

New Women in Colonial Korea: A Sourcebook.
Compiled, translated, and introduced by Hyaeweol Choi.
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HYAWEOL CHOI UNDERTOOK the arduous task of translating 65 Korean sources on the New Women (*Sin yösŏng*) into English. Her reason: so that “the voices of women and men who had passionately argued for or against New Woman in colonial Korea should be available to a wider audience” (xv). The “New Woman” was a movement that spread from the West to Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It challenged conventional views about female sexuality and femininity and insisted on certain rights (Heilmann and Beetham 2004, 1). The New Woman was found not only in the West but also in China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea (Muta 2004, 205).

The sources in *New Women in Colonial Korea* come from 21 magazines and newspapers, among them the pioneering *Sin yŏja* (*New Woman*) magazine and the influential *Sin yösŏng* magazine. All highlight the circumstances that led to and nurtured the Korean New Women, most important of which was Japan’s colonization of Korea from 1895 to 1945. Indeed, the presence of Japan pervades many of the sources, especially those that were censored by the Japanese. The emergence of the New Women also coincided with the entry of Western traditions and the blossoming of Korean nationalism.

Sin yŏja was the first journal to initiate and spread the discourse of the New Woman in Korea. Thereafter, different definitions of the New Woman appeared in literary pieces, newspapers, and popular magazines (2). Choi calls attention to the difference between the “New Woman” and the “New Women” in the debate. The former was “discursively constructed” (4) and an “oversimplified image” (3), while the latter referred to “actual historical figures, individuals with their own specific contexts” (4). Choi’s sourcebook shows both the “image” of New Woman and the heterogeneous nature of the New Women.

Chapter 1 is devoted to sources that discuss the “woman question.” They condemn practices that chained Korean women, such as the “inside-outside rule” (16) (*naeoböŏp*). An especially important source in this chapter is source 2, the first public document that called for upholding women’s rights in Korea. Sources 5 and 6 equate the low status of women with the weak position of the Korean nation, which was a colony of Japan at that time. Both assert that women’s education would help recover national strength and achieve “enlightenment” (24). Similarly, other sources see a connection between the status of Korean women and that of the nation vis-à-vis foreign powers.

Chapter 2 focuses on sources that discuss “New Woman” and “Old Woman.” Source 7 cites Japanese New Women, Hiratsuka Raicho and Yosano Akiko, as models for Korea’s New Women. This is not surprising since *Sin yŏja* was patterned after Hiratsuka’s *Seitō* (*Bluestocking*) magazine (26). Source 17 sets the criteria for New Womanhood but eventually states that being a “wise mother and good wife” was the goal of every woman (45–46). Source 11 is unique because the male author, Ham Sep’ung, flatly denounces the idea that women are inferior because of the “theory of evolution,” which asserts men are supposedly naturally more intelligent than women because men’s brains are larger than women’s brains (34). For him, women’s second-class status is merely the result of a lack of education.

Chapter 3 is filled with sources exploring issues on “schoolgirls” (*yŏhaksæng*), who were also associated with the New Women. These sources discuss the perceived “decline of morality among schoolgirls” (49), which actually originated in the penchant of prostitutes and female entertainers to wear schoolgirls’ uniforms. Source 24 examines the efforts of Alice Appenzeller and other women in establishing Ewha Women’s Professional School, and the successes of the school’s alumnae.

Chapter 4 is replete with sources on the Modern Girl (*modŏn kkŏl*) in Korea. Choi surmises that the concept came from Japan but points out that the phenomenon had a limited social space to thrive

because of economic conditions during the Japanese occupation. Sources in chapter 5 discuss love, marriage, and divorce. Source 34 expresses the hope of a New Woman trapped in a loveless marriage. Na Hyesök's "A confession about my divorce: To Ch'önggu" is a rare account of divorce from a Korean woman's perspective at a time males controlled the print media. It was also considered extraordinary that a divorced woman would be able to express her views (96).

Chapter 6 focuses on chastity, birth control, and fashion. One source asserts that men should also be required to be chaste while other sources discuss eugenics and the external, physical characteristics of the New Women, among others. Transcultural experiences of the New Women are featured in chapter 7. The New Women's accounts focus on their experiences in countries such as the United States, Denmark, Germany, and France. Source 53 discusses the status of women in the United States and women's higher education in that country, making special mention of five of the top seven women's colleges called the "Seven Sisters." Sources in chapter 8 tackle different issues in the Korean women's movement. Source 62 criticizes bourgeois women's presumed concern over their appearances, calls attention to the problems of proletarian women, and appeals to the New Women to help educate proletarian sisters.

Choi's sourcebook includes the works of many men and women who all contributed to the discourse. Sources written by Korean men show that not all Korean males dismissed Korean women as inferior. Some offer support for the intrepid Korean New Women, or at least champion their education. The book also features a cartoon section that gives us both the idealized and stereotyped images of the New Woman in Korea. Appendix 1 provides capsule biographies of the authors of the sources, while Appendix 2 offers detailed descriptions of each source magazine and newspaper.

One topic that may be further explored is the concept of the "New Men" (Sin chongnyong), a term that appears in Source 10 and Source 43. Perhaps Choi and other scholars in Korean Studies can shed more light on this phenomenon.

Overall, Choi's book is a gold mine of primary data. It belongs to and complements a growing number of studies of New Women in Northeast Asia, including her own *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways* (2009). Read alongside Barbara Sato's *The New Japanese Woman* (2003) and Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno's *Gendering Modern Japanese History* (2005), *New Women in Colonial Korea* contributes to the construction of a more holistic view of New Women in Northeast Asia.

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