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Living in the modern society of colonial Joseon as a patient: a study on Yi Sang's literature focusing on diseases and physical sicknesses

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Abstract: This study aims to discuss the body experiencing modern society and modernity realized through the body by analyzing the disease and physical sicknessness depicted in Yi Sang's literature. Until now, Yi Sang's literary research has focused on the subject's death impulse (Thanatos) and the image of death in his works, so this study aims to present a new perspective on Yi Sang's literature. Specifically, this paper explores works that illustrate diseases such as syphilis and tuberculosis and examines the author's subjective consciousness. In short, this paper discusses Yi Sang's attachment to life, which appears as a sexual impulse (Eros), by analyzing narratives that mention prostitution and syphilis among Yi Sang's works. Meanwhile, this article reveals the author's guilt about his inability to function properly due to syphilis. Furthermore, this paper manifests how Yi Sang presents his sick body that experiences the modern society of colonial Joseon by describing how he

implements the body with tuberculosis. Therefore, in each analysis process, this study reads Yi Sang's specific texts by referencing his various works to understand his esoteric world and literary image. Moreover, this paper reveals that the author reflects on his critical reasons for such a modern society and violent hygiene discourse in his independent literary world and identity as a patient.

Keywords: Yi Sang (이상 李箱); diseases; body; colonial Joseon; modern society; syphilis; tuberculosis.

병자로서 조선의 근대사회를 살아가기 – 이상(李箱)의 문학 속 질병과 아픈 신체를 중심으로

초록: 본 연구의 목적은 이상(李箱)의 문학에서 묘사되는 질병과 병든 신체를 분석함으로써 근대를 경험하는 신체와 그 신체를 통해 구현되는 근대성에 대해 논의하는 것이다. 지금까지 이상(李箱)의 문학 연구는 주체의 죽음 충동 (Thanatos)과 작품 속 죽음의 이미지에 치중되어 있어 그와 반대되는 성 충동에 대한 분석은 상대적으로 등한시되어 있는데, 이에 본 연구는 이상(李箱) 문학을 이해하는 새로운 관점을 제시하고자 한다. 구체적으로 본고는 이상(李箱)의 문학에서 묘사되는 질병을 각각 매독과 결핵으로 분류하고 이러한 질병에 내포된 작가의 주체의식을 탐구한다. 그리고 본고는 이상(李箱)의 작품 중에서 매춘 행위와 매독과 결합된 사례를 분석함으로써 성적 충동 (Eros)으로 나타나는 주체의 생에 대한 애착에 대해 논의한다. 동시에 매독으로 인해 제대로 기능하지 못하는 신체에서 비롯된 불능과 불모성의 이미지를 분석함으로써 그러한 이미지에 기저하고 있는 작가의 죄의식에 대해 탐구한다. 또한 본고는 이상(李箱)이 결핵에 걸린 신체를 구현하는 방식을 기술함으로써 근대를 경험하는 신체와 그 신체에 대한 작가의 주체의식에 대해 탐색하는데, 이상(李箱)의 난해한 작품세계와 문학적 이미지를 이해하기 위해 각각의 분석과정에서 이상(李箱)의 다양한 작품들을 참조해 그의 텍스트들을 상호텍스트적으로 독해한다. 나아가 본고는 병자로서의 정체성을 고수하며 스스로 소외된 타자이기를 고집한 이상의 작가적 정체성과 독자적인 문학 세계에는 근대 조선 사회와 폭력적인 위생 담론에 대한 그의 비판적인 사유가 반영된 결과임을 밝힌다.

핵심어: 이상 (李箱); 질병; 신체; 식민지 조선; 근대 사회; 매독; 결핵

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Abstrakt: Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przeanalizowanie odmalowanego w twórczości Yi Sanga obrazu chorób i fizycznych dolegliwości, których

ludzkie ciała doświadczały w warunkach nowoczesnego społeczeństwa koreańskiego i w ówczesnych realiach. Do tej pory badania literackie nad dziełami Yi Sanga koncentrowały się na impulsie śmierci podmiotu (Tanatos) i obrazie śmierci w jego utworach. Niniejsze badanie zakłada jednak nowe spojrzenie na literaturę Yi Sanga. Niniejszy tekst analizuje dzieła, które ukazują choroby takie jak kiła i gruźlica oraz bada subiektywną świadomość autora. Tekst zatem omawia przywiązanie Yi Sanga do życia, które jawi się jako impuls seksualny (Eros), analizując wśród prac pisarza te narracje, które mówią o prostytutce i syfilisie. Artykuł ten ma również ujawnić poczucie winy Yi Sanga w związku z jego spowodowaną kiłą niemożnością prawidłowego funkcjonowania w społeczeństwie. Tekst także pokazuje, jak Yi Sang przedstawiał swoje chore ciało, które doświadczało realiów ówczesnego społeczeństwa Joseon okresu kolonialnego, opisując, w jaki sposób traktowane jest ciało chorego na gruźlicę. Dlatego na każdym etapie analizy niniejsze badanie odczytuje tylko określone teksty Yi Sanga, aby ułatwić zrozumienie jego ezoterycznego świata i literackiego obrazu poprzez odwoływanie się do jego wybranych dzieł. Artykuł zakłada również, że Yi Sang jako pacjent ujawniał w swojej niezależnej twórczości literackiej i brutalnym dyskursie na temat higieny swój krytycyzm wobec ówczesnego nowoczesnego społeczeństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Yi Sang (이상 李箱); choroby; ciało; kolonialne Joseon; nowoczesne społeczeństwo; syfilis, gruźlica.

1. Introduction: The Modern Society of Colonial Joseon and the Body

The purpose of this study is to discuss the body experiencing modern society and modernity realized through the body by analyzing the disease and physical sickness depicted in Yi Sang's literature. Until now, Yi Sang's literary research has focused on the subject's death impulse (Thanatos) and the image of death in the work, so this study aims to present a new perspective on understanding Yi Sang's literature. Specifically, this paper explores works that illustrate diseases – such as syphilis and tuberculosis – and examines the author's subjective consciousness. In short, this paper discusses Yi Sang's attachment to life, which appears as a sexual impulse (Eros), by analyzing narratives that mention prostitution and syphilis among Yi Sang's works. Meanwhile, this article reveals the author's guilt about his inability to

function properly due to syphilis. Furthermore, this paper investigates how Yi Sang presents his sick body that experiences modern society of colonial Joseon by describing how he implements the body with tuberculosis. Therefore, in each analysis process, this study reads Yi Sang's specific texts by referring to his various works to understand his esoteric world and literary imagery. Moreover, this work demonstrates that the author, in his separate literary universe and identity as an invalid, focuses on his critical reasoning in the society of early 1930s Joseon.

Before starting our discussion, it is necessary to introduce the artist. Yi Sang (이상, 1910–1937) is a representative writer of Korea who was active in the Japanese colonial era, starting with his serial novel “12 월 12 일” (sib-i wol sib-i-il; 12th December) in *Joseon*, a magazine published by the Japanese Government-General of Korea. He was an architect and a painter in addition to being a poet, novelist, and essayist who authored hundreds of works across six years. Additionally, as the first and greatest modernist writer, his massive impact on Korean modern literature studies is so significant that various research projects on Yi Sang's work are still underway. Since Yi Sang, who died at the age of 26, suffered from tuberculosis during his lifetime, many studies on the theme of diseases have been conducted. According to Kim Yun-sik's 김윤식 claim (1988: 68) that “Yi Sang's literature began after Yi Sang's first hemoptysis”¹, and “the essence of Yi Sang's literature is based on his suicidal impulse and death drive related to hemoptysis”², it is highly possible that Yi Sang's literature commenced from his unhappy personal life. However, the concept of diseases repeatedly presented in his literature does not just mean fear or struggle with diseases but implies much more. In other words, Yi Sang's identity was a patient who lived in the modern society of Joseon and expressed his suffering from diseases and public distress of society. Therefore, this paper explores the meaning of sickness and physical sicknesses in Yi Sang's literature.

In Joseon, the concept of individual ownership of the body arose in modern times. Western culture has strongly influenced Joseon since 1876, breaking down the traditional feudal social order and starting reforms into a modern society. People have since devided the

¹ “첫 번째 각혈에서 이상(李箱) 문학이 비롯되었다” (김윤식 1988: 68).

² “이상(李箱) 문학의 본질을 이루는 것은 각혈과 관련된 자살과 죽음의 등가사상” (김윤식 1988: 68).

notion of the body into *body* and *consciousness*. Unlike traditional culture that did not separate body and soul, the body that appeared in Joseon's modern novels existed as a concept of separation between body and nature due to the influx of Western culture. In other words, the perception of the body has begun to change in modern times. When the body was an ancestral heritage, it was a domain of respect that should not be damaged. However, as people started recognizing the body as an individual's private possession, the body acquired autonomy. Therefore, the change from a body that reproduces *social norms* to a body that embodies individuals' *private desires* meant the dissolution of the body's public discourse and the expansion of personal discourse. In short, in modern Joseon society, the body became a concept that emphasized the idea of *individual* and *individuality*.

As such, the body is not just a matter of appearance. Perception of a body can be a specific methodology that can grasp changes in thoughts before and after modern times. In other words, the shift in perception of the body shows the difference in social customs and culture at that time. Therefore, in novels written in modern times, the subject's body is not just a matter of appearance but a specific criterion for grasping the author's sense and identity.

Besides, modernity is embodied as a body in Yi Sang's literature. As an individual experiencing modern times, his body reveals the phenomena and nature of modern times, awareness and practice, consciousness and unconsciousness, process and reality. In short, bodily perception in Yi Sang's literature is an indicator that shows not only the consciousness of the characters but also the consciousness of the artist who invented and manipulated them, as well as the changes in the body concept at that time. Accordingly, this paper investigates the writer's self-directed method in his literature through his sick body and such a differentiated body as one experiencing modern times.

2. *Hwaryubyeong* 화류병 (花柳病), Libido, and Impotence

In 1916, as one of the colonial control policies for Joseon, the Japanese introduced a prostitution control policy 공창제 (*gongchangje* 公娼制) that practically licensed prostitution. It gave the appearance of a policy

emphasizing a clean body and a hygienic life, but it was actually a product of the Japanese government intended to transform the colonial people into giving complete obedience to the Japanese authority. As a result, *gisaengs* 기생 (female musicians) became prostitutes and the number of syphilis patients increased rapidly in Joseon amid rampant prostitution (Kim Eun-jeong 김은정 2012: 292). In this type of social environment where syphilis discourse was active, the subject of prostitution and *hwaryubyeong* 화류병 (花柳病) appeared in Joseon's modern novels that were published in the 1920s. Here, *hwaryubyeong* is a generic term for sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea, which are described as diseases of geisha in Japan's prostitution industry. In fact, magazines and newspapers published in Joseon during the Japanese colonial period mentioned 19 and 138 cases of *hwaryubyeong*, respectively (Kim Eun-jeong 김은정 2012: 293). Accordingly, *hwaryubyeong*, infection through sexual intercourse, often symbolized a reckless sexual life and promiscuous people. Thus, *hwaryubyeong* implies promiscuous people such as prostitutes and their clients. Meanwhile, *hwaryubyeong* represented a physical and moral disorder in Joseon; it was also recognized as a disease *munmyeongbyeong* (문명병 文明病) of spoiled children of wealthy families or highly educated women (An Young-hee 안영희 2020: 106).

As a modern Korean novelist, Yi Sang wrote many works on the theme of romance with *gisaeng*, including *이런 시* (*Iron Si; A Certain Poetry*) and *봉별기* (*Bongbyulgi; The Record from Meeting and Breaking up with Geumhong*). In addition, works such as *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*), *지주회시* (*Jijuhwaesi; A Story of a Spider and a Pig*), *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*), *종생기* (*Jongsaenggi; A Lifelong Memories*), and *추등잡필* (*Chudeung jappil; The Autumn Compilation*) describe prostitution by referring to *gisaeng* or can houses. Some of those works prominently depicted the grotesque nature of this prostitution and *hwaryubyeong*. However, at the same time, Yi Sang (2010 [1936g]: 235) referred to syphilis as “a disease that is not honorable but not so shameful when you think about it”³ in his essay *추등잡필* (*Chudeung jappil; The Autumn Compilation*). In addition, this quote shares his romantic ideas about syphilis like another proverb⁴ from the Japanese Edo period. Therefore, this paper reviews

³ “그다지 명예롭지 못한 그러나 생각해 보면 또 그렇게까지 불명예라고까지 할 것도 없는 질환” (이상 2010 [1936g]: 235).

⁴ “自惚れと瘡氣の無い者はない No man is free from conceit and syphilis”.

Yi Sang's works where prostitution and disease are mentioned and reveals that the pathological condition of a body suffering venereal disease presupposes tragic eroticism.

First, I will analyze Yi Sang's poem, *가외가전* (*Gawaegajeon; A Story on the Street and off the Street*). The poem was written in Japanese and published in March 1936. However, as you can see from the footnote below, Yi Sang completely ignored the grammatical system when he wrote it. The writer listed words and phrases without any rhyme, so three scholars have translated and revised it in Korean over 50 years due to its complexity. Below is an excerpt of the poem and its English translation⁵.

“My body wears out from the sound of entertainment. Everyone says I am a young man as weak as an old man. However, it is easy for me to wash my body in a lump and bounce over a mountain of eggs. But, instead, I'm content with my life looking down at another vast continent from higher place. My friends are rejoicing and having a roll in the hay. Under the moonlight, the body shakes like a celestial globe. However, their shadows are hypocritical. All the tiny shades sit down by chance. The cherry blossoms wither. The seeds are eradicated. My peeping fizzles out. Why isn't there a clap that should be? Maybe I just have betrayed my father. (...) My pointed body part rubs the center of a young prostitute's body as if diagnosing it. The alley gradually decays. I can see there is a luxurious-looking door in the alley with a mouth. A mouth with golden teeth. And a lung disease with a dirty tongue is inside. Oh-oh-oh. What goes in once does not come out again. And it all becomes the same. On top of that, the pair of shoes stumbles. Certain bacteria cause one's lower abdomen to suffer—a muddy disease.

(...)

The scandal of money. A foot-like hand shamelessly grabs the sick old woman's hand.

There is a rumor that a tyrant has snuck into the house. Girls are willing to be his pet every time after time. Where can I hide so that I can't see that their shoes collide with each other? At the peak of the time, everyone laughs and talks at the same time. The gunfire rings from far away, and the purple spot appears dimly.

All of these are stuffy garbage generated in that large room. A choked crow as big as a pigeon flies into the room where lightning was pounding. Then, intense things are exterminated as if they were sprayed with medicine. The room becomes clean as if it would explode at any moment. However, the things here are just a pile of rubbish in our times.

⁵ Since there is no English translation, I translated all the novels and poems of Yi Sang by myself mentioned in this paper. And for the reader's understanding, the author's poem was modified to fit in the right grammatical system.

(...)

The blood is on the cigarette, and a big fire broke out that night. Fallen angels breed. They cover the sky and cross temperate climate regions. These things are getting warmer all at once. A large room festers inside, making itching. The garbage sticks to the room continuously.”⁶ (Yi Sang 이상 2010 [1936a]: 111–113).

Kwon Young-min 권영민 (2013: 123–124) interprets the disease in the poem as tuberculosis or measles, saying that the poem

⁶ “횡조(喧噪)때문에 마멸(磨滅)되는몸이다. 모두가소년(少年)이라고들그러는데 노야(老翁)인기색(氣色)이 많다. 혹형(酷刑)에 씻기워서 산반(算盤)알처럼 자격(資格)너머로 튀어오르기 쉽다. 그러니까 육교(陸橋)위에서 또 하나의 편안한 대륙(大陸)을 내려다보고 근근(僅僅)히 산다. 동갑네가 시시거리며 떼를 지어 답교(踏橋)한다. 그렇지 않아도 육교(陸橋)는 또 월광(月光)으로 충분(充分)히 천칭(天秤)처럼 제 무게에 끄덕인다. 타인(他人)의 그림자는 위선 넓다. 미미(微微)한 그림자들이 얼떨김에 모조리 앓아 버린다. 앵도(櫻桃)가 진다. 종자(種子)도 연멸(煙滅)한다. 정탐(偵探)도 흐지부지—있어야 움을 박수(拍手)가 어찌서 없느냐. 아마 아버지를 반역(反逆)한가 싶다.

(...)

쏟으려는 노릇—날카로운 신단(身端)이 싱싱한 육교(陸橋)그 중심(甚)한 구석을 진단(診斷)하듯 어루만지기만 한다. 나날이 썩으면서 가리키는 지향(指向)으로 기적(奇蹟)히 골목이 뚫렸다. 썩는 것들이 낙차(落差)나며 골목으로 몰린다. 골목 안에는 치사(侈奢)스러워 보이는 문(門)이 있다. 문(門)안에는 금(金)니가 있다. 금(金)니 안에는 추잡한 허가 달린 폐환(肺患)이 있다. 오—오—. 들어가면서 나오지 못하는 타입 깊이가 장부(臟腑)를 닳는다. 그 위로 짝바편 구두가 비칠 거린다. 어느 균(菌)이 어느 아랫배를 앓게 하는 것이다. 질다.

(...)

화폐(貨幣)의 스캔달—발처럼 생긴 손이 염치 없이 노파(老婆)의 통고(痛苦)하는 손을 잡는다. 눈에 띄우지 않는 폭군(暴君)이 잠입(潛入)하였다는 소문(所聞)이 있다. 아기들이 번번이 애충이 되고 되고 한다. 어디로 피(避)해야 저어른 구두와 어른 구두가 맞부딪는 꼴을 알 볼 수 있으랴. 한창급(急)한 시각(時刻)이면 가가호호(家家戶戶)들이 한테 어우러져서 멀리 포성(砲聲)과 시반(屍斑)이 제법 은은하다. 여기 있는 것들 모두가 그 방대(龍大)한 방(房)을 쓸어 생긴 답답한 쓰레기다. 낙뢰(落雷)심한 그 방대(龍大)한 방(房)안에는 어디로 선가질 식(窒息)한 비둘기만 한 까마귀 한 마리가 날아 들어왔다. 그러니까 강(剛)하던 것들이 역마(疫馬)잡듯 픽픽 쓰러지면 서방(房)은 금시 폭발(爆發)할 만큼 정결(精潔)하다. 반대(反對)로 여기 있는 것들은 통요사이의 쓰레기다.

(...)

궤련(卷煙)에 피가 묻고 그날 밤에 유곽(遊廓)도 탔다. 번식(繁殖)하고 거짓 천사(天使)들이 하늘을 가리고 온대(溫帶)로 건넌다. 그러나 여기 있는 것들은 따뜻해지면서 한꺼번에 들떠든다. 방대(龍大)한 방(房)은 속으로 굵아서 벽지(壁紙)가 가렵다. 쓰레기가 막 붙는다.” (이상 2010 [1936a]: 111–113).

expresses the diseased human organs one after another based on his body. This interpretation considers the historical fact that Yi Sang suffered from tuberculosis during his lifetime and the phrase “a mouth with golden teeth and a lung disease with a dirty tongue is inside”. However, given that metaphors for prostitution in the house of ill reputation can be found in the poem, it is more likely that “a mouth” refers to a vaginal orifice and “the bacteria” refers to syphilis rather than tuberculosis.

To analyze the poem, first, the body, which wears out from the sound of entertainment, indicates a body exhausted by frequent prostitution. Therefore, despite his young age, the speaker is as weak as an old man. Consequently, while his friends are laughing and enjoying sexual pleasure, he is content to stand on both legs and look down at the vast continent (a metaphor for nudity). However, his friends are unhappy with him. Eventually, the writer starts having sexual intercourse due to the serious air around him. He begins to invade the prostitute’s vagina with his genitalia. However, the vagina, metaphorically the alley, is a street where rotten things thrive on a daily basis. Additionally, the door is a hotbed of venereal disease (bacteria) that hurts his lower abdomen. In short, the poem illustrates how sex with prostitutes can transmit venereal disease. Furthermore, the writer presents the grotesque and negative imagery of his self-deprecation and hatred for the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases through prostitution using words such as “a purple spot”, “blood”, “garbage”, “rubbish”, “breeding”, “festering”, and “itching”. However, though he complains about the tragedy, Yi Sang does not distinguish himself from such an unfaithful place. Instead, he laments and sympathizes with the situation of young gisaengs who exchange sex for money. Along with them, the writer is willing to associate with them as a bunch of garbage that represents a social misfit and cancer in society.

At the same time, such prostitution involves more than just the infection of sexually transmitted diseases. Prostitution always comes with a pang of guilt. In verses such as “the cherry blossoms wither”, “the seeds are also eradicated”, and “maybe I just have betrayed my father”, the readers can find that prostitution is an act of pursuing pleasure and refusing to produce an heir. In other words, syphilis implies the concept of impotence in Yi Sang’s literature, related to the inability to produce children. Therefore, it is not the guilty conscience of the ego seeking sexual pleasure that is to blame but rather the impotence resulting from the inability to produce future generations.

For instance, Yi Sang's poem *문벌* (*Munbeol*; *Lineage*) also describes his guilt and sense of debt because he cannot bear a child due to his illness. Therefore, this inability to produce an heir leads to an impotence theme in the texts of Yi Sang. The motif is presented not only in Yi Sang's literature but also in the novel *발가락이 닮았다* (*Balgarak-i dalmadda*; *His Toe Is Similar to Mine*) (Kim Dong-in 김동인 1932). Furthermore, in modern Korean novels, one's fear of syphilis, which can infect one's spouse and even children yet to be born, goes on to a fear of pregnancy, evoking an image of barrenness. For instance, the wife in Shim Hoon's novel *적녀성* (*Jiknyeoseong*; *Vega*) refuses to sleep with her husband to avoid infection after noticing that he has syphilis (Shim Hoon 심훈 1934). From this point of view, the wife's prostitution in Yi Sang's novel *Wings* can be interpreted as an economic activity to make a living and a refusal to have a sexual relationship with her husband because she is worried about contracting his syphilis.

However, in Yi Sang's work, syphilis interestingly becomes one's excuse to reject others. In other words, it is he who refuses to have sex. The following is an excerpt from the full text of Yi Sang's poem, *신경질적으로 비만한 삼각형* (*Singyeong jiljeog-euro bimanhan sangakhyeong*; *A Sharp-tempered Fat Triangle*). The poem was written in Japanese and later translated into Korean.

“—△ is my AMOURUSE.

Dear ∇, how many times have you won wrestling?
Dear ∇, I only can see your backside buried in my coat.
Dear ∇, I am an instrument broken by the sigh.
Any solitude for me may come, I won't have X.
Only by doing so would my life be as rich as primary colors.
But I am a caravan.
I am a caravan.”⁷ (Yi Sang 이상 2010 [1931a]: 30).

⁷ “—△은 나의 AMOUREUSE 이다.

▽이여씨름에서이겨본경험은몇번이나되느냐.
▽이여보아하니외투속에파묻힌등덜미밖에없고나.
▽이여나는그호흡에부서진악기로다
나에게여하한고독은찾아올지라도나는XX하지아니할것이다.
오직그러함으로씨름만나의생에는원색과같이풍부하도다.
그런데나는캐러번이라고.
그런데나는캐러번이라고.” (이상 2010 [1931a]: 30).

The poem begins with the phrase “△ is my lover (AMOURUSE).” Therefore, △ represents a symbol of one’s lover, and ∇ means the opposite of △. When you look at the relationship between these two, you can realize that ∇ represents something the speaker doesn’t love. He makes fun of ∇ for losing in wrestling. Furthermore, he connects ∇’s experience and his own situation in the verse “I am an instrument broken by the sigh.” Thus, through these verses and a metaphor of ∇ as a snake in another poem ∇의 유혈 (∇-ui yu-hee; ∇’s Play), it is possible to infer that ∇ refers to the genitalia. Furthermore, it is obvious that wrestling in this poem means sexual intercourse, so ∇ may represent an improperly functioning penis. Therefore, △ indicates a properly functioning penis that can sexually satisfy a woman, while ∇ indicates sexual impotence whereby an erection is not forthcoming due to a nervous breakdown. Accordingly, the verse “your backside buried in my coat” refers to the genitalia just buried in clothing because it is not ready to have sex. Furthermore, “sigh” can be considered a metaphor for the speaker’s disappointment with his physical condition. Furthermore, the verse “I’m an instrument broken by the sigh” can be interpreted as a metaphor for loss of sexual function because his ∇ cannot make a woman cry with pleasure through sexual intercourse.

However, the speaker vows that he won’t have X. Here, it is easy to infer that X refers to sexual intercourse. What’s interesting is the speaker’s attitude that rationalizes the current situation, where his sexual ability is insufficient and sexual relationships are impossible, as a choice of one’s own will rather than rejection by others. Moreover, the speaker refers to himself as a caravan, which is his identity and does not fit the situation of not having sex, as the speaker’s attitude evokes a somewhat skeptical atmosphere. Thus, what does “caravan” mean? A caravan is a group of people with camels or horses traveling together on a long journey through the desert. However, a single definition only cannot help us read the symbolism of the caravan riding camels. Therefore, deducing the specific concept of the caravan in the poem requires looking up another text from Yi Sang’s literature. Thus, I cite a part of his novel *저도 의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; The Dark Chamber on the Map*), in which Yi Sang describes a “camel”:

“He likes camels that look like trunks. A camel gobbles up white papers. It swallows bills. Whatever you write down, whatever you order, the camel quickly chews the piece as if it were standing in front of a mailbox. However, he doesn’t want camels to have such obscene letters.

The camel doesn't know that having such letters would eventually make its body thin, so he wanted to write a letter with a pencil telling it to spit out the letters quickly, but the camel doesn't know anything about the pain."⁸ (Yi Sang 이 상 2013 [1932]: 26).

The above quote describes the camel as an animal that eats white paper, bills, and obscene letters. Lee Kyoung Hoon 이경훈 (2014: 322) explains that the obscene letter presented in Yi Sang's text means a condom. As a result of this researcher's explanation and the fact that the camel's humps resemble a woman's breasts and it receives money, it is possible to conclude that the camel represents a prostitute. Thus, a caravan with many camels represents a man with lots of sexual desire. Accordingly, the poem's title, *The Sharp-temper Fat Triangle*, can be interpreted as a penis (▽) that does not function due to syphilis even though he has a strong libido-Eros (an instinct for self-preservation). In this way, romance in Yi Sang's literature is based on a pathological body and tragedy.

On the other hand, in Yi Sang's work, impotence leads to the blocking of senses. Referring to the description of the room presented in the novel *Wings*, the speaker's room has no windows, unlike his wife's room. In addition, in the story, he has to go through his wife's room to get to his own, which means that when he comes out of his own room, his wife's room appears. In other words, since there is no means of interaction with the outside world in his room, he can only see the outside through his wife. This is because only the wife earns money and her room has doors and windows connected to the outside world. Furthermore, these doors and windows can be said to be related to the wife's economic skills because it generally requires money to afford windows in a room. However, he has lost his ability to spend money because he doesn't earn it. He even hates giving his attention to the outside world out of laziness. In this way, he isolates and confines himself from society in a windowless room, actively refusing to contact others and disconnecting himself. The following is the text cited in the novel *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*).

⁸ “그는 트렁크와 같은 낙타를 좋아하였다. 백지를 먹는다. 지폐를 먹는다. 무엇이라고 적어서 무엇을 주문하는지 어떤 여자에게의 답장이 여자의 손이 포스트 앞에서 한 듯이 봉투째 먹힌다. 낙타는 그런 음란한 편지를 먹지 말았으면. 머으면 괴로움이 몸의 살을 마르게 하리라는 것을 낙타는 모르니 하는 수 없다는 것을 생각한 그는 연필로 백지에 그것을 열른 배알아 놓으라는 편지를 써서 먹이고 싶었으나 낙타는 괴로움을 모른다.” (이 상 2013 [1932]: 26).

“I threw out the mirror, got close to my wife’s dressing table, and looked at various beauty products lined up side by side. They are more attractive than anything else in the world. I picked one of them, pulled the plug out, put it on my nose, and smelled it. As I inhale those exotic, sensual scents, my eyes get closed. It is the smell of my wife. I close the bottle and think. Which part of her smelled like this? I’m not sure. Why? Because my wife’s smell would be the sum of these scents in these various bottles. (...) But I don’t actively think about it, even when I think about it in my bed. I didn’t have to. (...) I like to be lazy like the lazy animal rather than working as a decent social worker or hearing news from my wife. If it’s possible, I want to take off this meaningless human face”⁹ (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936b]: 80–82).

According to the above quote, he perceives his wife by smell, not sight. This expresses the speaker’s self-deception; by smelling his wife’s scent, he identifies her with himself and tries to possess her. In this process, he removes his visual sense by closing his eyes. However, he fails to acquire her overall image. This is because while sight means observations and judgments that grasp reality, smell is a sense of imagination that does not require actual reality. Therefore, in this novel, impaired vision indicates a weakening of his ability to grasp reality, which leads to impaired cognitive functions and a loss of control over the situation. In other words, one’s perception that can only be sensed by smell represents fragmented individuals who exist only partially in modern Joseon society.

Furthermore, in the literature of Yi Sang, prostitution and syphilis do not only mean entertainment, infection, or sexual impotence. They also refer to the feeling of impotence that accompanies unemployment. As modern times began, the economic unit of Joseon changed from large households to nuclear families. Therefore, the

⁹ “나는 거울을 내던지고 안해의 화장대 앞으로 가까이 가서 나란히 늘어 놓인 고 가지각색의 화장품 병들을 들여다본다. 고것들은 세상의 무엇보다도 매력적이다. 나는 그 중의 하나만을 골라서 가만히 마개를 빼고 병 구멍을 내 코에 갖이다 대이고 숨죽이듯이 가벼운 호흡을 하여 본다. 이국적인 센슈얼한 향기가 페로 스며들면 나는 저절로 스프르 감기는 내 눈을 느낀다. 확실히 안해의 체취의 파편이다. 나는 도로 병마개를 막고 생각해 본다. 안해의 어느 부분에서 요 냄새가 났던가를……. 그러나 그것은 분명치 않다. 왜? 안해의 체취는 요기 늘어 섰는 가지각색의 향기의 합계일 것이니까. (...) 나는 그러나 그런 이불 속의 사색 생활에서도 적극적인 것을 궁리하는 법이 없다. 내게는 그럴 필요가 대체 없었다. (...) 내가 제법 한 사람의 사회인의 자격으로 일을 해보는 것도, 아내에게 사설 듣는 것보다도 나는 가장 게으른 동물처럼 게으른 것이 좋았다. 될 수만 있으면 이 무의미한 인간의 탈을 벗어버리고도 싶었다.” (이상 2013 [1936b]: 80–82).

family could only be maintained when the couple was engaged in economic activities. However, in Yi Sang's novels such as *봉별기* (*Bongbyulgi; The Record from Meeting and Breaking up with Geumhong*), *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*), and *지주회사* (*Jihuhwaesi; A Story of a Spider and a Pig*), only wives make a living through prostitution instead of husbands who are unable to engage in economic activities. As an example, the novel *Wings* (Yi Sang 이상 1936) presents a situation in which the traditional gender roles have been reversed. The man in the novel tries to confirm his position as a spouse by repeatedly referring to the woman as his wife. However, the wife, who sells sex for money, hands him the money she received from her customers instead of affection, sex, or children. Through her behavior, we can realize that she is free from wifely duties or demands through economic activity. Meanwhile, the husband does not spend the money he receives from his wife. This can be interpreted as pursuing his minimum rights as a husband, meaning a rejection of or resistance against transferring one's rights to others. However, he keeps reaffirming his lack of economic capacity or masculinity as he eventually fails to make and spend money. In this way, the concept of impotence and incapacity can be connected to the psychological images of deficiency and pessimism in Yi Sang's novel affects the composition and development of the narrative. Syphilis is not just a cause and symbol of physical pain but also the reason he cannot have mutual communication and express his sympathy with others. Moreover, through the body infected by syphilis, Yi Sang shows that the body is not only the means of satisfaction and pleasure but also the source of pain and distress.

3. Tuberculosis, Consumption, and the Modern Society of Joseon

In Joseon, people started recognizing tuberculosis as a dangerous disease in the 1910s, and the number of tuberculosis patients rapidly increased as modernization progressed. Due to this influence, tuberculosis was illustrated as a representative infectious disease in modern literature in the early 1900s. At the same time, tuberculosis was related to hygiene and fatigue in Joseon's urbanization process. Therefore, for many writers, tuberculosis became a new metaphor and

symbol, indicating Koreans' poor nutritional status and weak immune system at the time (Pyo Jung-Ok 표정옥 2015: 340). In addition, the rapid increase in tuberculosis in the 1930s led many to predict depressing results rather than positive signs of healing. Thus, the symptoms of mental illness and nervous breakdowns in novels published in the 1930s could be another indicator of tuberculosis or related diseases (Pyo Jung-Ok 표정옥 2015: 340).

As a tuberculosis patient, Yi Sang frequently included epic characters suffering from tuberculosis and tuberculosis-related subjects in his works. The following is a partial quote from the text directly describing the symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis in *봉별기* (*Bongbyulgi; The Record from Meeting and Breaking up with Geumhong*), *공포의 기록* (*Gongpo-ui girok; The Record of Fear*), and *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*):

“Back then, it was March. I was twenty-three years old, coughing blood.”¹⁰ (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936d]: 184).

“I know I haven't had a life for some time. The only 'life-like thing' that visits me in fragments is a monster called 'pain'. No matter how often I look for it, no one will understand me. (...) After the second sign of hemoptysis, I think I got to notice how long my life span is left.”¹¹ (Yi Sang 이상 2004 [1937]: 317).

“My complexion dried up as I turned pale. As I can see, day by day, my energy has decreased. Bones popped up over the skin due to a lack of nutrition. I couldn't stand the pain here and there without lying around dozens of times overnight.”¹² (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936b]: 83–84).

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by tuberculosis bacteria that mainly infects the lungs, but it can also affect other organs. However, infection with tuberculosis bacteria does not immediately

¹⁰ “스물세 살이오—3월이오—각혈(咯血)이다.” (이상 2013 [1936d]: 184).

¹¹ “생활, 내가 이미 오래전부터 생활을 갖지 못한 것을 나는 잘 안다. 단편적으로 나를 찾아오는 '생활 비슷한 것'도 오직 '고통'이란 요괴뿐이다. 아무리 찾아도 이것을 알아줄 사람은 한 사람도 없다. (...) 제 2 차의 각혈이 있는 후 나는 으스스푸레하게나마 내 수명에 대한 개념을 파악하였다고 스스로 믿고 있다.” (이상 2004 [1937]: 317).

¹² “나는 안색이 여지없이 창백해 가면서 말라 들어갔다. 나날이 눈에 보이듯이 기운이 줄어들었다. 영양 부족으로 하여 몸뚱이 곳곳이 뼈가 불쑥불쑥 내어밀었다. 하룻밤 사이에도 수십 차를 돌쳐놓지 않고는 여기저기가 배겨서 나는 배겨낼 수가 없었다.” (이상 2013 [1936b]: 83–84).

develop into the disease. Instead, tuberculosis occurs when the carrier's immunity weakens due to extreme fatigue, stress, and nutritional imbalances once the virus is lurking in the carrier's body. Therefore, unless it worsens, it is similar to a cold. However, if the disease becomes active tuberculosis, the patient goes through its characteristic symptoms such as hemoptysis, shortness of breath, fever, helplessness, fatigue, weight loss, and severe coughing (Kim Sung-Kyu 김성규 1997: 711; The Korea National Tuberculosis Association 대한결핵협회 2013: 42). Accordingly, Yi Sang repeatedly described these major symptoms of tuberculosis in various works. The following are excerpts from *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*), *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*), and *지주회시* (*Jijuhwaesi; A Story of a Spider and a Pig*).

"I overly spent every day lazy for no reason, and everything was just fine."¹³ (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936b]: 79).

"When he begins to lie down at four o'clock, he will rest until five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten. He is a funny guy—Yi Sang."¹⁴ (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1932]: 21).

"Let's see how lazy a person can be. (...) Even if it's noisy, you must pretend you don't know it and be lazy. I'll live my life being lazy, and I'll die."¹⁵ (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936f]: 56–57).

As mentioned above, Yi Sang's work has a generally lethargic and melancholy tone. Readers who first encounter his works may consider the writer (or the main character, represented by Yi) as a man enervated by slothful habits. However, continuous sleeping without going outside can be a symptom of depression, which is common among tuberculosis patients. One study found significant depression-related factors—such as gender, age, living standards, mental support, and lung function—in a group of people with active TB. Females, young age, low living standards, lack of mental support, and poor lung function are also found to be influential factors in patients' depression

¹³ “그냥 그날그날을 그저 까닭 없이 편둥편둥 게을르고만 있으면 만사는 그만이었던 것이다.” (이상 2013 [1936b]: 79).

¹⁴ “네 시에 누우면 다섯, 여섯, 일곱, 여덟, 아홉 그리고 아홉 시에서 열 시까지 리상—나는 리상이라는 한 우스운 사람을 안다.” (이상 2013 [1932]: 21).

¹⁵ “그저 한없이 게으른 것—사람 노릇을 하는 체 대체 어디 얼마나 기껏 게으를 수 있나 좀 해보자. (...) 시끄러워도 그저 모른 체하고 게으르기만 하면 된다. 살고 게으르고 죽고—” (이상 2013 [1936f]: 56–57).

(Seo Hae-sook et al. 서해속 외 2012: 160). Therefore, except for gender, it is safe to assume that Yi Sang had a high depressive factor.

Yi Sang got tuberculosis at the age of 21, when the disease was considered incurable. At that time, the perception and medical treatments for tuberculosis were much worse than they are now. Hence, the writer would have suffered from enormous fear of death. For him, a tuberculosis diagnosis was tantamount to a death sentence. Thus, he compared his life with a sick body to *hard labor* (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1932]: 22). *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*), in particular, Yi Sang's representative novel disclosed his resentment and fear of active tuberculosis. Below is a partial quote from the corresponding text.

“If he dies in his grave to die once more, he must die once more, so if he dies again, he must die continuously, so even if it is the same if he dies once or twice, he intends to die many times, so he has died countless of times, but it never ends. Lord, did you abandon him? Oh lord, why would you let him die again after his death?”¹⁶ (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1932]: 28).

In the quote above, the speaker repeatedly mentions “death” as often as ten times in a sentence. For him, death is not a one-shot punishment but a punishment that will never end. As a result, the speaker repeatedly experiences death in his mental world. He just can't help thinking about death, even assuming he's already dead and trapped in his grave. He despairs that no matter how hard he dies, the death will not eventually end. Thus, suicide is a meaningless act; it would only speed up his countless deaths. As such, the disease not only made the writer feel lethargic but also instilled fear enough to cause a nervous breakdown. The following is a description of the behavior of the speaker and K in the novel.

“Her eyes were so red that he sat watching the woman's eyes completely change, and her heart became fierce like a lion, but he didn't change his facial expression; it means that he didn't care if she bit her

¹⁶ “그는 무덤 속에서 다시 한 번 죽어버리려고 죽으면 그래도 또 한 번은 더 죽어야 하게 되고 하여서 또 죽으면 또 죽어야 되고 또 죽어도 또 죽어야 되고 하여서 그는 힘들여 한번 몹시 죽어보아도 마찬가지로지만 그래도 그는 여러 번 여러 번 죽어보았으나 결국 마찬가지로에서 끝나는 끝나지 않는 것이었다. 하느님은 그를 내어버려두십니까. 그래 하느님은 죽고 나서 또 죽게 내어버려두십니까.” (이상 2013 [1932]: 28).

lips with her teeth and make it bleed, or moans at him like a thin, long sound from the phonograph. The woman cries. (...) She raises her tearful face, approaches him, pulls up her sleeves, and says, "Look, isn't my arms too skinny?" (...) However, he doesn't know how skinny her arms are. So then, the woman cries bitterly."¹⁷ (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1932]: 31-32).

As you can see, the woman is at the end of her rope and expresses her pain to K. The woman yells, curses, and cries over her sadness, resentment, and fear. She unleashes all kinds of negative emotions on K. However, K responds indifferently to such reactions. He does not truly sympathize with her. Rather than empathizing, he keeps his distance and breaks off emotional relationships with her.

Who are these people? The woman can be said to be a psychological projector that exists in the consciousness and unconsciousness of Yi Sang. First, the woman caught in the fear of death because her body is getting thinner represents the writer's instinct and desire for life. Moreover, she doesn't just lie down and sob when she's sick. Instead, she actively speaks out about her situation. The woman shows that Yi Sang's desire to live was intense. However, there was no cure for tuberculosis in Joseon at that time. There was a lack of awareness of tuberculosis and no medical knowledge of the causes of or treatments for the disease. Thus, he was in a problematic situation where he couldn't do anything because he didn't know how to fix it. He considered it reality and his fate. He had no choice but to accept the impending death despite not wanting it. The writer criticizes the helpless society through K's unwitting reaction to the woman. K discourages the woman's will to live through indifference, distinct from rational judgment. He disregards the woman's intention to live and tells her to give up without putting forward any convincing reasons. K does not understand women's desire and soon blocks women's hysteria and

¹⁷ “눈가없이 대단히 벌게지면 여자의 눈은 대단히 성질이 달라지면 마음은 사자와 같이 사나워져 가는 것을 그가 가만히 지키고 앉아 있노라면 여자는 그에게 별짓을 다 하여도 그는 변하려는 얼굴의 표정의 먹살을 짝 붙들고 다시는 놓지 않으니까 여자는 성이 나서 이빨로 입술을 짝 깨물어서 피를 내고 축음기와 같은 국어로 그에게 향하여 가느다랗고 길게 막 퍼부어도 그에게는 아무렇지도 않다. 여자는 운다. ... 여자는 곧 눈물이 글썽글썽한 얼굴을 들어 그에게로 주면서 팔뚝을 훌훌 걷으면서 자 보십시오 이렇게 마르지 않았습니까 하고. ... 그에게는 얼마큼에서 얼마큼이나 말랐는지 도무지 알 수가 없어서 분한 듯이 여자는 막 운다.” (이상 2013 [1932]: 31-32).

cuts them off. In this respect, K represents Joseon society, indifferent to alienated and sick patients.

As such, the novel *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*) illustrates the artist's mentality and depicts the modern society of Joseon that ignores the underprivileged. Moreover, the sick body is compared to a weary body, as TB is related to consumptive images. Thus, in Yi Sang's narrative, tuberculosis is a nomenclature that negatively symbolizes the violence of modern Joseon society under the Japanese Empire, as its old term (consumption) symbolizes such negative symptoms. Thus, the body coughing up blood from pulmonary tuberculosis conveys an image of solitude and distress.

In short, the writer does not consider TB a personal tragedy for himself. In his writings, Yi Sang also criticizes the government for labeling tuberculosis a social disease. His criticism can be found in the transformation of a woman appearing in *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*) in his poem *흥행물천사* (*Heunghaengmul cheonsa, The Angel of Entertainment*). The text below is an excerpt from that poem:

“The orthopedic surgeon plucked the woman's eyes and turned them into an old clown's. A woman with clown's eyes smiles when she does not and laughs even when she cries. (...) The doctor takes the whip to the angel with a whip that looks like an angel's snake. The angel laughs in pain. She becomes mushy like a rubber balloon. The angel drops her shoes and runs away. She throws more than ten nets at a time. (...) The angel chews the full moon into pieces and gives a feast. People fat as pigs swallow up those pieces and spread the smell of chocolate.”¹⁸ (Yi Sang 이상 2010 [1931b]: 41–43).

Here, the surgeon representing the power of the government takes away the creativity that enables her to look at things, including reality. Thus, the woman who had complained about Joseon society's deficiencies in the dark chamber becomes an angel of entertainment; she now belongs to the realm of death. Moreover, as a victim of a

¹⁸“정형외과는여자의눈을찢어버리고형사形使없이늘어빠진극예상의눈으로만 들고만것이다. 여자는실컷울어도또한웃지아니하여도웃는것이다. (...) 천사의뱀과 같은회초리로천사를때린다. 천사는웃는다, 천사는고무풍선과같이부풀어진다. (...) 천사는신발을떨어뜨리고도망한다. 천사는한꺼번에 10 개이 상의뿔을 내던진다. (...) 여자는만월을잘게잘게씹어서향연을베낀다. 사람들은그것을먹고 돼지같이비만하는초콜렛냄새를방산하는것이다.” (이상 2010 [1931b]: 41–43).

grievous injustice, she condemns Joseon's violence and social irregularities and takes grotesque vengeance on society. In particular, the angel chewing the full moon into pieces with her mouth full of blood (chocolate) and feeding the bunch of people conveys the image of an infectious disease. In short, the poem expresses the writer's loathing of modern Joseon society, which dismisses patients as abnormal.

Nevertheless, why did Yi Sang criticize modern Joseon society so much? First, to understand Yi Sang's position when dealing with Joseon society, it is necessary to look at the sanitary city project in colonial Joseon at that time. In 1911, all hygiene-related tasks became the jurisdiction of the Japanese police and the Japanese Empire issued the Infectious Disease Prevention Order upon Joseon in 1915 (Jung Keunsik 정근식 2011: 233–241). Furthermore, the implementation of 조선시가지계획령 Joseon Planning Ordinance for Urban Areas in 1934 led to systematic developments considering hygiene and urban planning (Kim Heungsoon 김흥순 2007: 156). In particular, in the 1930s, when Yi Sang was actively writing, the Japanese Empire pushed for the removal of slums in Seoul and the expulsion of urban vagrants as one of Joseon's urban development plans (Kim Baek-Yung 김백영 2005: 87–88).

However, this emphasis on cleanliness and a hygienic environment became a legal regulation for colonial order stability rather than spreading knowledge of modern medicine (Kim Eun-jeong 김은정 2012: 292–293). Furthermore, pro-Japanese intellectuals advocated hygiene education and mental education in Joseon as part of the enlightenment movement. A case in point is 이광수 (Lee Kwang-soo), who advocated 민족개조사상 the national reformism in his poem 너는 청춘(青春)이다 (*Neo-nun chungchun-ida; You Are Young*). In the poem, Lee identifies himself as a writer and doctor, criticizing “the complaints that cannot be digested and the sentimentalism of tuberculosis of a nervous wreck” (Lee Kwang-soo 이광수 1921: 97). Through this assertion, he emphasized hygienic individuals who are disease-free and mentally healthy.

While Lee Kwang-soo's ego creates and spreads self-consciousness by discriminating himself from others, Yi Sang's ego does not distinguish him from others. Yi Sang defines himself as “an indigent patient” and “a beggar”, and embraces others far from the knowledge system (Lee Kyoung Hoon 이경훈 2014: 316–323). In short, the artist includes him in the domain of the underprivileged. As such, Yi Sang spreads sentimentalism, implying sickness through his

literature. Additionally, with the eyes of a clown (nervous wreck), he resists the hygiene discourse advocated by Lee Kwang-soo and criticizes the Japanese colonial power. For instance, the writer's resistance to repressive and violent sanitary discourse is directly suggested through the description in *조춘점묘* (*Jochun-jeonmyyo*; *An Announcement in the Early Spring*):

“However, if it is possible to have a hygienic world without beggars, sick people, or criminals, when everything disturbing to our eyes is completely gone, the earth would be a dull world, boredom itself. Therefore, philanthropists will have no way of satisfying their vanity. All doctors, lawyers, and courts will be wasted. Every day is just the same in a row, and this kind of world would be a waste. If one person accidentally gets a boil in this mild spring weather, he will immediately kill himself to be clean in front of all the people in the world. Without realizing it, the sense of morality of such a world will demand him to do so.”¹⁹ (Yi Sang 이상 2010 [1936e]: 199–200).

While Lee Kwang-soo insisted on eradicating social ills and pointing to tuberculosis patients as the cause of social problems, Yi Sang's statement satirizes that society itself is responsible for the evils of colonial Joseon society, not the sick. Thus, Yi Sang adheres to his identity as a patient to accuse the Japanese Empire of its tyranny and absurdity by illustrating his ill body. Furthermore, the suffering body here refers to the modern society of colonial Joseon under Japanese imperialism. In other words, the ill body symbolizes the modern society of Joseon, which was impoverished by the violent oppression of the Japanese colonial rule, not just the individual's sick body.

¹⁹ “그러나 또 생각해 보면 걸인도 없고 병자도 없고 범죠힌도 없고 하여간 오늘 우리 눈에 거슬리는 온갖 것이 다 깨끗이 없어져 버린 타지마당 같은 말쑥한 세상은 만일 그런 것이 지상에 실현할 수 있다면 지상은 그야말로 심심하기 짝이 없는 권태 그것과 같은 세상일 것이다. 그러니까 자선가의 허영심도 채울 길이 없을 것이고 의사도 변호사도 아니 재판소도 온갖 것이 다 소용이 없어질 것이고 따라서 그날이 그날 같고 이럴 것이니 이래서야 참 정말 속수무책으로 바야흐로 할 일이 없어질 것이다. 이런 춘풍태탕한 세월 속에서 어찌다가 우연히 부스럼이라도 좀 나는 사람이 하나 있다면 참과 이것을 이기지 못하여 천하만민 앞에서 아주 깨끗하게 일신을 자결할 것이고 또 그런 세상의 도덕이 그러기를 무언중에 요구해 놓아둘 것이다.” (이상 2010 [1936e]: 199–200).

4. Conclusion: Living in the Modern Society of Joseon as a Patient

To understand Yi Sang's literature, it is clearly necessary to explore the motifs of the disease underlying his literary world. Nevertheless, we should analyze not only the disease itself but also the body suffering from it. Thus, I suggest that Yi Sang's literature is based on a sick body experiencing modern times. In other words, in Yi Sang's literature, the concept of modernity is perceived through the body. Furthermore, he has experienced a body suffering from diseases that rampantly spread in the early 1900s and reveals the phenomena and nature, perceptions and practices, both conscious and unconscious, process, and reality of modern society. Specifically, Yi Sang shows his identity as a patient and a sex buyer, and he experiences and criticizes the large body of modern society, that is, the society represented as one giant organism. To discuss such topics, this paper debates the body discourse that resisted the sanitary discourse during the Japanese colonial period by analyzing the disease and sick body depicted in Yi Sang's literature.

First, this paper explores the author's consciousness and unconsciousness implied by syphilis in his literature. This paper specifically discusses his libido and attachment to his life by analyzing the case of combining prostitution and syphilis in his works. Thus, this topic differentiates itself from existing studies by focusing on the artist's death impulse and the image of death in his literature. Therefore, this study presents a new perspective on understanding Yi Sang's literature that has been relatively overlooked by revealing the writer's attachment to life, which appears as a sexual impulse (Eros). Moreover, the study reveals the author's guilt about his inability to function properly due to syphilis, which turned out to be a pang of guilt for failing to fulfill his duty to produce future generations and earn money. Furthermore, this paper identifies the author's autistic characteristics by capturing the disconnection from others described in his works. As a result of the analysis, the study finds that syphilis is not just a cause and symbol of physical pain but also the reason for the inability in actual communication and exchange with others.

In the second topic, I examined the concept of the body in modern times by describing how the writer implements the body with tuberculosis. In many modern pieces of literature, syphilis and tuberculosis are considered social diseases suffered by modern society.

However, no one actively adheres to their identity as a sick or infectious individual like Yi Sang. In response, this paper discusses the body discourse of Yi Sang, who resisted the hygiene discourse of the society of that time by sticking to his identity as a patient and insisting on considering himself among a neglected class of people.

For the discussion above, this paper reads the texts by referring to various works by Yi Sang. To understand his esoteric world of literature and literary images, an intertextual approach is essential. Through such analysis, it is possible to capture the psychological projections and poetic images that constitute the writer's literary world.

In conclusion, the body presented in Yi Sang's literature was a site of illness and a representation of a sick society. Through his literature, the author deplores the evils of the hygiene discourse advocated by colonial Joseon society under the Japanese Empire; that is, Joseon was the perfect breeding ground for the virus and the Japanese Empire to occupy. For Yi Sang, modern Joseon society was a place that neither understood neglected people nor sympathized with them. Thus, he established an independent literary world that reflects his critical reasoning for modern Joseon society.

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