not much is known about her life and activities, some recently discovered documents pertaining to her time in Sweden tell us more about her.

Ch'oe Yöngsuk embarked on her studies abroad with two objectives in mind. Her first goal was to acquire more knowledge and become a valuable asset to her colonial country. Her second goal was to learn under Ellen Kay, who was a significant influence on new Korean women. Although she did not have the opportunity to learn from Ellen Kay herself, Ch'oe was able to achieve her initial goals to

some extent and returned to her home country. She earned a Bachelor's degree in economics from Sweden and became the first Korean woman economist. While in Sweden, she spoke out against the injustice and brutality of Korea's colonial rule in various ways. Additionally, she was closely associated with K.F.U.K. and participated in the Women's Association of Stockholm University, where she continued to show interest in women's issues and communicated directly with prominent woman activists of her time such as Mary Sheepshanks and Emilie Rathou. Furthermore, she was active to promote Korea and tried to let the people know about the colonial situation of Korea. She went to India, a place Korea identified with them, and met Gandhi and Naidu for learning from their activities for independence.

Why did Ch'oe, who had successfully completed his studies abroad, face a tragic death a few months after suffering from financial persecution after returning home? In this paper, I reviewed the two socio-cultural backgrounds that surrounded Ch'oe Yöngsuk. The lack of activity in Korea was raised as the limitation of Ch'oe's research. But is the story of people who left their country for their country during the colonial period less noteworthy than their domestic activities? This may serve as a symbolic example of the contradictory situation faced by women elites at the time.

The lives of colonial women were veiled under two layers: as 'colonial subjects' and 'women.' Paradoxically, the figures who had to leave their country for their country are more invisible. This paper highlights Ch'oe Yöngsuk's independence movement and patriotic activities abroad. This micro-history of New Woman Ch'oe is a notable case study insofar as it illustrates that Korean New Women's activities abroad were undervalued compared to the knowledge acquired by Korean men who had studied abroad. It's also worth noting that her case is a symbolic example of the social constraints that elite women had to face at the time. Her contrasting activities and evaluations in Sweden and Korea show how constrained and suppressed a woman's life is by the time and space in which it positions.

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