

Colonial Media Space and the Intelligentsia in Kyōngsōng during the 1920s and 1930s: The Case of Choi Seung-Il's Life History*

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This study attempts to reconstitute the life history of Choi Seung-il (崔承一, 1901-?), a famous Korean intellectual of the colonial period. It especially focuses on his media career. As did his many fellow literati, Choi played an active part in diverse media and cultural arenas. During the period of 1920-1930s, he held various positions (magazine editor, writer, play director, radio program director, stage manager, etc.) with a socialist orientation in the Korean cultural scene. He also wrote several “moderrnologist” essays on the media culture in Kyōngsōng. However, he became a “pro-Japanese” film producer in the late 1930s, and produced Volunteer, a militarist propaganda movie. We assume that Choi’s media career and writings reveal, beyond his personal idiosyncrasy, the specific relationship between colonial media space and the intelligentsia. In this context, we try to clarify this relationship, conceptualizing media space as an important “structural space of opportunity” and “phenomenological space of experience” for the colonial intelligentsia. Choi’s life history clearly shows how the colonial intelligentsia continued to reconstruct media space by his thoughts and activities.

Keywords: Choi Seung-il, Colonial Media Space, Intelligentsia, JODK Kyōngsōng Broadcasting Station, Film Volunteer, Korea

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I. FOREWORD: THE NAME “CHOI SEUNG-IL”

Mr. Choi Seung-il – Beautiful, cute voice, a seemingly trembling stance, a feminine voice like that of an actress, a solid act of entertainment. However, he has no eagerness.

(Pyölgön'gon, February 1927)

Do you know Choi Seung-il (崔承一)? Chu-gok (秋谷) Choi Seung-il was active in the Japanese colonial period in diverse aspects of the world of arts and culture including literature, theatre, broadcasting and film. Yet, the title “older brother of dancer Choi Seung-hee” comes to one as a simpler description. In fact, this explanation is so impressionable that it immediately fills the blank named Choi Seung-il with a strong image. However, Choi Seung-il was also complicated and too interesting to be remembered merely as Choi Seung-hee’s brother—who would not be, if we were to look just a bit more deeply into their lives? Unfortunately, there is not much we know about him.

There are a few studies that fill in some of these gaps. One of the most representative ones in Korean Literature is the study by Son, J. (2005), who had edited Choi Seung-il’s most important literary stories and essays. Son presented Choi Seung-il’s life history behind his writing and gave an analysis of his literary world. This is probably the most detailed and structured “study on Choi Seung-il” written so far. In the fields of theatre and communication studies, several mentions made of Choi Seung-il’s theatre activities and broadcasting experience are particularly noteworthy. For example, in a study by Ahn, K. (2001) of the Japanese colonial period pro-theatre movement, Choi Seung-il’s activities are mentioned several times as one of the early leaders. In Jung, J.’s (1995) and Kim, S.’s (1997, 2000) studies, he is briefly discussed as one of the earlier Korean people who were active in the Kyöngsöng Broadcasting Station, as well as perhaps one of Korea’s first producers.

Two major factors come in play to explain the lack of research on Choi Seung-il. The first is that he moved to North Korea. This probably stood in the way of any academic interest in Choi Seung-il’s life history or his works

for a long time. The other factor is Choi Seung-il's "wide and shallow" achievements. That is, he showed unwavering talent in many fields like literature, theatre, broadcasting and movies, yet the dominant evaluation is that, perhaps due to "lack of passion," he did not possess any deep and noteworthy achievement in one field. For this reason, with the exception of Korean Literature, other fields saw little value in focusing solely on Choi Seung-il. In fact, it is hard to say whether he was considered an important writer in Korean Literature either. This is clearly demonstrated by his omission in the *Dictionary of Colonial Period Popular Artists* (Kang, O. et al. 2006), which records the activities of 143 popular artists of the Japanese colonial period.

The reason this study focuses on Choi Seung-il is precisely the same as the reason for which he has not received much attention until now. In other words, his "weak achievements" in his works and his "multi-faceted experiences" in his life have caught our attention. There is no doubt that this is partially due to Choi Seung-il's own peculiarity. For instance, there were few literati like him who also participated in broadcasting during colonial Korea. However, if we were to switch our point of view, we could say that his experience gives us considerable insight on the production, use, and reception of media at that time. Although not all literati were broadcasters, most broadcasters had initially been writers or journalists.

The situation wasn't much different in music and movies. Despite slight personal differences, there were many people who were active in diverse areas like Choi Seung-il. Even by looking at a few of the people around him, such as Kim Young-pal, Lee Kyoung-son, Ahn Seok-young or Shim Hoon, we can find personages whose activities transcended barriers between literature, press, theatre, movies, broadcasting, and art. Just as the editors of the *Dictionary of Colonial Period Popular Artists* pointed out, during this period there were many literati who were "singers as well as actors or film directors; composers as well as poets and playwrights," (Kang, O. et al. 2006: 12). If this kind of mobility was not solely due to their being multi-talented, then how could this have been possible? Through the case study of Choi Seung-il, we aim to uncover the multi-lateral and border-crossing nature of media space within the specific context of 1920-1930s Kyōngsōng. The question of how the intelligentsia perceived and made use of this characteristic within

this context, and how it simultaneously changed the structure of media space and their own identity, is another focus. This study attempts to, even with its limitations, reconstruct the biography of Choi Seung-il in order to answer these questions.

II. YOUNG NEW TENDENCY SCHOOL WRITER

Born in 1901, Choi Seung-il dropped out of *Paejae* High School and continued his studies in the Aesthetics Department of Nihon University in Japan. His family was quite affluent, though their fortunes started failing such that by the time Choi Seung-il returned to Korea, they were experiencing extreme economic hardships (*Pyölgöng'on*, March 1927). His formal cultural activity started with theatre while he was studying in Japan. In fact, Choi Seung-il held the longest and continued interest in theatre. While he was studying in Japan, he joined the first modern theatre association, Theatre Arts Association, in 1920 and, once back in Korea, he put focused on theatre activities such as founding a theatre circle in 1922. In 1923, he also became involved in a communist group Puksöng-hoe as well as the first socialist cultural group Yömgunsa theatre department. The following year, he officially made his first step into the literary world, as he presented the story “The Day You Leave” in *New Woman* (*Sin Yösöng*) and he continued to actively write and publish stories until 1930 (cf. Son, J. 2005).

In August 1925, Yömgunsa and PASKYULA joined forces to create KAPF. PASKYULA was the cultural group formed in 1923, consisting of Park Young-hee, Ahn Seok-young, Kim Hyoung-won, Lee Ik-sang, Kim Ki-jin, Kim Bok-jin, etc. Choi Seung-il played a crucial role in the merging of *Yömgunsa* and PASKYULA, as he was the one to convince Kim Ki-jin through his connections with Paejae High School classmate, Park Young-hee (Kwon, Y. 1998: Ch. 2). KAPF, which stands for Korea Artista Proleta Federatio, was the only official pro-cultural movement association that involved the whole of Korea during the Japanese occupation period. Choi Seung-il became a central committee member of KAPF, and in January and March 1926, he became editor of the *Youth Castle* and committee member of the Education Department of the Kyöngsöng Youth Association, respectively

(*Sidae Ilbo*, September 1, 1926). However, the activities of KAPF were limited, since its creation, to cultural activities related to poetry and stories. This was probably the reason why Choi Seung-il established a separate theatre circle in September 1925 (*Donga Ilbo*, September 14, 1925). In addition to Choi Seung-il, Shim Hoon, Lee Kyoung-son, Kim Young-pal, Ahn Seok-ju, and Kim Young-bo also participated in this theatre circle that advocated institutional associations that studied theatre and performing arts from a liberal perspective.¹ In 1926, KAPF officially commenced its activities by publishing its semi-official magazine, *Munye Undong*, and in 1927, underwent structural reformations. In April 1930, KAPF expanded its structure once again, by newly establishing a Technical Department in addition to the Secretariat, the Department of Culture, the Department of Publications, and the Department of Organization, which would oversee artistic movements. Under the Technical Department, there were five committees (Literature, Movies, Theatre, Art, and Music) that enforced the organization's goals as an artistic movement association. Within the theatre committee, members included Choi Seung-il, Ahn Mak, Han Tae-ho and Shin Young, in addition to upper council member, Kim Ki-jin (Ahn, K. 2002: 91-93).

Choi Seung-il was most active, both in theatre and in literature from the early 1920s to the 1930s. Nevertheless, it seems as though his works were not really appreciated at the time. Although Park Young-hee did not hesitate to pick him as a New Tendency School writer because of his work, "Two Young People," in "Discussions on New Tendency Literature," Park Sang-jun evaluated that amongst the named authors. Park Young-hee, Choi Seo-hye, Kim Ki-jin, Lee Ik-sang, Cho Myung-hee, Kim Young-pal, Lee Ki-young, Song Young, Lee Jong-myung, Joo Yo-seob, Choi Seung-il, and Han Seol-ya, there were many who could not really be considered part of the "New Tendency School." For instance, not only did Choi Seung-il's "Two Young People" fail to show conflict rooted in the antagonistic social dimension but it did not even present these struggles in terms of the character layout or the editorial argument (Park, S. 2000: 397). Whatever the literary or aesthetic

¹ This theatre circle is different from that established under the leadership of Choi Seung-il in April 1922. Nevertheless, the specific activities of this association upon foundation are likewise unknown (Ahn, K. 2002: 77).

evaluation,² by the early 1930s, Choi Seung-il was already considered a long way away from the New Tendency School.” For this reason, critic Min Byoung-hee, who had entered in debate with Park Young-hee over Choi Seung-il’s play “Proletarianism,” wrote in his “Study of Korean Proletariat Writers” that “there are many readers that would find it strange when they first hear that Park Young-Hee, Kim Ki-jin, Yoon Ki-jung, Lee Ryang, Choi Hak-song, Kim Young-pal, Ryu Wan-hee, Choi Seung-il, and Lee Ik-sang are proletariat authors” and coldly criticized that “these people have published many works in the past for the sake of Proletariat XX...but they are now turning towards collapse, or reactionism, or literary criticism,” (*Samchölli*, September 1932).

In 1927, Ahn Seok-young attributed the term New Tendency School writer to Choi Seung-il, who was both a KAPF colleague and childhood friend. However, this term was not only in reference to Choi Seung-il’s activities in KAPF. It included the fact that he was a literati always seeking new cultural trends. For Ahn Seok-young, the fact that after Choi Seung-il entered the broadcasting station, his works carry the phrase “radio, radio drama” was evidence that he belonged to the New Tendency School. He always had an openness and curiosity towards new things. This can be seen in his unprecedented dance recommendation to his sister Choi Seung-hee (Choi, S. 1937). Be it in theatre, in philosophy or in literature, Choi Seung-il was always in the avant-garde. Even as he was taking part in KAPF activities, he participated in experimental radio broadcasts, i.e. he put a lot of effort into *the* investigation of the political and aesthetic possibilities of new media. In the end, once the Kyöngsöng Broadcasting Station was established in February 1927, he started working there as one of the few Korean workers. The economic incentive, once again, played an important role in this decision. Add to this the fact that Choi Seung-il pursued both creativity as well as economic security and sought, thus, to carry out creation and work simultaneously, Ahn Seok-young pointed out that “it was an honesty that could not be found in any other literati” (*Chosön Ilbo*, November 14, 1927).

² Son, J. (2005) evaluated Choi Seung-il’s literary world into three periods. While the early stories generally used the theme of free love to express the ideals of anti-feudalism; during the New Tendency School period, he showed ideal socialist orientations; after this period, he expressed the sad reality of the fallen and destitute petit bourgeois.

Personally, Choi Seung-il's intellectual and emotional investment was too big for his move into the broadcasting station to be solely out of his dedication to "create and at the same time live moderately well off." Although it may have been a result of efforts to justify his remorse, it is likely that the radio held significance greater than as a mere means of subsistence for him. Choi Seung-il sought to lead his actions into such direction. As for the meaning itself, it was not too far off from his then outlook towards theatre and literature that held a love for repressed people and pursued enlightenment through the arts. If these assumptions are true, the fact that he was excommunicated from KAPF, the foundation which he himself had led, because he had entered the broadcasting station is somewhat paradoxical.³

III. DEFECTOR OR BORDER CROSSER

How did Choi Seung-il become an employee of the Kyōngsōng Broadcasting Station? This is a two-sided question. First, what was the personal motivation behind working at the broadcasting station? Second, how could it have been structurally possible for literati, such as Choi Seung-il, to work at the station? These are both questions with no definitive answer. Rather, we will raise some issues on both questions before proceeding in another direction. With

³ It is uncertain when exactly Choi Seung-il was ousted from KAPF. In the case of Kim Young-pal, it is widely known that he was removed in 1931 when he became an adviser to the Kyōngsōng Broadcasting Association (Kwon, Y. 2004: 160). Yet there is a newspaper article saying that he had already been excommunicated along with Ahn Seok-ju in July 1928 (*Chungoe Ilbo*, January 8, 1928). Choi Seung-il's name does not appear in the article. Considering that at the same period, he was active as a member of the Theatre Committee, we can deduce that his excommunication occurred sometime around early 1930s. In 1934, Jung Soo-jung criticized KAPF's stubbornness, taking as an example the "problem of sworn employment, for example, Choi Seung-il, and Kim Young-pal were excommunicated for the fact that they were employed by the Chosōn broadcasting station," (Im, G. and Han, K. eds. 1990: 256). If this is true, KAPF's reason for their excommunication can be revealed as but an excuse because, unless there were a particular incident in the early 1930s, Choi Seung-il's broadcasting activities had already begun in 1926. Furthermore, we cannot exclude a hypothesis that by the early 1930s he had already left the broadcasting station.

regard to Choi Seung-il's personal motivation, we can distinguish economic, ideological and aesthetic motives. Broadcasting provided him with a steady income, the possibility to pursue enlightenment and education of the public, as well as the possibility to experiment with different forms of art. Secondly, regarding the structural conditions of employment, we can set up the following hypothesis. In that period, it should not be difficult for literati to be employed in the broadcasting station.

Choi Seung-il's move into broadcasting is important as it allows a more general observation of the colonial period media space and its relationship with the intelligentsia.⁴ In other words, it takes us to the question of what modern forms of mass media, such as newspaper, magazine, movies, gramophones, and radio meant for the intelligentsia that had grown with the expansion of modern education in the 1920-1930s. We propose first that they provided a new, structural space of opportunity for the intelligentsia, especially writers. In other words, the media organization steadily conferred different forms of capital (economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital) to the social agent who entered in it and consequently, provided and institutionalized opportunities to strengthen one's power. Here, we classify the opportunities into three major categories: economic opportunity, ideological opportunity and aesthetic opportunity.

To use a contemporary phrase, the literati's "capacity for content creation" could be used not only in the print media but also in other types of media such as radio, theatre, movies, and music. Considering that the media organization consists of the content planning and production sector, the technical sector, and the performance sector, the literati could enter the content planning and production sector with no special professional capabilities. On the other hand, in sectors such as movie shooting and developing, album recording and producing, broadcast management and delivery, that required specific skills, there was daily micro-level cooperation with the Japanese.⁵ Furthermore, in the performance sector, a lot of women

⁴ We will follow Kim, H.'s (2008) definition of colonial period intelligentsia as the group of those who received at least high school education, and possess a sense of identity so as to call themselves the representatives of the people.

⁵ The Korean Movie Research Society, of which Im Hwa was chief in the late Japanese colonial period, published the list of 137 Korean movies that were produced between

(such as the *kwōnbōn kisaeng*) possessing the bodily capital appropriate for mass media – for instance, a voice like a nightingale, a Korean-style beauty, and the confidence to perform before many people – participated.

The economic opportunity provided by media space fulfilled an imminent need of the 1920-1930s intelligentsia. Under the colonial economic system, the threshold for employment was very high, even for those who had received higher education than the average citizen. The modern education system had commenced around 1919, but even in 1944, the point of greatest expansion of education during the Japanese colonial period, the proportion of Korean people who had received a high school education or more was less than 1% of the total population. According to Heo, T. (2005: 246), in May 1944, the proportion of middle school graduates was 0.88% (199,648 people), professional school graduates: 0.05% (12,064 people) and college graduates: 0.03% (7,374 people). On the other hand the proportion of uneducated people was approximately 86.18% (19,642,775 people). In this situation of poor economic growth, the few who had received modern education could only enter limited sectors such as the national administration, legal system,

Taisho 10 (1921) and *Showa 17* (1942) with the names of the producers, directors, filming company, and main actors in the “Special Issue of Korean Movies” in *Kinema Junpo* (映畫旬報, January 7, 1943). (The list is far from complete. For instance, there are mistakes in the years, and works such as *Amro* (1929) by KAPF director Kang Ho are missing.) Looking at the list, we can see that many Japanese filming companies participated in the production of Korean movies, especially in the early periods. Though Na Un-gyu is listed as the director of movie *Arirang* (1926), the controversy that the real director was Tsumori Hidekasu is also a product of the relationship of cooperation in movie production between Koreans and Japanese. Cooperative relations were also common in music recording and production (Fumitaka Yamawuchi, 2003). In the case of radios, at the time of the launch of JODK, the person in charge of the broadcasting equipment operation was Kyōngsōng Central Broadcasting Director Shinohara. He worked day and night with No Chang-song, who was two years his junior at Tokyo Engineering High School (currently Tokyo Engineering University) to finally launch the first broadcasting programs. Experimental broadcasts continued daily and Shinohara took on a remarkable role as he took charge, from the operation of equipment to the command of the announcers” studio (Tsugawa 1993/1999: 36). Throughout the entire history of Kyōngsōng Broadcasting Station, the intricate relationship of cooperation and conflict between the Japanese and Korean employees was inevitable (Lee, H. 1960).

public companies such as the Eastern Colonial Development Company, or sectors such as education, culture, and arts, and medicine. Furthermore, from the mid-1920s onwards, unemployment of Korean higher educated people, including those who had studied abroad, worsened, as unemployment in Japanese high-skilled labor started occupying secondary school teaching positions within Korea. This kind of unemployment problem was chronic until a special demand was created by the 1937 Sino-Japanese war (Jung, S. 2000: 141-151).

For the “cultural reserved forces” who had “received at least high school education” (*Cheil Sŏn*, January 1933), the newly emerging media was considered a job that would allow them to earn a living while continuing their literary work (Cf. Tsugawa 1993/1999: 121-122; Jeon, S. 2004: 97). Of course, the earnings varied greatly according to the type of media and one’s position. For example, in the world of newspapers, the earnings varied from “zero to a hundred won” (*Cheil Sŏn*, August 1932). Nonetheless, for those literati who used to receive at most one or two won per manuscript, at times not even that, this proved to be an excellent job.⁶ Furthermore, at that time, the diverse fields of media had not yet been properly established. Thus, the level of closure was low and so for those possessing specific cultural and social capital, moving between those fields would not have been too difficult.

According to a magazine editor’s answer to a reader asking what the academic qualifications for a newspaper or magazine journalist were, in places like *Donga Ilbo*, there was a policy to employ only people with a college degree at the very least. However under the then-present circumstances, education that afforded one insight into social situations coupled with the ability to record this was sufficient (*Cheil Sŏn*, August 1932). This shows that the skills needed to be a journalist were no different from those needed to be an ordinary writer. Furthermore, within the colonial society in which employment was greatly affected by connections through factions, families, schools, etc. (*Chungang*, March 1934; Jung, S. 2000: 150) for those who had set up a steady network by entering an institutionalized literary circle or

⁶ According to a 1932 investigation, the monthly wage of a doctor was 75 won; a journalist, 50 won; a teacher, 45 won; a policeman, 36 won; while the daily salary of a rickshaw puller or a day laborer was 50 cents (*Cheil Sŏn*, July 1932).

journalism, movement to other media was not difficult. Even within the world of newspaper, it was frequent for a same person to move unrestricted between *Maeil Sinbo*, *Donga Ilbo*, *Chosön Ilbo*, and *Chosön Chungang Ilbo* and it was not rare to see movement from newspaper/magazine to broadcasting, or into music or movie production (cf. Kang, O. et al. 2006; Kang, Y. 1948; Kim, B. 2001: 115-116; Won, Y. 2009).

Media space was also a space of ideological opportunity. After the Enlightenment Era, the new concept of “Debt to the People” amongst the Korean intelligentsia (Kim, H. 2008), merged with the desire for national sovereignty, placing the spotlight on the ability of the media to deploy ideology and culture. Thus, it provided the intelligentsia participating in the media organization with a means of subsistence, but it also potentially provided the justification that they were realizing the cause of “patriotic revolution,” “education of the populace,” and “cultural improvement.” Journalistic activities of the socialists are a direct example (Park, Y. 2008; Chun, S. 2004: 75-99). It is hard to see this entirely as false consciousness. This is because, in the process of modernizing the colonies, the role of print media such as books, newspapers, and magazines was significant. For example, in an article in *Samchölli*, the total number of readers of daily newspapers such as *Chosön*, *Donga*, and *Chungoee*; monthly publications such as *Chosön Chigwang*, *Samchölli*, and *Pyölgöngon*, and monographs on politics, economy or literature, was estimated at 300 thousand people. The article evaluated the achievements of print media highly, calculating that “if we were to divide the 300 thousand into schools of 300 students each, there would be around 1000 schools carrying out the social cultivation of laborer, farmer, student youth all over the 13 provinces. The education of 300 thousand people in 1000 schools! In terms of the past 10 years, ten thousand schools “cultivated” 3 million people in total. If the achievements of the early stage were already thus, how much more would be the effect in the future!”

According to the same article, “publications such as newspapers and magazines are a society’s face...Nevertheless, it must not forget that in addition to becoming a mirror, newspapers, and magazines should become the ‘brain’ of the population. Thus, the articles in newspapers, and magazines are the injection for our people’s minds and have the obligation as a text of the people. Can there be anything that spreads philosophy and emotions

better than publications? Newspapers and magazines show us that, despite everything, we are still alive and moving. They are the evidence of existence,” (*Samchǒlli*, January 1930). Symbols of modernization, other types of media, such as movies, radio, and gramophone can, as an extension of print media, find their justification by merging with socialist, nationalist, or even cultural ideologies. Some specific examples include KAPF’s movement for the glorification of the proletariat, the spread of *sin minyo* records, the efforts of the radio to broadcast traditional music, and the studies into “Korean-esque qualities” that appeared regardless of the media type.

Finally, media space also provides a space of aesthetic opportunity. This means that media space prepared a “stage for the intelligentsia to experiment with new symbolic forms, as well as a stage of ‘aesthetic self-expression.’” The intelligentsia could either develop upon the already existent traditional forms of literature, or create new literary forms corresponding to new media by borrowing, transfiguring and hybridizing the forms originating from Japan or the occidental world. In the process, as the literati crossed over boundaries between different media, combined and new literary forms began to emerge. Furthermore, there was an extensive combination of newspaper, magazine, literature, traditional music, film, theatre, gramophone, and radio. Radio experimented with radio drama, movie broadcasting, novel readings, and children’s theatre, whereas, gramophone records presented folk songs, movie soundtracks, movie commentary, audio plays, and comedy. Newspapers serialized movie stories, and magazines printed “non-senses” or “sketches” of records as well as movie commentaries. Classical literature and newspaper serial stories were made into movies, and the so-called “news movies” (for example, the 1930 *Chosŏn Ilbo* newspaper of the Chosŏn Ilbo company) were produced. Some of these attempts were aborted after one or two attempts, but there were some that became established as new styles. It developed a broad media matrix,⁷ not only on technical levels but also in terms of content. Through the act of creating, such as by writing, broadcasting or making a movie, the intelligentsia were able to discover a way to newly establish their

⁷ Kaneko Akio (金子明雄 2009) called this phenomenon in which multiple media contents join their markets and create a commercial effect and in which genres are culturally established out of individual types of media, “media mix.”

self-identity, that had faced a national and hierarchical rupture within a rapidly changing society. This was related to their efforts to adapt themselves to modern society and actively find their places in it (at times, at the most avant-garde).

That the modern mass media provided such a structural opportunity to the colonial intelligentsia is closely related to the fact that the bilingual market had basically been maintained in Korea for a long time. The level of Japanese literacy in Korea (including those who understood a little as well as those who had no problem in daily conversation) was 7% in 1928, 11.0% in 1937, and 15.6% in 1940, which shows that even after 30 years since the Japanese had colonized Korea, literacy remained at a very restricted level. Of course, this situation gradually changed, after the principle of “Oneness of the Japanese and Korean” emerged after 1937, followed by the work of Hwangminhwa, based on this, and the 3rd Chōsen Education Act. Nevertheless, the fact that it was not until 1943 that the rate of Japanese propagation reached 22% marks a great difference from the situation in current day Taiwan where by April 1943, Japanese propagation had reached 62%. Another significant fact is that the level of Japanese propagation in 1943 amongst the Korean youth in their twenties born after the Japanese colonization of Korea received a Japanese education and would become the main consumers of media, reaching 24.4%, just above the total average (Choi, Y. 1997: 148-161).

What does this signify? It shows that the strong demand for Korean media was structurally kept all throughout the 1920-30s. Moreover, the Japanese repression of Korean media also presented limitations due to the need to maintain hegemony over the Korean people. In fact, before wartime national mobilization led to Japanese forced intervention, which in turn led to the reorganization and annihilation of diverse media, the Korean language media market enjoyed a growth of its own. In this context, media space could not be but attractive to the intelligentsia, especially for writers. The high illiteracy rate of the Korean people is another important factor. According to the 1930 “Report on Chōsen Tax Revenue Census” carried out by the Chōsen Government General, the people who could read and write both Japanese and Korean were 6.8%; those who could only read and write Korean, 15.4%; those who could only read and write Japanese were 0.03%; and total illiteracy rate was 77.7%. The gender difference in the literacy rate was extremely

high: while 36% of males could read and write Hangul (Korean) or the Korean alphabet, only 8% of females could do so. Hence the reason for the orality of movies (including theatre), the orality of sound media such as the gramophone, and radio were more important than print media during this period. Furthermore, in this context, we add justification for the expansion of the intelligentsia's activities from written to audio-visual media.

Nonetheless, we cannot say that media space, as an economic, ideological and aesthetic space of opportunity, provided the participating intelligentsia with sufficient realization of such opportunities. A space of opportunity is nothing more than “a space where actors have the objective potential to realize their subjective expectations.” In other words, in reality, there still remained the risk that the entry into media space would result in economic insecurity, ideological frustration and aesthetic failure. These risks were very large under the repression and restriction of imperialistic forces and the logic of media capital. In addition, we need to take into consideration that there were personal differences in which type of opportunity each intelligentsia placed greater importance on. The uses of media, which were relatively stabilizing, also led to differences in the type of opportunity presented by each type of media. At times, these types of opportunity clashed or conflicted with one another. The achievement of economic opportunity could demand one to forego ideological or aesthetic opportunity, whereas the realization of ideological opportunity could interfere with that of aesthetic opportunity.

Due to the commercial nature of mass media, and the imperfection of artistic consecration, the penetration of literati into the media was looked upon negatively. An example is the observation: “It is right to be more ashamed for a literary man becoming a journalist is to lose himself as an artist,” (*Chosŏn Mundan*, August 1935). It was also widely known that literary men underappreciated men of theatre or movies (*Yŏnghwa Yŏngŭk*, November 1939). This probably means that the entry into colonial media carried a certain damaging effect on one's symbolic capital. In fact, the literati that participated diversely in media such as movies, music, and radio were generally close to the non-mainstream fringe group. That Choi Seung-il's movement into the broadcasting network did not become a subject of active evaluation as literati, but rather, was looked upon negatively, and that this caused him psychological distress, reflects the fact that under the structural

limitations of the colonial broadcasting network, he could not really fulfill his ideological and aesthetic opportunities. Nevertheless, it is possible that the hope of establishing himself as an “economic subject,” a “subject of enlightenment,” and “an aesthetic subject,” and the possibility of becoming an entirely “modern subject” on his own, might have been attractive enough for Choi Seung-il to enter the broadcasting station. Or rather, this may have been the vision shared by all the colonial intelligentsia who crossed the boundary from a literary man to a journalist, broadcaster, or movie man.

IV. KYÖNGSÖNG BROADCASTING STATION CLERK

It has not been determined exactly when Choi Seung-il’s broadcasting activities began and ended. It is only certain that he had carried on his broadcasting activities alongside his KAPF activities in literature and theatre. This was also the case of his friend, Kim Young-pal. As is well known, even before JODK officially began broadcasting, many experimental broadcasts had been carried out by the Government-General Bureau of Communications or newspaper companies such as Chosön and Donga. The Bureau of Communications, after confirming the interest of the public through the experimental broadcasts, started airing regular experimental broadcasts starting in March 14, 1925 and continued until January 16, 1927, one month after Kyöngsöng Broadcasting Station introduced its official program (Seo, J. 2008: 226). The experimental broadcasts began in 1925 and there were Korean language radio broadcasts from August 1925. Every Thursday, all day long, and every Sunday, half a day, it broadcasted stage plays of the Korean Theatre Association or traditional music or readings by Bok Hye-sook and others (Hwang, M. 1998: 344-356). We can assume that Choi Seung-il worked as a clerk at the Government-General Kyöngsöng Bureau of Communications Wireless Broadcasting Station since 1926 (*Chosön Ilbo*, November 23, 1926; January 9, 1927).

The one record about Choi Seung-il’s broadcasting activities that can be verified is the establishment of the Radio Theater Research Society (or Radio Drama Research Society). According to some newspaper articles, he founded the Radio Theatre Research Society in June 14, 1926, with Lee

Kyoung-son, Kim Young-pal, and two or three others. The research society that had head office at No. 137 Chaebu-dong planned to broadcast domestic and international plays bimonthly, and scheduled “P’amyöl” (destruction), originally written by Choi Seung-il and adapted by Lee Kyoung-son, for the first broadcast in the last week of June (*Sidae Ilbo*, June 1, 1926; *Donga Ilbo*, June 27, 1926). In July 1927, an article was published, in which the Radio Theatre Research Society presented its aspiration to “from now on take the sky as the audience and make the effort to make even the slightest contribution of the Korean theatre movement,” and presented its ten or so members: Kim Young-pal, Lee Kyoung-son, Shim Dae-seop, Choi Seung-il, Park Hee-soo, Ryu Seung-joon, among others (*Maeil Sinbo*, July 2, 1927). This demonstrates how this association had managed to expand its scale in a period of just over a year.⁸

How Choi Seung-il experimented with the potential of radio broadcasting, either personally or through the Radio Theatre Research Society, can only be partially known. First, during the period of experimental broadcasting, he had recorded the songs from Yoon Shim-deok’s operetta “Chun-hee.” That same year, on the night of November 4, actors from the Korean Theatre Association including Bok Hye-sook participated in the experimental broadcast from Kyöngsöng Broadcasting Station (*Maeil Sinbo*, June 11, 1926). According to Bok Hye-sook’s memoir, she recorded an one-act stage play, “Saebyök chong” (Dawn Bell) with Byun Ki-jong and Kwon Il-chang, in a small rented room behind a post office with no other effect than a single layer of wrapping as an acoustic device. The announcer and producer in charge at that moment was Choi Seung-il. Following Choi Seung-il’s suggestion, the broadcasting network aired story readings, which were mostly 30-minute sessions during which he would narrate as well as characterize different voices such as the father, mother, sister, sibling, etc. (Bal, H. 1960: 86-7).

⁸ In July 1927 Choi Seung-il also participated in the establishment of a Movie People Society. This society’s objective was pursuing the development of Chosön movies through joint movie reviews, and its members other than Choi Seung-il were Lee Kyoung-son, Ahn Seok-ju (Ahn Seok-young), Shim Dae-seop (Shim Hoon), Na Woon-gyu, Kim Young-pal, Kim Ki-jin, Ahn Jong-hwa, Kim Cheol, Im Hwa, and Kim Eul-han (*Maeil Sinbo*, July 5, 1927). Many of the members of the Radio Theatre Research Society and the Movie People Society coincide.

After its establishment on July 5, 1927, JODK tried the first broadcasted movie theatre with the newly produced Korean movie “Goldfish.” This was “an experiment to try achieve the most subtle radio effect through the cooperation of actors who had participated in a movie, a narrator from the theatre, and an orchestra, in which the narrator would explain the subtitles and actions as if explaining the movie, the male and female actors would broadcast the dialogue (*serihu*) as in a theatre play, and the orchestra would play the corresponding accompanying music.” The participating actors in the “Goldfish” were Na Woon-gyu, Shin Il-seon, Kim Jeong-sook, etc. (*Maeil Sinbo*, July 5, 1927). Although there are no remaining records, there is high probability that Choi Seung-il intervened in this broadcast. This is because he was working as a producer of Korean programs at JODK, and at that time, he also participated in the foundation of the Movie People’s Society along with Na Woon-gyu and others. In addition, in the October 1927 issue of *Pyōlgōn’gon*, Kim Young-pal’s “The Story of a Stage Director” was published with the explanation “script of the Theater Research Society 7th performance.” This is considered the oldest extant original radio work (Park, M. 2004; Seo, J. 2007: 101-107). Judging from the names of the actors written in the script (Supervisor Lee: Shim Hoon; Mother: Lee Kyoung-son; Park Young-sook: Ryu Il-soon; Choi Byung-hwan: Choi Seung-il; Old innkeeper: Kim Young-pal), it would not be wrong to assume this was a play script for the Radio Theatre Research Association. On the 100th Anniversary of Ibsen’s birth, Choi Seung-il also broadcasted Act 3 from “A Doll’s House” in Korean (Tsugawa 1993/1999: 55). He also wrote a short piece entitled “Air and Theatre” for the December 1927 issue of *Pyōlgōn’gon*, which he subtitled “About the 20th Radio Theatre Broadcast.” The phrase “20th Radio Theatre Broadcast” is probably a good sign of the continued efforts and achievements of the Radio Theatre Research Society.

JODK Kyōngsōng Broadcasting Station was established on February 16, 1927, at one o’clock in the afternoon. At that moment, in the station, there were four Japanese executives and fifty or so employees. Amongst these, the Korean people were: No Chang-sung and Han Duk-bong in the technical sector, Choi Seung-il in the general organization and management sector, Ma Hyun-kyung, and Lee Ok-kyeong as announcers. It is uncertain when exactly Kim Young-pal started working as a male announcer; it is only known

that at some point in 1927 he was amongst the station personnel.⁹ The fact that No Chang-sung and Lee Ok-kyeong, Choi Seung-il and Ma Hyun-kung were married became the talk amongst the Korean workers (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, September 1, 1927). Actually, Choi Seung-il's first wife had been Han Young-myung, but they divorced due to the fact that they did not have any children. Ma Hyun-kyung was both his second wife and the first openly recruited announcer at the JODK. Although we cannot know when exactly the two got married, by late 1929 their married life was essentially over. Choi Seung-il had had a child with actress Seok Keum-sung (aka Seok Jung-hee) and had remarried.

1930 marked changes at the Kyŏngsŏng broadcasting station. At that time, JODK programs and organization were incapable of rising to the demands of the audience because of various restrictions and censorship. As a result, the increase of radio receiver sets remained stagnant as well. As the financial hardships worsened, in September 1929, Kyŏngsŏng broadcasting station started relaying broadcasting programs in Japanese. After this, it was no longer required to air independent programs, for which there were only limited broadcastings of Korean traditional music, news, the weather forecast, and market reports. As an aftermath, in 1930, the two female Korean announcers Ma Hyun-kyung and Lee Ok-kyeong left the broadcasting station. However, for the resolution of the station's financial problems, it was an urgent matter to increase the number of Korean consumers with radio receiver sets. Towards this end, a dual broadcasting system with a secondary Korean language program was planned. To achieve this, Korean broadcasting directors and announcers were newly recruited (Kim, B. and Baek, M. 2009: 67). The dual broadcasting system commenced on April 26, 1933, with a first channel in Japanese and a second one in Korea. Those who began to work with Choi Seung-il on the Korean broadcasting section were Yoon Baek-nam as the first chief, Lee Hye-goo as the head editor, Lee Hayoon, announcer

⁹ There are contradicting opinions on whether Kim Young-pal started working at the broadcasting station in 1927 or in 1930 (Kim, S. 1997: 93). However, judging from his memoirs from late 1931s about the five years of his youth he spent in JODK, the hypothesis that he started working at the station since 1927 with its establishment seems to be the correct one (*Sidae Sang*, November 1931). He ends the same passage by saying that he does not know what his position will come to be in the future.

Park Choong-geun, Nam Jung-joon, Choi Ah-je, and Kim Mun-kyung (Jung, J. 1955: 322-324).

What happened afterwards to Choi Seung-il and his friend Kim Young-pal who was an announcer at JODK? Kim Young-pal left the station a bit later than the female announcers. We know this because of a magazine article which date backs to September 1932 states that Kim Young-pal left his job at the Kyöngsöng Station and went to Manchuria (*Samchölli*, September 1932). The facts on Choi Seung-il are a bit more vague. It is possible that he left the station in 1930 with the others. In a piece called “Prophesy of Spring,” there is a passage in which he describes the situation at that time in the following manner:

“A scene on an early spring day in 1930. A conversation with the Tax Investigator from the government office who came for a visit with a golden badge on his cap. “I heard you left your job?” – “How did you know? You are very skillful” – “Ha! I know everything. Then how are you making a living?” – “I am still without a job” – “Really? You should find a new one this spring” and with a glance, he put a circle in his books and left. A few days later, the amount on the tax payment notice for school fees of the first quarter had fallen noticeably (*Pyölgön’gon*, March 1930).

Although Choi Seung-il doesn’t specifically reveal the subject in this passage, from the context, there is great likelihood that he himself is the protagonist. It is also possible that he left the station near the end of 1937. The circumstantial evidence for this hypothesis is in the June 15, 1937 *Donga Ilbo* paper. The journalist covering Choi Seunghee’s American performance wrote, “When I visited the broadcasting station to meet Choi Seung-il, he was talking on the phone.” However, according to an unofficial record from the Chosön Broadcasting Association, Lee Seo-gu (who graduated in 1922 with an aesthetics degree from Nihon University), Choi Seung-il’s successor at the station, is said to have entered the station on December 22, 1937 in the secondary channel department. Furthermore, in the 1938 *Registry of Station Employees of the Chōsen Broadcasting Association Corporation*, Choi Seung-il’s name cannot be found (Jung, J. 1995: 327, 333). These facts support the hypothesis that Choi Seung-il left the station in 1937. Finally, we cannot exclude the possibility that Choi Seung-il had left the station in

the beginnings of 1930 and at some time (possibly with the start of the dual broadcasting system?) returned to the station to work until the end of 1937. We would like to place greater weight on this final possibility, yet due to the lack of further evidence, this remains a mere hypothesis.

What would have been the feelings of Choi Seung-il during his years at JODK? How did he actually experience the different spaces of opportunity provided by the broadcasting station? There are several references that allow us to reach a limited inference. The first evidence is the short story “What?” published in the February 1927 issue of *Chosŏn Chigwang*. Judging from the publishing date, it is apparent that he is expressing his experiences on duty during the experimental broadcasting days, before the establishment of JODK. Throughout the entire story, we can feel his distress towards his “subservience without defiance,” being tied down by his salary, and his fear of his life ending tragically as a result. Then, did his mind change after the establishment of the station, when he started working with his wife and enjoyed a better-off lifestyle? According to the two survey-type articles published in *Pyŏlgŏn’gon* on February and December 1928, Choi Seung-il’s experience at the broadcasting station revealed in his writing is characterized by a sense of shame and suffocation. He considered his employment a compromise with, and submission to, reality and he was constantly troubled by a sense of division as his body and actions were proceeding in a different direction from that of his heart and soul. This division resulted in a feeling of tediousness towards his daily life and towards life itself. He experienced an acute self-contradiction in that while he pretended radical negation of reality through his literary production or his group activities such as in KAPF, he was in fact enjoying a stable living as a white-collar employee at the broadcasting station. This, once again, led to severe sense of shame. For this reason, he sarcastically referred to himself as “bread insect, knowing only to earn his bread,” (*Pyŏlgŏn’gon*, December 1928).

Even so, was his work at the broadcasting station really so meaningless to him? Had his expectations of experimenting with the potential of new media to enlighten people and the possibilities of new literary forms not mattered? There is no self-evaluation by Choi Seung-il himself about how much these expectations were fulfilled. Thus, we are left to infer Choi Seung-il’s position from two self-evaluations left by his friend Kim Young-pal. In

1928, Kim Young-pal said that the objective of the people working at the broadcasting station despite many hardships was “the aspiration to construct Korean culture by means of the radio and to try find the inherent national art of Chosön through the radio.” Even so, he re-questions himself, as if unsure, “But can we truly achieve our objective? Or can we not?” (*Munye-Younghwa*, March 1928). A few years later, he gives the following evaluation of his 5 years at JODK:

The monster-like microphone was a partner like no other; the white house in Chung-dong, my home for five years. Yet, following my small conscience, I have tried to revive and promote Korean music for which I have been active, in my own terms, trying to find music that would be appreciated. For this reason, I have put efforts into open-air broadcasting, I have introduced Korean royal court music to citizens, I have presented historical stories and I have introduced Korean music to Japan (*Sidae Sang*, February 1931).

We cannot criticize this slightly self-conceited assertion as merely a self-justification or as a poor excuse for having cooperated with the Japanese in the management of the broadcasting station. Rather, it also demonstrates the weak will of a colonial intelligentsia to fulfill the realization of ideological and aesthetic opportunities within the job of his choice.

V. MODERNOLOGIST

One day in 1934, Mr. Kubo, a storywriter, stands on the main road in Kyöngsöng and states his remorse for having neglected “modernologio” for so long (Choi, H. 1998: 37). Modernology (考現學), i.e. the study of a period’s characteristics through the lifestyle and customs of that time, was a regular activity of not only Park Tae-won, but also the other Kyöngsöng intelligentsia (Cf. Wajiro Gon 1930/2000). Regardless of the differences that may have existed in their depth, the different pieces published in newspapers or magazines presented the modern culture and the customs of the *mobo* (modern boy), *mogöl* (modern girl) or the chaotic landscape of downtown Kyöngsöng in a lively, at times satirical manner. These writings depicting the ever-changing nature of modernity were not only about the world. They were

deeply rooted in the minds of their authors themselves. These written works were part of an essay genre that began in 1920 and actively continued in the 1930s. These “essays” that included liberal and unregulated non-fiction prose of different styles acted as personal documentaries that expressed simple experiences, feelings, ideological tendencies. This was closely related to the emergence of the private individual (Kim, Y. 2000: 190-194). This being the case, for the colonial intelligentsia, their “modernologio” was a way to reconstruct their inner abyss by describing the outer world’s customs and scenes.¹⁰

Modern mass media became an important subject matter for this “modernologio” which developed naturally. As is well known, there was a rapid growth of mass media distribution in Korea during the 1920-1930s. If we were to look more specifically into some verifiable material, firstly, the total number of Korean newspapers (*Donga*, *Chosŏn*, *Chosŏn Chugang*, *Maeil Sinbo*) in circulation surpassed 100,000 in 1930, reaching 111,833 in 1931, 155,484 in 1932, and 211,210 in 1939 (Jung, J. 1990: 553). The annual number of movie viewers continued to show an explosive growth from 4.07 million in 1929 to 5.11 million in 1930, 8.7 million in 1935, 11 million in 1937, 21 million in 1940 (映畫旬報, July 1, 1943). For the other part, from the end of the 1930s to the beginning of the 1940s, the number of gramophones used was around 300-400 thousand units, and the scale of the record market is estimated at around 1-2 million annual sales. After JODK began broadcasting in 1927, the number of radios supplied was 10,153 units in 1929; 20,479 units in 1932; 52,853 units in 1935; 111,838 units in 1938, and 227,573 in 1940.¹¹

For the intelligentsia of the period, media space was both a structural a space of opportunity as well as a phenomenological space of experience.

¹⁰ The essay cartoons (漫文漫畫) that appeared in newspapers and magazines from the 1920s to the late 1930s, were a modernologist work that combines picture and writing. These essay cartoons differ from the previous cartoons that commented on current events, as they specifically described the daily life in the modern city of Kyŏngsŏng (Shin, M. 2004).

¹¹ Here, we have not referred to any other material on radio than the *Chōsen Government-General Statistical Year Book*. The figures mentioned here are different from those presented by Kim, Y. (2002: 165).

They were a group that had the potential to, at times, enter the media system to become producers, but more importantly, they were the main consumers of modern media.¹² In particular, the bourgeois intelligentsia families could subscribe to newspapers and magazines, read books in libraries and reading rooms, listen to gramophones and radios at home, and go to the theatre or movies in their leisure time. They met other people at cafés and teahouses to discuss newly published books and enjoyed new information on classical music. The media was deeply rooted in their daily lives more than anybody else's. They were, effectively, the more multi-faceted consumers and users of media amongst the then audience of mass media, such as for example, the illiterate who could not read newspapers or magazines and the unemployed or the daily workers who could not afford the expensive gramophones or radio. The multi-faceted nature of consumption and usage was made even more complex due to the cross- and multiple-media nature of the content.¹³

¹² According to Yoo, S. (1992: 254), the classes that could enjoy popular culture in the Japanese occupation period were limited to: commercial and service industries, industrial laborers, absentee landlords, students, public servants, people with liberal professions, other kinds of workers, unemployed, daily workers, and their family members. They were the ones who had the leisure necessary to enjoy popular culture, who lived in cities, and who had purchasing power. During the colonial period, the non-rural population exactly doubled from 15% to 30% between 1910 and 1940. Urban-migrant farmers had a much higher possibility of consuming popular culture than their rural counterparts, due to their literary and employment levels. While the percentage of school attendance of the former was 41%, attendance among rural households was only 22.8%.

¹³ The case of *Changhanmong* is an interesting example. *Changhanmong* was an adaptation by Cho Il-jae of Ozaki Koyo's (尾崎紅葉) *Konjikiyasa* (金色夜叉) that had been put on stage and gained spotlight in 1898 during the Meiji Period. This adaptation version was serialized in 1913 in *Maeil Sinbo*, and in the process, it had been adapted to fit the sentiment of the Korean people. It was completely remade, with changing the names or backgrounds of the characters, the writing style and conversations of the original work. It was made into a new-wave drama in 1918 and became popular for which a movie version was planned for 1920, and in 1925 it was made into an adapted new-wave movie under the direction of Lee Kyoung-son. Through the 1930s, Columbia records also launched the record *Changhanmong*, and when this gained popularity, it was reproduced into tragic or comic versions under Regal (*Changhanmong*, and *New Changhanmong*), *Taep'yōng* ("Universal Janghanmong"), and *Chieron* ("Occidental Changhanmong"). At that time, this kind

Media space, as a phenomenological space of experience, did not exist homogeneously in real space such as a city or a region. There were certain sites of reception of relatively higher density where media was concentrated. Some of the more public sites were libraries, reading rooms, theatres, gramophone and radio stores, instrument stores, teahouses, and cafes. In the case of gramophones/radio or musical instrument stores, not only could people listen to music in the stores, but they could also place the speakers headed towards the streets and play the music loudly so that there was “collective” and “intensive” reception on the streets. In the case of teahouses, they generally also had books, newspapers, magazines, gramophones, and telephones at the disposal of the customers. These public media reception sites were a new type of space that had previously been non-existent. For example, the theatre was a place that brought male and female, Korean and Japanese people, into a same space, where silence and commotion, discipline and pleasure would come together, while maintaining the minimum level of patriarchal and national hierarchy (Park, M. 2000; Yoo, S. 2004). From the beginnings of the 20th century to the beginning of the 1930s, private theatres were not only a space for Korean traditional opera and comedy, dance and movies, but they were also platforms for enlightening conversations, speeches and places of assembly (Park, M. 2000: 11-12). Thus, with the exception of the Eastern Theatre established in 1935 exclusively for plays, the theatre was a place where revue type programs combining not only plays and movies, but also music, dance, and singing were shown, and where different genres crossed and combined with each other.¹⁴ Until the mid-late 1930s, when the majority of the movies were silent movies, there was a complex harmony of the screen, the music (from a band or a gramophone), a presenter’s

of cultural product was not rare but rather widely distributed. It was the expansive reproduction of one story as a play, a movie, a magazine, or an album. Popular stories were made into plays or movies, theme songs and contents were put into albums, and movie and album reviews were once again made into stories for magazines – in this way there was active circulation of contents.

¹⁴ There were around 40 Korean bands and musical troupes but there were only 6 to 7 theatres open for performances around the country for which when these bands were on tour, they borrowed cinemas for a period of one day to a week (映畫旬報, July 1, 1943).

narrations, and the spontaneous reactions of the audience even while the movie was playing. The teahouses decorated in foreign style were unique places where exhibitions of illustrated poems were held, and where people who didn't know each other sat around together glancing at each other or listening to music. These reception sites were a stage for new spectacles and sounds: readings, conversations, demonstrations, and record music.

Nonetheless, the fact that there was an “unequal geographical development” of these reception sites is quite significant. The developmental difference seems to be evident in the specific level of propagation of several types of media, or in the number of reception sites per region. First, the number of cinemas (show places) in Korea in April 1943 is estimated at 166 in total. The provinces with the greatest number of cinemas was Kyönggi (25), South Hamgyöng (23), South Kyöngsang (22), North Hamgyöng (21), and the provinces with fewer than ten theaters were Changwön, North Chölla, and South Chölla (8 each), South Pyöngan (7), Hwanghae (6) and North Chungchöng (3). This allows us to see the stark disparity in the annual number of viewers as a percentage of the population. On the one hand, there were cities like Hamhüng (94%), Kyöngsöng (72%), Pyöngyang (68.5%), while there were also cities like Andong and Kimhae that did not reach 10% (映畫旬報, July 1, 1943). In 1934, there were 520 instrument stores in all of Korea that sold gramophones and records, but most of them were in the south – 78 in Kyönggi, 55 in North Chölla, 50 in South Kyöngsang (*Donga Ilbo*, October 1, 1934). In other words there was a concentration of 15% of the stores in Kyönggi province and 10% each in North Chölla, and South Kyöngsang. Taking into consideration that the proportion of Kyönggi from the total population was 10%, North Chölla 7% and South Kyöngsang 10%, respectively, it is possible to see that the relative majority of the stores were distributed in Kyönggi and North Chölla. In the case of radios, due to lack of electric infrastructure and the high prices of the receivers, there were many small and medium sized cities and country towns until late 1930s where radios had not penetrated at all (Kim, Y. 2002: 167). Even in 1944, when the radio penetration had reached its peak, there was a great difference in regional levels with Kyönggi 12.7% and North Chungchöng 0.8% (宮田節子 1985: 3). Furthermore, there were disparities even within Kyöngsöng, between the northern areas inhabited by the Korean people and the southern

parts inhabited by the Japanese. For example, before 1935, of the nineteen cinemas in Kyöngsöng, 11 were set up in the northern area, whereas most of the cafés were in the south.

In colonial Korea, modern mass media propagated rapidly and media-centered places were being established around the major cities. Kyöngsöng was one of the more extreme cases of such. Despite the internal disparities in the level of media penetration in the families or in public places, overall, Kyöngsöng was becoming more and more shrouded by the sights and sounds of different types of media. For the citizens living day by day in this space of lived experience, the city of Kyöngsöng was a gigantic media consisting of a combination of the immutability of the city, the newly planned hybrid building, the ever-changing media types who worked together to form the complex strata of meaning of modernity. Needless to say it was the intelligentsia who was most sensitive to this media space, be they the bourgeoisie who possessed different types of media and enjoyed diverse pastimes and information, or be they the lumpen proletariat who looked through newspapers and magazines in reading rooms, wandered around the streets with nothing to do other than listening to music from the radio, or enjoying music in a teahouse with a 10 cent drink. Furthermore, they had the privilege of expressing their lived experience into language and, at times, even publish. The impressions of “Modernologio” in “Great Kyöngsöng” and the diverse media flourished from the tips of the pens of numerous literati. This “Modernologio” possesses both the phenomenological attraction and admiration felt by the intelligentsia towards the diverse media types of “modern Kyöngsöng” and towards Kyöngsöng itself as a type of media, as well as their psychological resistance and opposition to it.

Choi Seung-il’s life as a literary writer continued actively until before the early 1930s, roughly when he was excommunicated from KAPF. The few extant written works on modern culture and media are also concentrated in this period. Let us enumerate in chronological order the related topics in his writing: “Radio, Sports, Cinema” (*Pyölgön’gon*, December 1926), “Air and Theatre: About the 20th Radio Theatre Broadcasting” (*Pyölgön’gon*, December 1927), “Modern Heroine” (*Chosön Chigwang*, February 1929), “Great Kyöngsöng Panorama: Talks on Original Pastimes” (*Chosön Munye*, May 1929), “Broadcasting station” Chat: Radio Nap” (*Hakaseng*, November 1929),

and “Radio’ and Electric Culture” (*Chungang Ilbo*, April 1, 1930). These short passages are interesting accounts that show Choi Seung-il’s perspective on Kyōngsōng’s modern culture and media at that time. At this point, we need to point out that his position is two-sided. He is both an observer and an analyst. As an observer, he sketches out his impression of the new cultural scenery that captivates his senses, while there are also times in which, as an analyst, he paints his ideological orientations over this scenery.

Choi Seung-il points out “speedy pace” as one of the most important characteristics of modern culture. “Modern culture is producing hundreds of modern deformities at full speed and the wheel is turning so fast that my eyes are catching fire,” (*Chosōn-munye*, May 1929). This “speedy modernity” is basically derived from the characteristics of a capitalist society. For this reason, for example, he says, “Those who are looking from beneath the train called capitalism with their eyes on fire are the present day ‘heroines,’” and the female laborers that are evidently impelled beneath this train of capital are the “modern heroine” (*Chosōn Chigwang*, February 1929). This modern capitalist race of production changes the senses, the dreams and the hearts of the modern man to adapt to this race. “People are going round and round in the modern production process, that has allowed mass production with the help of machines – the crowds are only satisfied when they dream big. Our hearts are following the speed of an automobile and in this powerful stimuli and speed our senses find pleasure” (*Chosōn Munye*, May 1929).

However, for Choi Seung-il, the capitalist system of mechanized mass production was borrowing from electric energy. He said, “All the cry-outs of the bourgeois for industry and the electrification of the proletariat’s countryside are indications that a new culture that uses electricity as its ‘energy’ is being created,” and he calls it the “electrical culture” towards which “the cultures of all humanity are charging.” In other words, the modern industrialization based on electricity is not only changing man’s nature, but also the arts and culture. “In this way, we have discovered ‘tempo’ – ‘speed’ and their influence begins from making a person walk faster on the street to affecting all cultural facilities, especially the arts and literature, responsible for our mental-sensory maps.” Choi Seung-il takes the “electrification” of movies or plays as a more specific example. From his point of view, Russian movies like “Wind of Asia” or “Warship Potemkin” consisted of a “strong, reasonable

tempo like an explicit, ingenious, extravagant rotary press.” In addition, the “Merchant of Berlin” that was shown in the German theatre “Buscarton” show us the “remarkably rapid speed” of a play with no acts (*Chungang Ilbo*, April 1, 1930).

In this situation in which electric energy and the capitalist system were driving man and culture on a “speed race,” the panorama in modernizing “Great Kyōngsōng” was spreading with cars, movies, photographs of foreign actors, radio speakers on the streets, jazz records in cafes, and numerous Japanese magazines and advertisements.

Look! There are over ten streets that have laid cement and have new Fords at 2-2.5 km per hour...On Saturdays, people with stockings of synthetic silk, modern style shoes, greenish *turumagi* and even coats crowd into the cinema, and when a love scene is shown on the screen, they shudder convulsively and lean on their companion’s shoulder enjoying the such strong thrill. They stick photos of Jon Gilbert, Ronald Goldman, Raymond Navaro and who else are stuck on the walls and desks of their dorm rooms in twos and threes, and smile beamingly at it. Night. When the oriental orchestra’s foxtrot starts playing from the radio speakers on Chongno crossroad, groups of tipsy, drunk people come out of loach soup restaurants, and tofu restaurants and with a few cents in their pockets say, “to Chin’gogae, to Chin’gogae” – they look into show windows, look into reading rooms, and in front of “Café Queen,” they take out ten cents for a cup of coffee and a jazz record, rambling drunkenly. When *yugwagol* friends come down to the Chongno crossroad, their eyes go round. In this narrow road, there stands an advertisement notice worth five hundred won. The advertisement of magazines – it is a sales strategy like the call of a tout. The large reading rooms in Anguk-dong and Chongno crossroads had flown flagpoles of the “Puin Kurakpu” (Wives’ Club), “Sonyōn Kurakpu” (Youth Club), “Chubujiwoo” (Housewives’ Friend), “King,” “Fuji,” and “Asahi” and now a whole bunch of magazines have come out (*Chosŏn Munye*, May 1929).

However, in his point of view, “All this modern pleasures have been produced for the flattery for the sons and daughters of the bald old men who possess capital and they are the final cry of material civilization,” If this becomes a trend and advances quickly, dominating the social atmosphere, “no matter if we eat millet rice from Manchuria, our young men will become drunk

with this atmosphere,” (*Chosön Munye*, May 1929). Choi Seung-il is placing charges on the unreasonable situation in which the young colonial proletariat were being swayed by the modern consumption culture, of which he, as a bourgeois, could enjoy.

Within the media scenery of Great Kyöngsöng, Choi Seung-il had a special interest in the radio. This is extremely obvious taking into consideration his achievements while working at the broadcasting station. With an intuitive ability about the remediation of this new type of media, he described the radio as “the combination of newspaper and theatre” or “a newspaper during the day, a gramophone during the night.” According to him, although there were aspects of the newspaper and theatre the radio could not emulate, there were also other aspects in which it showed much greater effectiveness than the others (*Haksaeng*, November 1929). To express it rhetorically, it was the culmination of science, the god of modern civilization and the dominator of the newspaper:

The radio – the extreme form of modern scientific civilization: the riddle-like story of how we can listen to the movements of the world by means of a spider-like microphone...If you lift a laundry pole in the threshing ground and add a battery and a speaker, you can hear JOAK. You can hear the sounds of a *kisaeng* in Japan. Suddenly you can hear “Today, rice that used to be 56 cents a doe is now 57 cents.” The people with sickles in their hands believe it is a joke by ghosts. It is the God of Science. It is the new God of modern civilization... In fact, the radio is dominating over newspapers. This is a clear fact that need not be repeated (*Pyölgön’gon*, December 1926).

Just as Choi Seung-il is rightly pointing out, the radio at that time represented the rationality of high technology, the western world and modernity, but, at the same time the colonial citizens who just used it, rather than understand its actual workings, experienced the radio as a mysterious piece of technology, like magic (cf. Morley 2007: 11). However, he believed that “the radio was a widely used engine of reformation, a vehicle of news, and entertainment facility, such that there would be nothing to overcome it,” (*Hakaseng*, November 1929). He pays special attention to the radio’s cultural potential. For example, although sadly the Korean people were unable to have theatres and stages, for that reason, they also “[hung] on to the voices of plays

through the antenna’ and this could lead to the creation of a new culture. Of course, this would only happen mutual contention with the people’s “cultural standards.”

Air and Theatre – The theatre of Korea, the sufferer, is his path! His home is in the air... We announce that next year, we will make a new style of play script appropriate for the radio. The reason for this is that, if a new culture can be established through the radio, this can only be so in the form of a play...A new style of radio play script – Furthermore, though we would, at times, like to present “The Machine Wreckers,” “Mob=Human being,” “Naval Battle,” and “Who is the worst rascal?” but our hearts become heavy and we cannot but sigh when we think of the situation of the Korean people listening from their homes (*Pyölgöngon*, December, 1927).

In any case, Choi Seung-il said, “there will continue to be distinctive cultures emerging from the ‘radio’ culture,” and “just like the art or literature that is produced and propagated from pen and manuscript to a printer, a new type of art is beginning to blossom from the ‘microphone’” (*Haksaeng*, November 1929). He also calls this the “electrical literature” or “electrical art” that takes place through electrification. For example, a playwright writing a new script to be broadcasted on the radio is also “electrical literature,” (*Chungoe Ilbo*, April 1, 1930). However, for this kind of cultural potential of the radio to be realized, there would have to be many more broadcasting stations and the possession of radio receivers amongst the common people needed to be freer. Choi Seung-il criticized and agonized over the fact that Korea’s reality was not so.

The fate of Korean radio has been so unfortunate that it is only been used by speculators to announce market prices, or on the streets by the merchants of Chongno for advertisement purposes, or as toys of the sons of the rich families. The microphone that hundreds of thousands and millions of people possess elsewhere, in Korea, only one or two thousand possess it, for which we cannot even call it public. Yet, we must be grateful that, as long as only one broadcasting station is allowed in Korea, and as long as there are people using this facility, no matter how few, the popular opinion allows us to fix any unfavorable condition we may face (*Haksaeng*, November 1929).

Our moneyless friend! Just as you pay 80-90 cents to read the newspaper, will

you be able to pay that much money to listen to the radio? Will you be able to listen to the radio, which is newspaper in the day and gramophone in the night? Yes, life and radio – for us, it is yet far from our lives. Not everything is so, yet civilization – even that is at the expense of the rich. Civilization is constantly presenting us with new things. And these are being sold off to the bourgeois. And so, that which had so far come with consciousness loses its original purpose. For this, civilization cries. Civilization cries. It is sorrowed. The radio cries. It is far from us (*Pyōlgōn'gon*, December 1926).

Then, how can this reality be remedied? Choi Seung-il, who until the beginnings of 1930 had socialist ideals, suggested “Soviet Russia” as a possible model. We can see this in how he ends the section on radio in one of his earlier written pieces “Radio, Sports, Cinema,” published in a radio journal by describing “a picture that fit his heart.” It is a picture that depicts a farm in Russia, in which an old man concentrates on a radio to hear Stalin’s speech, and his younger son is patiently waiting his turn. This is particularly significant in that it shows Choi Seung-il’s ideal society. In that society, there is free possession of radios even in the countryside, and the revolutionary effects of the radio as a political tool reaches even the younger generation. In the last part of one of his last pieces on the radio, “Radio and Electrical culture,” he presents how the broadcasting industry works in “Russia, Country of the Proletariat.” According to him, the number of broadcasting stations in Russia is 65 and radio receivers are distributed for free to the workers, and according to the “Five Year Plan of the Soviet Broadcasting Industry,” radio penetration in the future was to reach one per ten people. Furthermore, Choi Seung-il tells us that the citizens of a socialist society are not just consumers of art, but are also active creators, and thus Moscow artists launched the broadcasting industry under the banner “Art to the Workers!” Choi Seung-il’s similar outlook towards radio is also closely related to his Tendency School view of art.

Though not as detailed as his view of the radio, we need to go through his view on movies. It is probably due to his friendship with Lee Kyoung-son, that he had an early and steady interest in movies. As is widely known, Lee Kyoung-son was a renowned movie director, who had studied under Yoon Baeknam, director of Korea’s first movie *The Vow Made Below the Moon*, and debuted with the silent movie “The Story of Shim Chung” in 1925. Nevertheless, it seems as though for some reason, Choi Seung-il’s interest

in movies did not develop significantly. His only movie related writing is his piece “Radio, Sports, and Cinema.”¹⁵ In it, he places value on the fact that movies are the media that are “closest in meaning to the people than any other art or thing.” This was because visual media was much easier to understand than print media or stories, and could be approached at a cheaper cost. Furthermore, it relayed a lot of information in a short period, which made it suited to the speed of modernity.

Movies have actually conquered stories. Why is this so? This is because while the story is knowledgeable and speculative, movies allow that beyond any thinkable speculation to take effect with vision alone. Furthermore, even in economic terms, by a mere 3, 4 cents thrown away a night, you can see the movements of the events of several stories (productions), and even in this busy world, you can see the entire movements of events in a short period of time (*Pyölgöngon*, December 1926).

As a media that could be consumed at 3-40 cents, at times just 10 cents, Choi Seung-il talks of movies with a different standard as that of the radio, with which he had emphasized popularization from the perspective of class society. Though implicit, this standard is “Korean quality.” From this point of view, the movie he rates highly is Na Un-gyu’s work *Arirang* (1926) that was popular among the Korean people at that time. He said, “Korean culture is gradually penetrating movies. Everyone wants to see movies, movies. But there is one, just one, *Arirang*.” He praises, “this movie, *Arirang*, burns down [belittles] all Korean movies of the past and is a colossus that has made the sky cry and has made us cry out for that something in this land full of sighs, where one cannot live without money.”

The media culture scenery of the modern city of Kyöngsöng left Choi Seung-il with a sensuous impression as well as an emotional ambivalence, as

¹⁵ Choi Seung-il published a piece titled “On School Cinema” in the June 1929 Issue of *Chosön Movies*. Unfortunately, we have only found advertisements and have been unable to verify the material. This magazine is also noted for the other writers who have contributed such as Kim Young-pal, Lee Kyoung-son, Shim Hoon, Im Hwa, Ahn Jong-hwa, and Ahn Seok-ju. There is also notice advertising that Choi Seung-il’s “Theater Chat” was going to be published in the June 1929 issue of *Chosön Munye*, but this material is also unavailable in the present.

it had the other intelligentsia. Choi Seung-il imagined the scene of a different color, by projecting his proletariat artistic viewpoint. Widely propagating popular, democratic content on media that can be used by anybody was the core of Choi Seung-il's ideal view of modern media in the mid-to-late 1920s.

VI. FROM A “LEFTIST” MAN OF THEATRE TO A “PRO-JAPANESE” MAN OF MOVIES

After the 1930s, Choi Seung-il underwent several changes. First, at around that time, he finalized his divorce to Ma Hyun-kyung and began a new family with actress Seok Geum-seong. At the time of his re-marriage, Seok Geum-seong was a housewife with a husband and three children and was pregnant with Choi Seung-il's child (Rosa) (*Samchölli*, November 1931). In addition, Choi Seung-il was enthusiastically supporting his sister, Seung-hee, in the dancing school business she had started up right after returning to Korea in 1929. Furthermore, if our guesses are correct, he had either temporarily left the broadcasting station where he had worked for almost 4 years, or at least, his role or position at the station had been severely affected by the suspension of Korean broadcasts. The most important change was that the theatre became once again the center of his creations. After “Who won?” was published in August 1930 in *Daejo*, we can no longer find any published stories by Choi Seung-il. Instead, his literary work becomes limited to stage plays and musical plays. In the fall of 1930, he begins to enthusiastically unfold his theatre activities through the Minadojwa Theatre Group and the New Theatre Literary Group. These activities end after a year, with no major accomplishment (cf. Yoo, M. 1996). Choi Seung-il's activities from then on until the late 1930s are vague. Perhaps due to the fact that he had left the literary world, there aren't many articles about him in the newspapers or magazines either.

Of note is the written piece he presented in 1934, “A heart on a pilgrimage” (*Sin Chosön*, October 1934), and “Love for a foreign country” (*Samchölli*, November 1934). Judging from the length, components and structure, they are the then-popular musical play.¹⁶ Seok Geum-seong started working

¹⁶ In the compilation of Choi Seung-il's works edited by Son Jung-soo, “A heart on a

as a signed artist for Columbia Records in 1934 (*Chosŏn Chungang Ilbo*, November 9, 1934), and it was probably within this situation that Choi Seung-il also got involved with the records industry. There is also the possibility that it was Choi Seung-il that brought Seok Geum-seong into the records industry. Nevertheless, it is difficult to confirm whether he actually worked as a musical playwright. Given that we have not found other musical play creations, there is a high probability that it may have been a temporary activity. The two extant plays share the characteristic that they show a conventional romance in a non-Korean setting. A passage from “A heart on a pilgrimage” that consists of a conversation between a couple that has met on a boat to China seems to reflect Choi Seung-il’s own mind at that time.

I’m on my road to Peiping. – For what? – To search – For what? – I’m searching for many things. I am looking for food, for love, for wine, for a home, for a job, and all this together as happiness. – Ah! Are you then a discoverer of happiness? But then, have you been unable to find it where you are from? – I don’t know. I don’t know if only I have been unable to find it, or if many of us have not been able to find it. – Then do you think there will be happiness in Peiping? – I don’t know. If it isn’t there, as you say, then I shall go elsewhere. – What a strange man. What on earth are you? – What do you mean, what am I? – I mean, what do they call you? – I am just a person. – A student? – No – Then, a literary man? – N-o. – Then an ‘-ist?’ – No – A spy? – No – A racketeer? – No – A politician? – No – Then, what are you? – Let’s just say that I am a discoverer of happiness, just as you said (*Sin Chosŏn*, October 1934).

Also, that Choi Seung-il’s two uncommon newspaper pieces in the mid-1930s both insisted on large-scale investments into theatre is quite significant. Firstly, in the piece published in 1934 called “If there were an entertainer with ‘knowledge’ and ‘money’” (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, July 6, 1934), he answers the question on measures necessary for improving and purifying Korean theatre by emphasizing the need for business investments. According to him, there were many excellent playwrights, staff and actors but the problem was that

“pilgrimage” appears as an essay whereas “Love for a foreign country” appears as a play, yet this seems to be an error (Son, J. ed. 2005: 291)

there were no “businessmen – entertainers with knowledge and money.” Additionally, he asserted that with 100 thousand won, one could lead the entire Korean entertainment world and even suggested a specific plan. He believed that by constructing a high quality, luxurious theatre in the center of Kyöngsöng and two-to-three acting companies with money, excellent scripts and actors would naturally gather. In this way, he suggested one should run a “cultural business in the form of an entertainment corporation that would regulate business.” This business would not only be serving the nation, but it would also be more profitable than running a pawnshop. He ends the piece with the following question. “Is there no entertainer who would newly establish Korean theatre culture in front of an audience of two million with “a hundred thousand won?”

In “The commercialization of theatre,” (*Chosön Ilbo*, October 7, 1935), published by Choi Seung-il in 1935, he reiterates the same position he held almost ten years previously. He says that for the establishment of a new drama and the development of theatre culture, a businessman that “knows how to understand and manage (business) culture and entertainment,” and whom he calls a “capitalist investor.” The development of Chosön new-drama would therefore be in the hands of a “capitalist investor.” Once again, he proposes investing around two hundred thousand won to build three-to-four theatres and running three-four acting companies. The noteworthy point here is the change in Choi Seung-il’s perspective on the role of capital. He points out that, “Like any production center, a regulated enterprise is the inevitable consequence of capitalism for which the theatre movement, as a market good, ought to go through this road,” and maintains that “the theatre can at once become an excellent enterprise while continuing the line of ‘true art.’” Capitalization was a necessary evil for the growth of “theatre art.” Considering his previous judgment about the commercialization of sports, calling it “the commodification of sports matches,” “enslavement of sportsmen,” and “commercialization of a piece of meat bumping into another piece of meat,” and maintaining that “many sportsmen are chained down and win trophies and championship flags for the glory of their owners, the capitalists in the background, and through this they maintain their lives,” (*Pyölgöng’gon*, December 1926), the change in mindset shown in these last two pieces on theatre is extremely surprising. This is a result of his long-

time concerns as he tried to carry on his theatre movement under enormous financial pressures. At the same time, it is the prelude into his transition from a New Tendency School worldview to his experiences as an entertainer and movie producer in the late 1930s.

Choi Seung-il's activities as an entertainer are evident in the 1938 invitation performance of *The Story of Ch'unhyang*. At that time, the Tokyo New-Drama Association (Shinkyou) staged *The Story of Ch'unhyang*, adapted by Chang Hyeok-ju and produced by Murayama Tomoyoshi (村山知義) all around Japan, including Tokyo and Taipan, receiving great acclamation. A certain magazine article says that the Chosŏn invitation performance of *The Story of Ch'unhyang* was co-hosted by *Maeil Sinbo-sa* and Choi Seung-il, and sponsored by *Kyŏngsŏng Ilbo* (*Samchŏlli*, October 1938). In fact, *The Story of Ch'unhyang* was staged for four days in the Kyŏngsŏng Pumin Hall, but it was the Kyŏngsŏng Christian Youth Association that hosted the event and *Maeil Sinbo* that sponsored it (*Maeil Sinbo*, October 25, 1938). According to back stories, *Kyŏngsŏng Ilbo* and *Maeil Sinbo* had both given up because they were uncertain they would be able to fund it, and it was Choi Seung-il, encouraged by the success of the Choi Seung-hee Dance Association, who signed the contract. However, this tour performance which cost about 16 thousand won in total, including the wages of the acting company, stage installation costs, theatre rent, travel expenses and advertisement costs, left promoter Choi Seung-il with a 4000-won loss (*Samchŏlli*, January 1939).

Near the end of the 1930s, Choi Seung-il set up the Donga Entertainment Company and became a movie producer, making the movie *Volunteer* originally written by Park Young-hee, adapted and directed by Ahn Seok-young in 1940.

When the drafting of volunteer soldiers, a proposal made by the southern Governor-General and that which had been under long consideration by the parliament, was enforced after the China incident, and our soldiers were making glorious exploits in the northern and other fronts, the movie committee of Donga Entertainment Company, the joint company of Choi Seung-il and Park Yoon-gi, has decided to produce the *Volunteer* as its first movie. Park Young-hee, the promoter of the literary world, has been writing the original script for some time, while Ahn Seok-young from the Chosŏn Movie Production Company, who had produced *Sim Chŏng* will lend a hand

with the directing, and Choi Seung-il himself will be the producer. Filming will begin shortly (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, August 26, 1939).

This article clearly points out the two unique production characteristics of *Volunteer*. First, it was a ‘political movie project’ in response to the implementation of the volunteer enlistment system, and second, that it was the first work of Donga Entertainment Company, the joint partnership company of Choi Seung-il and Park Yoongi. As the Sino-Japanese war which started in 1937 escalated to a full scale war, Japan, along with its terrible “Korean Infantry Special Volunteer Soldier Act” implemented in February 1938, started to recruit Korean volunteer soldiers to send to the Chinese front, to address a lack of military force. As a movie producer, Choi Seung-il’s initial work was a confrontational response to the Empire’s policies. Yet, Park Yoon-gi, who had also participated in the production of this movie, was not well-known. One newspaper presents Park Yoon-gi as a “young businessman who knows not of the desire for honor,” and “the person who invested twenty something won of personal funds to make ‘Volunteer’” (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, March 2, 1940). He was not an old-time friend of Choi Seung-il, as was the case of either Park Young-hee or Ahn Seok-young. In the title credits at the end of the finalized movie, Choi Seung-il and Park Yoon-gi are mentioned as producer and planner, respectively.

The production of *Volunteer* began in fall 1939 and finished approximately in spring 1940. This has been deduced by calculating the time between the recruitment advertisement of a female protagonist published in the newspaper (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, October 13, 1939) and the article announcing that the filming had ended and that it would be completed as soon as the theme song, for which there had been a contest, was decided and inserted into the movie (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, February 3, 1940). In spring 1940, there was an article saying that Choi Seung-il and others were putting efforts into the Japanese release the movie *Volunteer* (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, April 20, 1940). However, the post-production process of the movie until its release was not easy. One of the main problems was probably the company’s financial problems due to its debt situation. For example, related articles predicted that “not only has the owner of the “print” not been decided due to creditor problems, but there will also be much complication in the future regarding the movie rights” and

mentioned that the first-run theatre had not been decided either, writing that “there had been many rumors heretofore and because the first run theatre has not been decided, there has been much curiosity about the movie,” (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, May 19, 1940; June 14, 1940). In any case, the actual release of the movie took place almost a year after the making had finished, in spring 1941.

The period in which Choi Seung-il produced and released *Volunteer* coincided with the period the so-called “new system” being implemented in the Korean movie industry. As the Sino-Japanese war escalated, the Japanese Government General sought to completely seize the production and distribution of movies in Korea. To provide legal justification, the Chōsen Movie Act was promulgated in January 1940. This was an almost exact copy of the Japanese movie legislations commenced in October 1939 and its main objectives was to closely regulate the production, distribution, and viewing of movies. As supply became restricted with the regulation of wartime commodities, from February 1941, the system changed so that raw film could only be obtained through the Government-General, and had to be applied for at the Information Bureau in the Japanese cabinet. The allocated raw film was preferentially given to the Government-General movie class. Thus, the civilian movie companies received less than one tenth of the amount of raw film they applied for, making it realistically impossible to produce movies. In the end, in May and September 1942, the Chōsen Movie Distribution Company and the Chōsen Movie Production Corporation were established respectively as corporate bodies. This signified the forced abolition of all movie companies and the unification of production and distribution. Furthermore, although they were corporate bodies, the management and decision-making of both companies lay with the Government-General. Even though the actors of the movies by the Chōsen Movie Production Corporation were Korean, the movies were made under the Government-General’s planning and supervision in Japanese and, in order to promote the idea that Japan and Chōsen were a single body, actors, and filming crew from Japan and Wanrong were frequently mobilized (Kim, R. 2006: 197-194; Lee, H. 2005: Ch. 4; Ham, C. 2008: Ch. 2).

In this context, *Volunteer* became Donga Entertainment Company’s first and last production. We cannot find records of Choi Seung-il’s official whereabouts after this. There are, however a few records on movies he had

planned after *Volunteer*. In the Donga Entertainment Company's production list published in the January 1941 issue of *Samchōlli*, in addition to *Volunteer*, *Son of the Land* (original work by Lee Ki-young, directed by Ahn Seok-young, filmed by Yang Se-woong), and *The Back Stories of Volunteer* (original work by Lee Seo-gu, directed by Ahn Seok-young, filmed by Yang Se-woong) were movies planned to be filmed. *Son of the Land*, which was based on the serial stories by Lee Ki-young in the *Chosōn Ilbo*, was probably planned in the beginnings of 1940, when the production of *Volunteer* had been roughly finished (*Chosōn Ilbo*, February 22, 1940). Nonetheless, the production made little progress for a long time, until it was finally aborted (*Chosōn Ilbo*, July 16, 1940; Modern Japan Company 2009: 364). Had these two unfinished works, *Son of the Land* and *The Back Stories of Volunteer* been completed, they would most probably have been typical propaganda movies of the end of the Japanese colonial period. The original work itself of "Son of the Land" is supportive of the colonial economic policy, "reclamation of Manchuria," and possesses characteristics of propaganda. Furthermore, though we cannot know the contents of *The Back Stories of Volunteer*, judging from the title and the experience of the author Lee Seo-gu – he is the adapter of the Naniwabushi record in Korean, *Heroic Corporal Lee In-seok*, praising the first fallen Korean volunteer soldier (Tsugawa 1993/1999: 123) – we can guess that this movie was planned along the same lines as that of the *Volunteer*. Additionally, in the article "Symposium – People Burdening the Movie World of the Peninsula" from a 1940 special Korean issue of *Modern Japan*, Choi Seung-il revealed that he was planning an international movie with Choi Seung-hee as the protagonist (Modern Japan Company 2009: 366-375).

Volunteer, released after much difficulty, begins with the subtitle "Movie Patriotism." It continues, "In light of the Imperial Year 2600, the movie people of our peninsula dedicate this movie to the governor-general Minami." This movie took the lead amongst a series of movies such as *Spring in the Peninsula* (Myōnbo Movie Company, 1941), *You and I* (Chōsen Military Headquarters, 1941), *Miles Away from Happiness* (Koryo Movie Association, 1941), and *Straits of Chōsen* (Chōsen Movie Corporation, 1943), which supported the Oneness of Manchurians and Koreans or the Oneness of Japanese and Koreans movements. Regardless of the intent of those who made it, the movie was not much welcomed by either the imperialist Japanese or the colonized

Korean. When *Volunteer* was released in Japan in 1940, the critics judged it as an outdated New Wave style tragedy and yet at the same time tediously insensitive (Lee, Y. 2008: 56-58). The movie did not raise any sensation in Korea, and in this, we can assume that both internal and external factors came into play.

One external factor may have been that because the release of *Volunteer Soldier* was postponed, it may have been overshadowed by major advertising of *You and I*, which was produced by the Chōsen Military Headquarters in support of the volunteer enlistment system and the oneness of Koreans and Japanese, and which was released in both Korea and Japan in November 1941. *You and I* was a major movie in commemoration of Corporal Lee In-seok, who had fallen at the Battle of Shanxi as the first Korean volunteer soldier, featuring many star actors from both Korea and Japan. The internal factor is a bit more complex: this movie, in contrast to the intention of production, failed to properly transmit the emotions of the protagonist and those around him and so failed in its function as a propaganda movie. In fact, it might have been caused by the subconscious symbol of the depression of the colonial elite, or because of the internal conflict within the non-elite brought forth by a discussion on national policy propaganda. Additional considerations include localism that reconstructed countryside=Korea as the space of feudalism/past from the perspective of modernism/city, it was this rupture and tension, this self-contradiction in the text that makes the pro-Japanese movies so peculiar (Kwon, M. 2005: 340-343; Lee, Y. 2008: 56-58; Lee, S. 2007: 21-22; Lee, H. 2005: 162-163).¹⁷ Although it is hard to agree completely, there have been critics who have pointed out the director's intention of "criticizing the violent reality by showing how unrealistic the volunteer soldier system is" and have read "the acceptance and the resistance of the colonial subject towards the imperial logic" into the movie (Chang, S. 2008: 421, 423).

Choi Seung-il's movie activities near the end of the colonial period show active support for a militaristic fascist system. Although such judgment or condemnation may be contested, it remains indisputable that he, who had

¹⁷ Amongst the numerous reviewers of *Volunteer Soldier*, only Ham, C. (2008: 126-175) understood the text as a "typical pro-Japanese movie." We plan to deal with the peculiarities of *Volunteer Soldier* in greater detail on another occasion.

called himself neither an “-ist” nor a “man of letters” but a mere “man” and “discoverer of happiness,” sought to find happiness in this kind of defection. Could he be excused, since his works were ideologically more lukewarm in comparison to the other people (e.g., Ahn Seok-young, Park Young-hee, and Seo Kwang-jae) who had been affiliated to KAPF, then shifted towards cooperating with the Japanese? After all, he did not participate in the Chösen Movie People Association, or the Chösen Movie Production Corporation. In fact, in Choi Seung-il’s line of action, we can detect a certain paragon of the 1920s leftist intelligentsia. According to the study of Jeon Sang-sook (2004) on the people concerned in the Korean Communist Party organization and happenings, then- leftist intelligentsia were youth from Kyöngsöng’s petit-bourgeois, who had received high-school education, and many of whom had studied in Japan. Many were also working in the press and had been influenced by socialism while seeking the ideals of the anti-imperialist civil movement. The change undergone by this intelligentsia was not so much of a change in thinking, but rather a change in attitude towards the dominating system’s heavy-handed policies. The swing began to appear amongst the leftist intelligentsia who lost or put off their hope for national independence with the escalation of the Japanese invasion of the Asian continent. Most of them developed a new perception about the Japanese force within the dynamics of international politics, and whether it was “completion” or “conquest” of modernity, they tried to find a realistic solution by strategically riding along the domination policy of imperialism (cf. Kim, J. 2004). Of course, despite this collective similarity, each person’s personal and particular logic and experiences remain.

Sociologist Anselm Strauss pointed out that, “Human experience is always incomplete, there is always uncertainty regarding the results” and maintains that “what needs to be explained is not change, but the specific directions of change and what needs to be taken for granted is not the absence of change but change itself,” (Strauss 1959: 43). From this perspective, even if we were to try understand Choi Seung-il’s life as dynamic, it would be difficult to understand the logic of defection or conversion caused by an extreme change in his identity. How had this young man, who had “effort” as his creed, pursued “equality” and pushed away “falsehood” (*Kaeböök*, July 1921), this socialist who was a “good friend who always had self-dissatisfaction,” (*Yöngghwa*

Sidae, January 1932) finally come to cooperate with fascism? Following Strauss' logic, the subjective sense about the continuity and consistency of identity depends on whether there is a structure that can embrace and explain non-aligned events. Even if one's past identity may be very different from that of the present, if it can be contextualized within a coherent explanation, it might be possible to evade self-treachery and a sense of loss. When change appears as part of a longer-term plan, the individual can avoid feeling that a period of their lives is insignificant or that it was wasted (Strauss 1959: 146-147). How can Choi Seung-il incorporate his ideological defection and cooperation with fascism into his self-identity? Happiness in his daily life? Art beyond nations? Constant pursuit of something new? Ambition for modernity? Or, had he perhaps not even tried to reconcile up his split identity but simply accept it as the human being's endlessly multi-faceted nature?

VII. CONCLUSION: "HE IS (WAS) NOT THERE"

In this essay, we have tried to reconstruct Choi Seung-il's life, focused on his media-related career. Like many other literary men of his time, his was a varied experience, crossing through diverse cultural and media domains. In the 1920-1930s, he took the role of a writer for literary magazines, a story-writer, a theatre producer, a radio program producer at Kyōngsōng Broadcasting Station, and a concert/performance planner with a socialist orientation. Furthermore, he left behind several modernological pieces regarding Kyōngsōng's media culture. However, in the 1940s, having turned into a movie producer, Choi Seung-il produced *Volunteer Soldier*, a typical "pro-Japanese movie" and one that was picked up as a propaganda movie for militarism. Under the assumption that his experience and writing went beyond mere individual particularities to revealing the characteristics of the relationship between the 1920-1930s Kyōngsōng media space and intelligentsia, we have tried to clarify this assumption.

With this objective in mind, we conceptualized the colonial Kyōngsōng media space as an important structural space of opportunity as well as a phenomenological space of experience for the intelligentsia. Under the situation in which the Japanese and Korean bilingual market had been

maintained for so long, media space provided a strict minority group of intelligentsia, especially literary men, with new economic, ideological and aesthetic opportunities, and it gave them hope that through the realization of such opportunities they could establish themselves as “modern subjects.” In the colonial political economic situation, there were many obstacles blocking the realization of this space of opportunity, or possibility, and the consequent ups and downs incited the participating literary men to frequent border-crossing and deviation, personal anguish, and defection. We have also proposed that media space was the source of experience that stimulated a new spatial impression along with Kyōngsōng’s modernization. As the main consumers of various types of media and as wary walkers of the city, the literati were able to externalize Kyōngsōng the city of media and the experience of Kyōngsōng as a media type itself through “modernological” writing, and the result emerged in the form of newspaper and magazine articles, and essay cartoons.

This argument rises from the point of view that there is a need to understand the colonial media situation not through a separate approach to each media type (newspaper, radio, and movie), but as a multi-faceted and heterogeneous totality. This is under the premise that the then producers and contents of the various medias were closely interrelated and mutually influential, and that the acceptance and consumption of these media types (or media spaces) occurred at a multiple sensory level. Choi Seung-il’s life and writing provide a good case study to back up our argument. This is why this study undertook a biographical approach. As the colonial media space was being formed and developed, Choi Seung-il did not enter the given structure and remain passively there; rather, he actively worked to construct it. He put considerable effort into bringing together people to experiment with the new possibilities of media space. He repeatedly abandoned roles given to him or that he had made for himself, though it is difficult to determine whether it was because he was restless or because he lacked talent. He actively expressed his views on the impact of modern media and the direction for its development, as a producer, consumer and observer. Though there may not be great philosophical depth, we cannot deny that he presents serious concerns and sharp critical mind.

The famous Italian microhistorian Giovanni Lévi once presented the four problems using the biographical approach and its application when writing history (Lévi 1989: 1329-1333). First is the problem of prosopography

and model biography. The biography of an individual may have times be used as evidence of a typical form or position. In this case, the individual becomes a case that closely demonstrates the characteristics or structural form of a group. Second is the issue of biography and context. Even in a biography possessing particular characteristics, time and setting also demand investigation. In this case, the context is called forth for two different functions. One is to explain the peculiar experience of the individual as an ordinary event, whereas the other is to use a consistent context to fill in whatever voids there might be in the specific material about the individual. However, the tendency to establish the context as a sturdy and consistent, immobile background is not really viable. Third, there is the issue of biography and the limited case study. Frequently, biographies are used to shed light on the context. Especially as microhistoric studies depict limited case studies, they highlight the periphery, the edges of social fields that made these cases possible. In these cases, one must avoid discussing the limited case study as completely separate from the whole society, or suggesting the context as too rigid. Fourth, there is the issue of biography and hermeneutics. From the perspective of hermeneutic anthropology, biographical sources can be interpreted in various ways in which we cannot entirely determine the “original” character, idea, and expression. Here, the important task is the act of interpretation itself, that is, the process of adding value to a biographical fact to continuously change the text. In this hermeneutic function, there is the concern about the impossibility of writing biographies, and presents the risk of falling into relativism. Nonetheless, it has the advantage of reminding us that biography writing is an indeterminate and endless process of discussion.

Such argument of Lévi’s has become a methodological guideline and material for retrospection throughout the writing of this essay. As in the case of most essays related to microhistories and life histories, this essay is not free from mutually reiterative questions. Is Choi Seung-il a typical case, or is he an extreme one? There are too many blanks to reconstruct his life story, so how can these be amended? How can we reconstruct the historical context in reciprocal interaction with the life of an individual? What kind of questions should an investigator of the present make about the sources of the past? This investigation has been completed, without having arrived at any provisional conclusion about these difficult questions, by reading the sources and

understanding the context, with just a vague sense of direction. Furthermore, due to restrictions on the few accessible sources, we cannot really say we have sufficiently realized our original objective of understanding the relationship between the colonial Kyöngsöng media space and the intelligentsia through the case of Choi Seung-il on a multi-dimensional level. We are intending a follow-up work based on more sources and more delicate interpretation.

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