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The *Gisaeng's* Identities Moving through the Classifications in Art in the Colonial Joseon

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I. Introduction

> What is *yegi* [artistic *gisaeng*]? It refers to a woman who, upon being invited to a banquet, performs music and dance, adding a touch of elegance to the banquet, enhancing its liveliness··· How could *yegi* be reduced to the mere possession of a prodigal son? Song and dance are art, and at least we are artists(Jongheum Song, Gyeongu Bak, and Chundong Yu, 2009, p. 241).[1)]

The above quote is an excerpt from *Janghan*(literally long grief), a magazine published in 1927 by *gisaengs*, or female entertainers. Here a *gisaeng* named Ok-hyang Yun writes "the artistic *gisaengs*' position and awareness," discussing the precarious status of *gisaeng* as artists. The concept of art introduced into colonial Joseon from the West had a profound impact on the ecosystem of dance and music professionals of the time. The *gisaeng* group, in particular, performed in a complex relationship with the modern concept and institutional system of arts. Their specific social position has a profound impact on whether their dance is recognized as art.

Scholars investigating *gisaeng*'s performance illuminate not only their artistic significance but also their limitation involving sexual service. For example, In-sook Kang's discussion on changes of Korean traditional dances addresses how Japanese colonial policies prevented *gisaeng*'s traditional dance from entering to modern official institutions like education system. She suggests that Korean

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1) Because many Korean authors share a common family name making it difficult to identify someone by surname alone, both family and given names are used in all references to avoid confusion.

traditional arts had been left in a very poor state because they have failed to integrate with the modern education system and have been left to the logic of the market without state protection(In-sook Kang, 2005, p. 6). However, the market logic she pointed out as a negative element of arts has a double-edged sword in the modern concept of arts, so it needs to be examined more closely. Norbert Elias points out that a free-market system is the social system that allows artists to freely express their creativity emancipated from patronage system(Elias, 1999, pp. 22-57). My previous research also examines the formation of the concept of fine art and the process by which dance was incorporated into the modern concept of art, pointing out public support of the state as well as the free art market system as key factors(Sue In Kim, 2017, pp. 72-73). To understand the position of *gisaeng* in relation to the modern concept of art, one must consider gender and colonial discourses, along with state protection and market system in colonial Joseon. In particular, the structural specificity of the field of dance makes the performance of *gisaeng* more complex in relation to modern concept of arts, at the core of which lies the ideology of choreography achieved by free individual creation. Younghee Kim(2004; 2006) discusses that *gisaengs* produced many new dances, but they were "folklorized court dance"(2004, p.232) and aimed to meet public demand(2004, p. 226-228). Following Young-hee Kim's discussion, I elaborate on the point that this type of *gisaeng* creative dances had not been recognized as originality, which is the basis of modern concepts of art. New productions of *gisaeng* dances did not name the individual creators who were the source of their originality. Furthermore, they were perceived as improvements or modifications, not creations from within.

Meanwhile scholars like Do Hee Kwon(2003; 2014), Chan-seung Park(2015), Hyun-Ju Lee (2007), and Soo Jin Jung(2009) discuss *gisaeng* in terms of gender and colonial policies, their works focus more on general *gisaeng* practice or their music. Jin-A Lee's study, which examines the existence of *gisaeng* through the lens of colonialism and gender discourse, also focuses on the profession of singers, leaving out any discussion of dancing(Jin-A Lee, 2022, p. 49). In this article, I ask how modern concept of arts and institutions functioned against *gisaengs* becoming an art from sociological perspective. As dancing women, *gisaengs* were sites where colonial, gendered, and institutional control over the body was inscribed. Therefore, a discussion focusing on dance would contribute an approach to an undertheorized point in music-centered analyses.

I examine the ecosystem of *gisaeng* dance practice to scrutinize where its characteristics clash with modern notions of art. In particular, I focus on how the dichotomy of art and craft intertwined with the double standards of colonial modernity affected the dance of *gisaengs* as colonial women. By grappling with how the classification of culture has been made, this paper takes a sociological approach. In particular, I find Howard Becker's discussion significant since he elaborates how an art world strives to distinguish art from craft, commercial work, and folk cultures by treating the label of art or artist as "an honorific title" (Becker, 1982, pp. 36-37). After the feudal system collapsed in

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Korea, the new and foreign concept of "honorable" artist was sometimes attached to and other times detached from *gisaeng* with various parties' interests. Mapping these movements, I argue that the classification of dance is a social and historical construction.

This article examines *gisaeng* during the Japanese colonial period, focusing on their social positions as art creator. First, I discuss how colonial modernization influenced the dance and life of *gisaeng* in two ways: modern concept of fine arts and modern institutions. Then I explore how *gisaengs* were alienated from the fine arts in two aspects: culturalism of the colonial policy and tourism industry. This study presents a sociological approach to dance by examining the social conditions that affect the recognition of dance as an art form.

II. Modernization of *Gisaeng* Practice

Before the colonial period, *gisaeng* belonged to the government as official servants since 1650 and provided banquet entertainments. In 1895, the Gabo Reform officially abolished the class system of Joseon dynasty. From that year forward, all *gisaeng* became nominally free from the class system. Thereafter, the *gisaeng* could no longer belonged to the palace or government offices, and had to devise their own living by presenting their performance to general public audience. Although *gisaeng* performed in 1902 when there was a national ceremony of celebrating the 40th anniversary of King Kojong's reign (r.1863-1907), this kind of case was not continuous.

In 1908 the Japanese police promulgated the "*Gisaeng* Regulation Order", which required all *gisaeng* and other sex workers to register with the Japanese police and be affiliated with an authorized *gisaeng johap* or 'guild' (Jung-Kim, 2006, p. 212). Insuk Lee as well as Kongmin Yi observes that the aim of this Order was to manage the *gisaeng* group through a *gisaeng* license and to collect tax revenues more effectively(Kongmin Yi, 2005, p.63). Indeed, *gisaeng* guilds presented performances in order to earn their expense.[2] As the colonial power instigated, *gisaeng's* activities revolved around profit-making organizations, which regarded traditional repertories profitable. In this way, the application of the modern administrative system to *gisaeng* organizations largely operated within the capitalist grammar of profit and taxation. Beginning with this 1908 Order, the practice of *gisaeng* was implemented within modern institutions such as schools, research institutes, exhibition, recitals, presentations, competitions, associations, and broadcasting stations.

2) *Gisaeng* Performance. (1910, February 22). ***Daehan Minbo***. The newspaper articles cited in this paper are from the Japanese colonial period, making it difficult to identify the author. Therefore, the article title is listed first instead of the author's name.

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1. Modern Concept of Arts and *Gisaeng* Practice: Autonomous Artistic Creation vs. Commercial Strategy

To adapt to the new art distribution system, *gisaengs* refined their existing dance repertoire, and in some cases, even created their own pieces. However, these changes were not sufficient to achieve the concept of fine art based on the autonomous creativity of individual artists.

The first thing I want to point out is that the *gisaengs* did not simply stick to traditional dance repertoire, even though traditional dance repertoire was important to *gisaeng* as their mainstay (Moon-Ho Rhee, 2007, p. 213). In December 1907, a charity performance for Kyeongsung orphanage presented ten dances, seven out of which were court dances.[3] In 1910, a private *gisaeng* institution "Institution for Korean Classical Music" was established to train first-grade *gisaeng*. Its curriculum included classical songs (*kagok* and *sijo*), traditional instruments (*Keomungo* and *Kayagum*), and classical court dance like *Song of Nightingale* (*Chunaengjeon*). Insuk Lee contends that "learning such a formal dance and classical songs enhanced their reputation as the highest *gisaeng*, even though the hierarchy system had already collapsed by this time" (Insuk Lee, 2010, pp. 78-79).

However, *gisaeng's* performance in the commercial stage attempted various modification on the traditional forms. Younghee Kim contends that theaters were on the cutting edge of culture and did not have to be restricted by tradition(Younghee Kim, 2006, p. 65). However, I point out that *gisaeng* dances' modification was not yielded from individuals' creative vision. Paying audiences' applause or boo determined performer's direction. The condition of a commercial theater was more of a competitive strategy than an artist's free creative vision in *gisaeng* dance creation.

As the theater industry developed, *gisaeng* should expand their repertories at least two ways: reformatting court dances and adopting folk dances. First, court dances embraced lay audience's response. Although *gisaeng's* performance of court dances was continued in pro-profit theaters, not all dances were prospered. Since the last court ceremonial performance of 1902, many court dances had to wait in dark until the 1915 Joseon Industrial exhibition.[4] Some court dances frequently succeed in drawing audiences and achieving public favor.

For instance, the *Dance of Hangjang* was a dance drama, originating in the epic of the Feast of Hong Gate which refers to a conspiracy to kill Liu Bang (劉邦), who later became the first king of the Han kingdom (漢). This dance included a splendid sword fighting dance, during which one of the dancers planned to stab the target. However, Fan Kuai, a general of Liu Bang intercepted and danced with brilliant skills so that Liu Bang could escape from the scene while everyone's eyes were drawn to Fan Kuai. This dance had several merits for public reception. The story was a well-known classic with

3) About 100 gisaengs raised funds for the Gyeongseong Orphanage. (1907, December 24.). ***Daehan Maeil Shinbo***.

4) A Competitive Exhibition of Joseon Products. (1915, September 10). ***Maeil Shinbo***.

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much suspense and thrill. Its prescribed conversations as verbal explanation would have promoted audiences' comprehension of the dance. The dance was less prescribed by documented texts of the court so that dancers could present their best techniques without being restricted by a fixed protocol(Sue In Kim, 2011, p. 94). While this dance was frequently performed by *gisaeng* through 1907 to 1917, a couple of different titles were attached to this dance. Among those was *Dance of Fankuai*, after the character Fan Kuai. Younghee Kim points out that *Dance of Fankuai* was good enough to be an independent piece and made as a repertory separated from *Dance of Hangjang* (Younghee Kim, 2006, p. 138). I suggest that this variation illustrates public influence over a traditional practice. A review of this dance in 1913 wrote how thousands of audiences gave thunderous applause when finally, Fan Kuai appeared on stage. The public sentiment favored the particular character among a dozen of characters. Sensitive to public opinions rather than to traditional principle, theaters attempted various experiments and reformation of old customs.

The reformation of court dances was accelerated by competition among theaters. Since the first modern in-door theater *Hyeobyulsa* was opened in 1902, several other theaters were opened during 1907-1908. After the first theater having presented *gisaeng's* music and dance for about five years, following theaters competed to draw a paying public by presenting something that had not been seen before. In 1908, a news article introducing a *Gwangmudae* theater's performance wrote that it reformed all repertories and expanded them.

> [This performance] renewed all repertories, represented miraculous events of all times, expanded old customs in order to establish appreciable presentation which would raise emotions and pleasure to gentle peoples' sentiment and discerning eyes…please haste to come and enjoy it.[5)]

This theater sought taste of general public, which was diverse, unspecified, and anonymous citizens, by presenting profitable repertories. The dances presented in this performance consisted of three court dances, six folk dances, and four newly created dances.

A review of 1912 performance of theater *Danseongsa* revealed a hint of what were the demands of audience. The reviewer approved traditional music and dance, including traditional instruments like *geomungo* and *gayagum*, *butterfly dance*, and *peach dance*. He agreed that they should be developed since they were national tradition. However, there should be some modifications.

> However, the rhythms of accompanists were too slow and made the audience bored. Thus, even old customs would better be speed up for the sake of audience, since it was the biggest shortcoming.[6)]

5) Special large Advertisement. (1908, May 28). ***Hwangseong Sinmun***.
6) Theatrical World. (1912, April 26). ***Maeil Shinbo***.

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This review cites audience boredom as the reason for the need for a change in dance.

Second, *gisaeng's* performance broadened its repertory to include folk genres.[7] In the field of dance, dances from Buddhist ritual, shaman ritual, and party house entertainment came into theater performance. However, these kinds of reform or recreation were not recognized as modern artistic creation, because they lacked disinterestedness, which was the core of aesthetic autonomy, but rather were largely by commercial pressures. My previous research points out that in the West, in order for dance to be established as a fine art, it had to break away from the tastes and demands of the mass audience and utilize the ideology of choreography achieved by free individual creation(Sue In Kim, 2017, p. 73). Conversely, no individual author was mentioned in the creation or recreation of the *gisaeng* dance performance. They remain in the position of customary practitioners or public demonstrators. Their performance focused on meeting the tastes and needs of the audience and guests.

> Anyway, as for me, I sell songs and dances to many customers, so it's my job to sing or dance to the customer's liking, no matter what they request...Some customers confuse *gisaeng* with prostitutes, which is a common problem (Jongheum Song, Gyeongu Bak, and Chundong Yu, 2009, p. 117).

This excerpt by an anonymous *gisaeng* (一妓生) from the *gisaeng* magazine *Janghan* explicates how *gisaeng* performance prioritized customers' demand over the performer's creative urge or vision. In these circumstances, the creative methodologies of artists, such as personal experimentation, challenge, deconstruction, innovation, and choreography, which are at the core of the concept of modern artistic dance, were difficult to demonstrate in the performances of *gisaeng*.

2. Modern Institutions of Arts and *Gisaeng* Practice

Newly imported mass media and entertainment had a double-edged impact on *gisaeng's* performance. Until *gisaeng* guilds were organized in 1913, *gisaeng* usually worked under exclusive contracts with theaters. The theater industry was busy with importing new items of mass entertainment from abroad. They were pioneers of the lasted fashion, including revue and western dance. Although revue was a form of popular entertainment and mass culture, which would be regarded as lowbrow in west, its globality and modernity provided a higher status to its practitioners. Newspaper stories referred to performers of the Japanese entertainment group as "actor" or "actress," distinguishing from traditional entertainers. Introducing a Korean performer of the Japanese

7) Insuk Lee contends that this expansion was caused by the Special Order for Koreans No. 7 in 1912, which suspended programming that promoted Korean cultures. Mark E Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea 1910-1945* (Seattle: University of Wahington Press, 2009), p.157. (recited in Insuk Lee, 2010, p. 81.)

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entertainment group, a newspaper article explained the difference between a modern actress and a traditional clown.

> In our Joseon custom, performers are female clowns and male clowns, whose social standing is the lowest and whose occupation is mean and dishonorable. However, this Bae Gu-ja received considerable modern education, learned skills, and studied music and dance. With her noble and elegant artistry, she is becoming an actress, cheering our spirit and exciting our emotion. To introduce her, I need to clarify the distinction.[8)]

Although the genre of revue with magic shows and horse stunts geared much toward mass entertainment rather than fine art, the above quotation describes it noble and elegant. Younghee Kim points out that this attitude toward revue as a new culture bestows a higher status than traditional practice(Younghee Kim, 2006, p. 113).

In addition, their being popular stars enabled them to rise as modern career women. Kwon Do-Hee suggests that *gisaeng's* popular nature and the capital strength allowed them the extensive support of the general public(Do-Hee Kwon, 2014, p. 108). As they actively worked in the public sphere and responded to public needs, the visibility of *gisaeng* was consolidated. In the growing colonial public culture *gisaeng* became some of the most powerful figure (Pilzer, 2006, p. 298). For instance, *Dansung* Theater presented a show called "gangseonru" for about a month from April 21st to May 26th in 1912. This show was so popular that the number of the viewers in one night counted five hundred thirty-five. Younghee Kim expresses that such box-office success would not be possible for today's dance performance (Younghee Kim, 2006, p. 70). For another instance, a newspaper Maeil Sinbo published a series of articles called "One Hundred Artists" from 1914. 89 out of 100 artists were female and *gisaeng*. This large proportion suggests the central role and success of *gisaeng* in the emergent public culture. The series presented the personnel's biographical information and interviews along with his/her photography. Like a pop star of today, *gisaeng's* personal life and public work were an object of public interest as well as at the center of attention.

Not as a marginalized other, but as a dignified member of society with public recognition, *gisaeng* participated in social, economic, and political activism(Insuk Lee, 2010, p.91). They staged numerous benefit performances for orphans, flood victims, etc. In 1907, *Gisaeng* participated in repaying the national debt. In 1919, they participated in the Korean Independence Movement. With the social activism, *gisaeng* strived to take off previous feudal title of slave or the lowest class and projected themselves as the modern women with social acknowledgement.

However, their growth as a social party was seen as a threat to the imperial government, so performance of *gisaeng* guilds was prohibited in 1918.[9)] The reason the imperial government stated

8) Magician's Bae Gu-ja. (1918, May 25). ***Maeil Shinbo***.

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was that the crowd at *gisaeng* peroformance was groups of hobos and their performances disturbed the social order. There had been several reports about disorder in theaters.[10] After this prohibition, some prominent members of *gisaeng* broke the connection with guild and worked as individual artists(Do Hee Kwon, 2014, pp. 115-116). This trend facilitated singing, rather than theater performance, to become *gisaeng's* main activity, since theater productions required a collective activity of performers and staffs. From a dance perspective, this prohibition was fatal, because dance, unlike singing, has difficulty entering the phonograph record market or radio broadcasts, and relies on the theater as a platform.

Another consequence of the prohibition of performance of *gisaeng* guilds was that the private room culture aspect of *gisaeng* dance was emphasized. Previously, *gisaeng* performed for the larger audience as well as private clients, as they have done in the feudal system. The prohibition constricted the presentation for the larger public and towed *gisaeng* to private entertainments at the place called party house(Ji-young Suh, 2005, p. 289). *Gisaeng* schools set up lesson of etiquette of serving clients. By taking this path of private room culture, *gisaeng* dance moved away from a modern career with official recognition.

Meanwhile, some talented *gisaeng* searched for their own ways of living as popular entertainers via mass media or serious and honorable artists(Ji-young Suh, 2005, p. 289). By this time the division between popular entertainer and serious artist was not definite (Do Hee Kwon, 2010, p. 121). Sometimes performers in theater, which also was an imported culture, were referred as artists, while performers in more traditional venue were called clowns or acrobatic tumbler.

In the latter half of 1920s, gramophone and radio broadcasting system, which was pioneers of mass media, geared *gisaeng's* performance away from theater presentation to audio format like singing and instruments playing(Do Hee Kwon, 2012, p. 107). Several *gisaeng* with excellent talent in singing could obtain the title of "master singer" not as a pre-modern female entertainer but as a modern artist(Ji-young Suh, 2005, p. 289). Aided by the aureole of foreign technology, *gisaeng* with strong musical talents could move more easily to the arena of modern art than those with talents of dance.

In sum, adopting western form of entertainment, *gisaeng* reached close to the honorific title of artists. With growing social recognition and visibility in society, *gisaeng* was moving to the arena of modern career. However, the colonial government's prohibition on theater performance pushed *gisaeng* dance toward private room culture. Despite many efforts, *gisaeng* performances became the target of social criticism instead of expanding their public appeal. The next chapter elaborates the social conditions of such decline.

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9) Gisaeng Performance. (1918, March 17). ***Maeil Shinbo***.

10) A review of *Danseong* Theater performance said "the order in the theater was severely chaotic. Entertainment: Kangseonru's Good and Evil Review. (1912, April 30). ***Maeil Shinbo***. Also, the fact that theater gathered both men and women in a same place even in dark indoor space was a part of criticism.

III. *Gisaeng* Alienated from Dance as Fine Art

As the concept of fine art began to be imported and settled down in the dance field in 1920s, *gisaeng's* practice gradually became distanced from artistic dance and frequently viewed as the opposite. This section discusses two ways of alienating *gisaeng* from dance as fine art. First, the colonial policy, "Cultural Policies" or culturalism, presented a Japanese version of western dance form as artistic dance. Second, *gisaeng* became an icon of the colonial Joseon, which was presented as pre-modern and undeveloped, to the eyes of foreign tourists as well as Koreans. These two conceived the dance of the *gisaeng* as raw material that can be used as choreographic material by innovative artists by confining it to the realm of tradition.

1. Artistic Dance As The Opposite To Traditional Dance

After the Korean Independence Movement in 1919, the colonial government changed their policy from military ruling to "Cultural Policies." Rather than governing by bayonet, "Cultural Policies" targeted ideology and hegemony. "Cultural Policies" or culturalism professed abstract discourses such as new and modern civilization, whose keywords comprised rationalism, enlightenment, efficiency, science, individualism, and creativity. In this paradigm, the new modernity stood opposite to indigenous tradition; tradition was perceived as obstruction for modernity.[11)]

Ye-Ho Kim discusses how culturalism operated as a strategy of imperialism(Ye-Ho Kim, 2013, pp. 380-384). According to him, culturalism emphasized personal perfection and enlightenment, sterilizing political concerns and sacrificing national tradition. Similarly, Moon-Ho Rhee argues that the colonial government used the frame of 'culture=modernity' (Moon-Ho Rhee, 2007, p. 229). By the effect of this cultural policy, traditional dance was regarded as old and lowbrow while western artistic dance was as new and highbrow. In this dichotomy, *gisaeng* with traditional legacy started disappearing from artistic venue with official approval.

Dances of foreign origin were regarded as more respectful dance forms. In 1921, Korean students, who studies abroad in Vladivostok, Russia came to Korea and gave a national tour performance including polka, Russian Cossack dance, etc. This performance contributed to spread the idea that dance performance was not restricted to pre-modern art specialists like *gisaeng* or clowns. In particular, for the fact that intellectuals like international students presented themselves as dancers, western dance was perceived as high art embedding advanced ideology of modern society(Younghee Kim et al., 2014, p. 308).

However, the foremost propagation of a new and modern dance was the performance of a Japanese

11) A news article uses an expression "Strip the old and evil society and create a new and good society. Discussing the Korean National Movement at the Dawn of World Reform (Part 4) (1920, April 7). ***Dong-A Daily News***.

dancer Ishii Baku in 1926. Ye-Ho Kim suggests that this performance was a colonial cultural strategy by using a professional (western and/or Japanese) dance form as enlightenment in order to dismantle Joseon culture(Ye-Ho Kim, 2013, p. 384). Two newspaper companies 『*Gyeongseong Ilbo*』 and 『*Maeil Shinbo*』, speaking for Japanese cultural policy, actively publicized and supported Ishii Baku's performance. I-Mun Kang also suggests that the Ishii Baku's Joseon tour was not a coincidence. It possibly was strategy for cultural assimilation and obliteration of Korean culture by showing off the excellence of Japanese culture (I-Mun Kang, 1982, p. 54).

New dance, implanted by Ishii Baku, was influenced by a modern dance of German expressionism (Van Zile, 2001, p. 39). This abstract and sometimes grotesque dance style was new to Joseon public.[12] Its major audience was intellectuals. Seung-Hee Choi, who became a most famous student of Ishii Baku, was also an intellectual, who graduated a girl's high school. Taek-won Jo, who saw Ishii Baku's performance and became his student, studied Eastern classics and later became a law student. Young-In Park, who became a student of Ishii Baku, was a college student in Aesthetics department of University of Tokyo. The high social standings of the practitioners contributed to conceive new dance as high art.

New dance was immediately professed as art. When Seung-Hee Choi departed from Seoul to become Ishii Baku's student, her school teachers protested because it would distain the honor of the school. Interestingly, this news report described the incident a comic action and juxtaposed with another interview by an officer of the Japanese Government General of Korea. The title of the interview said "Dance is an art, therefore the objection should be not allowed"[13]

While new dance was propagated as an art as opposed to traditional dance and popular dance, practitioners of new dance did not regard traditional dance practitioners as artists with creativity. Seung-Hee Choi said "my dance is different from *gisaeng's* dance. I aim to express the mind of Korean people. I do not want to do *gisaeng* dance, but new dance" (Young-Hee Kim et al., 2014, p. 350) Taek-won Jo said that traditional dance could not be art as it was, but when a choreographer reinterpreted it according to his/her artistic philosophy, only then it became a truly artistic dance (Min-young Yoo, 2013, pp. 502-503). According to Taek-won Jo, Korean traditional dance was too folk and not enough to be art. To enlighten Korean dance to be artistic, new modern dance needed to take it as a material for creativity.[14] These discourses deny creativity in the *gisaeng* dance.

The same perspective resonates in Young-in Park's writing. According to Young-In Park,

12) Song Lee notes that Seung-Hee Choi's first dance recital in 1930 attracted small number of audience and suffered a great loss for two-day performance. Song Lee, "*Shinmuyongui gijeomgwa munhwasajeok uiui* [The point of new dance and its cultural signification]" in *Hankukchumui jeongae yangsang* [The development of Korean dance], Song Bangsong et al. eds. (Bogosa, 2013, p. 458).

13) Dance is an Art. (1926, March 27). ***Maeil Shinbo***.

14) Reflection and a New Start. (1943, January 7). ***Maeil Shinbo***.

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traditional dance had a raison d´être as a museum item, meanwhile creative dance constructed cultural improvement of human life.[15] He also said that dance in Korean up to now had been no more than artistic technique or artistry. Young-In Park pointed out several characteristics of true artistic dance. The dance artists needed to do scientific study. Most of all dance artists needed to create and construct dance.

This discourse constructed the concept of dance as fine art which celebrated an individual's creativity (Van Zile, 2001, p.43). Those who possessed excellent personality and worldview enough to exercise one's creativity were intellectuals with economic capital to go study abroad. Traditional dance and *gisaeng's* dance constituted the opposite. When Korean Dance Art Association was organized in 1946 with Taek-won Jo as the president, departments of modern dance, ballet, dance theory, and fine art were composed, without a department of traditional dance.

Unlike these new intellectuals, *gisaeng* were considered to be service worker who could not assert their own personal vision. As mentioned in the previous section, the colonial government banned performance of *gisaeng* guilds in 1918. According to the news article, the colonial police ordered the managers of three *gisaeng* guilds to discontinue *gisaeng* performance. When the managers pled that they could only run the guilds by the incomes of such performances, the police commanded that they could have only one performance per year and this should be done without collecting any money for *gisaeng's* "play" from now on.[16] Do-hee Kwon contends that this prohibition made *gisaeng's* practice to diminish to the arena of private room culture. This included party houses, restaurants, and houses geared toward entertaining colonial elites(Pilzer, 2006, p. 298). Here, the prohibition ignored the formal and serious potential of the *gisaeng* dance by referring to it as a "play," therefore pushing it into the realm of private entertainment.

One year before this prohibition, the colonial government ordered to change the title of *gisaeng* associations to *kwonbeon*, which was from the Japanese term *gyoban* (Plizer, 2006, p. 298; In-sook Kang, 2005, p. 5). I suggest that this change signaled a persisting attempt to conceptualize *gisaeng* as the licensed prostitute, not as art specialists. The Japanese term *gyoban* referred to a licensed prostitution, which did not exist in the feudal period of Korea. As mentioned in the first section, the Japanese police promulgated the "*Gisaeng* Regulation Order" in 1908. This Order treated all *gisaeng* and other sex workers together (Jung-Kim, 2005, p. 212).

With the "*Gisaeng* Regulation Order," the colonial government commended *gisaeng* to submit medical reports when applying for the license. The government enforced health inspection for venereal disease to *gisaeng* in 1906 in the name of modern medicine and hygiene (Do Hee Kwon, 2014, p. 96). In-sook Kang argues that this way of identifying *gisaeng* as prostitute breaks the legacy

15) Dance and Life. (1936, April 10-12). ***Dong-A Daily News***.
16) Gisaeng Performance. (1918, March 17). ***Maeil Shinbo***.

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of traditional arts and hampers them to grow as artists(2005, p. 8). Pilzer argues that the ideological conflation of the female entertainer with the sex worker seems to be the central factor in its decline.

Focusing on singer *gisaengs*, Ji-young Suh suggests that at this point of time singer *gisaeng* could achieve fine art by abandoning the identity of *gisaeng*(Ji-young Suh, 2005, p. 289). These *gisaeng* broke away from *gisaeng* guilds and become members of art associations pursuing artistic professionalism. Some excellent singers like aforementioned Nok-Ju Pak participated in Korean Music League, which eventually became a foundation of fine art music in Korea, or Theater Culture League, both of which were the state-sponsored organizations(Pilzer, 2006, p. 300). Meanwhile, dancing *gisaeng* was more difficult to abandon *gisaeng* identity or leave the guild, since performance of dance relied on theater system and mass art entertainment was developing around recorded music market. Those who were tied to the title of *gisaeng* distanced from the title of artist as they did not qualify as individual authors.

2. *Gisaeng's* Returning to Tradition under the Gaze of Tourists

While they were alienated from artistic dance and geared toward demimondaine, *gisaeng* came to be attached to traditional Korean, particularly in terms of global market. *Gisaeng* became the representative image of pre-modern Korean in the mass-tourism industry, photography, postcard, international exposition, and other mass media. *Gisaeng* became the most crucial icon of colonial Joseon tourism, as the hula girl was of Hawaii tourism. This iconic image of tradition of *gisaeng* constituted by the gaze of tourism, especially that of imperialist.

This reattachment of tradition to *gisaeng* seems ironic, since *gisaeng* in popular entertainment industry had to broaden their repertoires and absorb foreign forms as discussed in the earlier sections. As a matter of fact, party house in the late 1920s was full of western-modern repertoires.

> Jazz has penetrated the world of demimondaine. Two third of songs that clients request in party houses are popular songs of Jazz mood. If old songs like *hwapyeon* or *hwanggyeosa* are heard from next room, a young man playing with *gisaeng* would swear without hesitation (Ji-young Suh, 2009, p. 173).

This report shows how *gisaeng* moved away from traditional practice. In the discourse of modernity, old practices are regarded as false, evil, dirtiness, inefficiency, irrationality. However, when traditionality of *gisaeng* was sterilized by the tourism industry with the gaze of imperialist, traditional manner and art of *gisaeng* became tourism asset, which could attract tourists' interests and be consumed with convenience.

Around 1920s and 1930s, *gisaeng's* social presence had been diminished, meanwhile the number of

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prostitutes increased because of "execrable paucity and unemployment" in Joseon.[17] With these reasons, the quality of *gisaeng* dance had been deteriorated. For the meantime, mass tour industry boomed in 1930s. So Young Yoon points out that Japanese travelogues of early 1900s do not remark *gisaeng*, whereas those of 1920s and 1930s discuss *gisaeng* in earnest (So Young Yoon, 2007, p. 84). Along with the deterioration of *gisaeng*, booming tourism made *gisaeng* the essential attraction in a colonial Joseon tour.

Under these circumstances, what was asked to *gisaeng* was not high-minded artistry or great discernment but beautiful appearance. Shin Hyeon-kyu explained that in the late 1930s clients became less interested in traditional dance forms, *gisaeng* schools provided nominal lessons of traditional dances (Hyeon-kyu Shin, 2010, p. 283). The more important lessons were the way of serving, of treating male clients, of pouring drinks, of seeing guests out. Similarly, Ji-young Suh also observes that lessons of traditional art substituted by lessons of "service which would be favored by men and becoming a flower of a party" (Ji-young Suh, 2009, p. 188).

For foreign clients and tourists, *gisaeng's* art was less interesting than their appearance and clothing(Soo Jin Jung, 2009, p. 86). Ji-young Suh discusses that Japanese travelogues note Joseon dance being way to monotonous, boring, slow, cheerless, lifeless, simple, and stiff (2009, pp. 177-178). A Japanese magazine Modern Japan (1939) wrote that "*gisaeng* for tourists like us are beautiful and meet the taste of Japanese, while those for Korean clients are high-minded as a celebrated artisan" (Ji-young Suh, 2009, p. 178). Since most foreign tourists could not understand the language and performance, visual image of female body was the center of tourist consumption.

Traditional practice of *gisaeng* in tourism industry has two folds of significance. With a feeble link to traditional art, *gisaeng* image fell under orientalism, formulating Joseon as exotic, sexual, and female other. Traditional practice of *gisaeng* worked as a sign of inferiority against empire. At the same time, it operates as a tourism asset, difference. Ji-young Suh discusses that Koreanness was reconstructed through 'locality' of empire. She quotes Modern Japan (1940), which wrote "Joseon has 'some kind of folkloric atmosphere lacking in Japan or foreign countries.' This local color of Joseon should be actively applied to politics, religion, science, daily life, particularly at the level of tourism" (Ji-young Suh, 2009, p. 186). This locality of Joseon lied under the greater order of the empire.

This conceptualization of locality echoes in the discourse of traditional dance and the greater order. As suggested in Taek-won Jo's discussion on Joseon dance, traditional dance with local color subsumed under new and modern dance. Taek-won Jo professes that "I believe that western technique, Japanese technique, Joseon technique…all are beneficial to Japanese new modern dance". Locality of traditional dance was worthy when it was used as a material for modern dancers. With the powerful ideology of

17) Grief of Women, Growing Unemployment of Women Who Become Prostitute. (1932, December 19). ***Dong-A Daily News***.

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creativity of choreographer, “Joseon technique,” stripped off all the context and history of *gisaeng*, was reconstructed as convenient and exotic asset.

IV. Conclusion

Gisaeng in the colonial Joseon played diverse roles in constructing the current landscape of the dance field in Korea. In the Joseon dynasty, they were art specialists as well as state-governed servants. As the feudal caste system collapsed, they were enforced to make their own living by selling their talent. They used their traditional arts as their mainstay in the theater industry. Eventually, they broaden their repertoire as the audience taste shifted. They renovated old dances, made new dances, adopted western revue and social dance, and set out in the mass media world. With growing social recognition, *gisaeng* moved toward a modern career group. *Gisaeng's* social activism such as the Independence Movement contributed increasing their visibility in society. However, the colonial government took advantage of them by assimilating them with prostitutes. Strategically, the ideology of culture as modernity was propagated. Along the same line, new dance, a western-Japanese modern dance, was planted as artistic dance. Meanwhile *gisaeng* dances were regarded as folk practice, which lacked creativity and should be refined to be artistic. New dancers, most of whom studied in Japan, equipped with the power of choreography and creativity. Joseon technique, stripped off *gisaeng* history, was used as a material for dance artists' creation. In contrast, *gisaeng* was reattached to tradition, viewed as the other in the eyes of global economy. *Gisaeng's* exotic appearance, not their dances and songs, was the main commodity in tourism industry. In the tourist network of meaning, *gisaeng* signified other both as a woman and as a traditional one.

Gisaeng in the colonial Joseon signified diverse and complex issues of modernization, woman history, colonialism, gender, class, etc. Their movement through the ideas of traditional practice, popular entertainment, and fine art shows the way pre-modern concept of *gisaeng* performance was divided into the modern classifications of dance. The process of classification sometimes attracted *gisaeng* to one category and other times pushed them away from the same category. The complex movement of *gisaeng* among diverse categories shows that the idea of dance as art in Korea has been socially and historically constructed.

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Abstract

The *Gisaeng's* Identities Moving through the Classifications in Art in the Colonial Joseon

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This article investigates how *gisaeng* or "female entertainers" were alienated from formulations of modern concepts of dance, while colonial Joseon experienced a rapid social and economic change in the course of modernization and westernization. I focus on the changes of the position of *gisaeng* as dance specialists and the nature of their arts in relation to the modern concept of fine arts. A historical investigation shows that new productions of *gisaeng* dances did not name the individual creators who were the source of their originality. Also, they were perceived as improvements or modifications, not creations from scratch. Furthermore, the imperialist policy of associating *gisaengs* dances with tradition resulted in these dances being seen as an anonymous collective culture that could be used as raw material for modern choreographers.

Keywords: *Gisaeng*(기생), Modern concept of fine arts(예술에 대한 현대적 개념), Colonialism(식민주의), Women history(여성 역사), Modernization(근대화)

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