The Making of a New Generation: Ordinary School Education in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945

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The Making of a New Generation:
Ordinary School Education in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945

Hyun Wook (Jacob) Noh

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History at Pomona College

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................1

Introduction......................................................................................................................2

Chapter 1
An Inside Look: The Structure of Public Ordinary Schools.............................................10

Chapter 2
Education as an Instrument of Power: Japanese-style Language Textbooks in Colonial Korea.........................................................................................................................24

Chapter 3
Putting Ideas into Practice: Elements of Colonial Education in Modern Korean Literature.................................................................................................................................56

Conclusion.....................................................................................................................88

Bibliography..................................................................................................................91
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INTRODUCTION

On 22 August 1910, Japan officially annexed Korea into the Japanese empire (1868–1945). It created a central government led by a Governor General (hereafter referred to as GGK) who controlled the colony’s finances, laws, infrastructure, and education. Primary education, in particular, was deemed important as a way of creating loyal and obedient imperial subjects. Most Korean children did not attend secondary schools or colleges/universities, so elementary schools were the best places to shape their thoughts and actions. The colonial government understood their value, but it faced stiff competition.

Unlike other East Asian colonies, Korea had traces of modern education prior to Japanese colonialism. In the late nineteenth century, Protestant Christian missionaries arrived on the Korean peninsula and built western-style elementary, middle, vocational, normal, medical, and foreign language schools. A handful of Korean parents sent their children to these academic institutions, while those from the wealthier yangban class preferred private sŏdang academies. The colonial government’s first order of business, therefore, was to enroll Korean children in government-run public schools—or public ordinary schools (K. kongnip pot'ong hakkyo, C. 公立普通學校). To this end, it enacted four educational policies: the first and second policies (Chosŏn kyoyungnyŏng 1911–22 and 1922–38,

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1 According to Andrew Hall, the educational system was extensive during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). In his own words, “private schools flourished, scholar-teachers were held in great esteem, and the literacy rate among males was probably high for an early modern society.” It is important to note, however, that only a small percentage of families had the financial resources to take advantage of these opportunities. For more information, see Andrew Hall, “First Steps Toward Assimilation: Japanese Run Education in Korea 1905–1910,” Acta Koreana 18, no. 2 (2015): 359.


3 Sŏdang academies were elementary-level educational institutions that taught the rudiments of hanja (Chinese characters), arithmetic, and Confucian classics and ethics. For more information, see Seong-Cheol Oh and Ki-Seok Kim, “Japanese Colonial Education as a Contested Terrain: What did Koreans do in the Expansion of Elementary Schoolings?” Asia Pacific Education Review 1, no. 1 (2000): 76.
respectively) emphasized simple loyalty to the Japanese empire, whereas the third and fourth policies (*Chosŏn kyoyungnyŏng* 1938–42 and 1943–45, respectively) pushed for accelerated assimilation.

Although the official wording of these policies is clear, scholars continue to debate the true intentions and effects of colonial education on the Korean peninsula. Historians Ronald Toby and Patricia Tsurumi offer the first Western interpretations. In “Education in Korea Under the Japanese: Attitudes and Manifestations” (1974), Toby provides a preliminary investigation of the topic, arguing that the colonial government used ordinary schools not only to assimilate Koreans but also to reap economic benefits. First, GGK Terauchi Masatake (1910–16) prioritized the study of the Japanese language. During the first years of colonization, for example, the subject occupied over 37 percent of the curriculum in boys’ ordinary schools. This percentage only increased with time, suggesting that the colonial government wanted Koreans to adopt a new language for indoctrination purposes. Second, GGK Terauchi incorporated agricultural biases in the schooling system. He, along with other prominent scholars, believed that Korean children should learn practical skills, so they could work manual labor jobs and contribute natural resources to the Japanese archipelago.

In “Colonial Education in Korea and Taiwan” (1984), Tsurumi conveys a slightly different interpretation. She argues that the colonial government wanted gradual

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assimilation. It used education to create loyal subjects but did not initially promote equality between Koreans and Japanese. As mentioned, ordinary schools competed with various academic institutions, including private and religious schools, so the colonial government focused on increasing enrollment numbers rather than implementing drastic assimilation measures. After the March First Movement (1919), however, GGK Saitō Makoto (1919–27, 1929–31) accelerated the assimilation process by constructing more ordinary schools, modifying the overall ordinary school curriculum, and allowing Koreans and Japanese to attend the same ordinary schools. The goal of government-run colonial education, in short, changed from gradual to accelerated assimilation.

This narrative has changed slightly over time. Recently, scholars such as Seong Cheol Oh, Ki Seok Kim, and Leighanne Yuh refute the idea of complete assimilation. In “Japanese Colonial Education as a Contested Terrain: What did Koreans do in the Expansion of Elementary Schoolings?” (2000), Oh and Kim reveal a contradiction in colonial policies. They explain that the colonial government wanted assimilation but practiced discrimination. While it attempted to turn Koreans into Japanese, it also excluded Koreans from privileged circles and stripped them of their political rights. Because of these discriminatory practices, the goal of ordinary school education could not have been complete assimilation.

Likewise, in “Contradictions in Colonial Education” (2010), Yuh asserts that the colonial government “pursued a policy of discrimination in order to construct a subaltern

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6 Tsurumi examines different primary sources. A few of them include government surveys, personal accounts, and speeches. For more information, see Tsurumi, “Colonial Education,” 294-311.
7 Oh and Kim use a variety of primary sources to construct their argument. A few of them include: Chosen sotofuku (1932, 1933, 1928, and 1942), Chosen sotokufu gakumukyoku (1912–42), Chosen sotokufu gakumukyoku gakumuka (1927 and 1941), Chosen Sotokufu keimukyoku (1929), and Chosen Sotokufu Naimukyoku (1924–38). For more information, see Oh and Kim, “Japanese Colonial,” 75-89.
Korean identity.” Unlike Oh and Kim, Yuh does not arrive at this conclusion by analyzing the social realm; instead, she focuses on the contents of colonial ethics textbooks. Her work acknowledges the inherent contradictions within the four educational policies. From her perspective, the colonial government wanted “moderated assimilation”: it included Korean holidays, traditions, and beliefs within textbooks, so children would learn the subtle differences between Koreans and Japanese. The former were to accept their lower social, political, and economic status compared to that of the latter. This would maintain the colonial hierarchy, as well as preserve the “superior” Japanese identity. It is important to note that Tsurumi also mentions Korean history, but she says the colonial government used it to facilitate the complete assimilation process by highlighting the country’s backwardness.

These scholars also discussed the “consumption” issue—or the reception of colonial education by Korean students. Tsurumi states that ordinary schools “played a central role in the formation of a modern Korean nationalist consciousness.” Instead of adopting Japanese culture and values, Korean students rejected the colonial government’s authority and mobilized against it, resulting in different independence movements and protests. Ordinary school education, therefore, cannot be considered a success. In addition, Oh and Kim claim that it led to unintended and unwanted consequences—more specifically, a push from Koreans to strengthen their political power and enable social upward mobility. The Japanese government wanted Koreans to accept their role as low-level

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workers and second-tier imperial subjects, but their ability to read and write motivated them to expand their horizons and seek higher positions within the colonial hierarchy. Ordinary school education, thus, failed to meet its original objectives. Unlike these other scholars, Yuh does not explicitly address this issue. Her inclination to investigate forms of resistance, however, suggests that she believes ethics textbooks failed to reach their full potential in influencing readers.\textsuperscript{14}

My investigation of colonial education and its effects on the Korean people and society has led me to question the accuracy and thoroughness of these interpretations. The purpose of colonial education was to create loyal and obedient imperial subjects. If it was truly effective, it would shape the everyday activities of Korean students with or without their knowledge. As a result, one must consider the subtle ways in which it manifested itself in their lives. My thesis aims to do just that by making two main arguments: first, the overall goal of the colonial education did not change over time. Although a variety of social and political events altered the pace and severity of the so-called “moderated assimilation” process, the contents of textbooks remained relatively consistent throughout the colonial period. The Japanese government had always used education to meet the everchanging needs of the empire. Second, colonial education effectively shaped the thoughts and actions of Korean students. In an attempt to measure these subtle changes, I will discern elements of colonial education in short stories written by former pupils of public ordinary schools. My initial argument will help facilitate this process: it will allow me to search for lessons from throughout the colonial period rather than from the specific years in which these authors were enrolled in their respective schools.

\textsuperscript{14} Yuh, “Contradictions in Korean,” 145.
Undoubtedly, ordinary school education is a topic worthy of study. Unlike other Japanese colonies and territories, Korea established modern-style schools prior to colonization. The GGK and his officials were forced to work with pre-existing institutions and to compete with Christian missionaries, making the push for a standardized education more complicated than other state-led disciplinary mechanisms. Yet, it was one of the most important aspects of the gradual assimilation process. To provide a thorough examination of its short and long-term effects, I will ask and answer the following questions: How did the colonial government organize and operate its ordinary schools? What themes, morals, and stories were embedded in the ordinary school curriculum? And how did these themes, morals, and stories influence the writing of Korean intellectuals?

Chapter one will provide important context by showing how public ordinary schools operated as controlled spaces designed to exercise power over Korean children. In order to ensure that all students received the same education, the colonial government built heavily regulated academic institutions with specific lessons, lectures, power relations, ceremonies, rituals, and other activities. While Korean children were exposed to different ideas in the real world, they could not escape Japanese ideology and propaganda inside the classroom. Using Michel Foucault’s theory of power, this chapter will show how different the components of education worked together to indoctrinate Korean students.

Chapter two will describe the major themes, morals, and stories embedded in the ordinary school curriculum. The colonial government wanted not only to suppress any awakening of national consciousness but also to keep Korean students in low-skill jobs, so it taught practical rather than higher education. When the demand for education increased, however, it was forced to open secondary schools and colleges/universities, but the main
lessons and morals stayed relatively consistent across all levels. To highlight the ideas and practices that the colonial government deemed essential for Korean students, I will analyze education from the most basic level. I will examine the first (1915–18), third (1923–24), and sixth (1930–35) volumes of the *Korean Governor General National Language Textbooks* (K. *Chosŏn Ch'ongdokpu kugŏ kyogwasŏ*, C. 朝鮮總督府國語教科書), a compilation of ten textbooks used in Korean schools between 1915 and 1950, because they are the only elementary school textbooks in the series. In doing so, this chapter will explain the changes in education across three periods of colonial rule: military period (1910–19), cultural period (1919–30), and wartime period (1930–45).

Chapter three will address the “consumption” question by studying the different ways in which this education affected the literature ultimately produced by its students. It will rely on Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation to identify and rationalize elements of colonial education in short stories written by Ch’ae Mansik (1902–50), Kim Yoo Jung (1908–37), and Yi Hyo Sŏk (1907–42). As former pupils of public ordinary schools, these authors experienced the same space and curriculum outlined in chapters one and two, making them and their works the perfect vehicles for showcasing the long-term effects of colonial education. These short stories will represent both realist and proletarian literature, the two most prominent literary genres of the time, and reveal the larger socio-political climate of colonial Korea. Of course, there are inherent limitations to the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from such a qualitative analysis. My approach, however, will attempt to make the most cohesive argument possible and provide a new perspective on this relatively overlooked topic.
Overall, this thesis will add to the existing scholarship on colonial education. Most of its main points will apply to previous colonies in East Asia, as well as those in other parts of the world.
CHAPTER I
An Inside Look: The Structure of Public Ordinary Schools

In the early 1920s, a large education movement started in colonial Korea (1910–45). Most Koreans recognized the value of a standardized education and sought to send their children to public ordinary schools (K. kongnip pot’ong hakkyo, C. 公立普通學校). They called for expansion—a phenomenon that perplexed the Governor General of Korea (hereafter referred to as GGK) and the rest of his officials. Although the colonial government wanted to enroll more Korean students in its academic institutions, it did not expect such enthusiasm. It eventually passed “the one school for every three districts policy” (1919–22) and “the one school for every district policy” (1929–36). The Korean people spearheaded the movement: local volunteers built new schools, classrooms, and playgrounds; village leaders launched fundraising campaigns to finance these construction projects; and community members maintained the quality and cleanliness of these buildings. In doing so, they willingly helped expand and strengthen an education system designed to subjugate them in subservient positions.

This movement had both short and long-term consequences. In “The Subject and Power” (1982), French philosopher Michel Foucault explains the process by which individuals exercise power over others. To understand it fully, one must first recognize the inter-connected relationship between “capacity” (raw nature), “lines of communication” (lessons, lectures, orders, signs, symbols, and marks of value), and “power processes” (pyramidal hierarchy, surveillance, enclosure, and a system of rewards and punishments). ¹ Although these three components are separate entities, they “overlap one another, support

one another reciprocally, and use each other mutually as means to an end.” Their natural tendency to interact creates a state of interdependence and keeps them in constant engagement, but these relationships develop in different ways. There is no general rule or standard: they establish themselves in “diverse forms, diverse places, [and] diverse circumstances or occasions.” When governments regulate these relationships, however, they form “blocks of capacity-communication-power”—or highly structured spaces where people can freely influence the actions of their subjects. They can emphasize one component over the others, introduce new ideas to a component, or remove a component completely. Whatever the case, political institutions use these “blocks” to modify behavior. The essence of power, therefore, lies within one’s ability to shape the thoughts and, more importantly, the actions of other individuals.

Foucault’s conception of power can be applied to government-run educational institutions in colonial Korea. It is, after all, a theoretical framework that helps explain the exercise of power in different situations. In this chapter, I analyze primary and secondary sources to argue that public ordinary schools were meticulously built power structures with a specific aim and purpose. The colonial government used them to propagate pro-Japanese ideology and to condition Korean and Japanese children. By establishing lines of communication and power relations within the classroom, it successfully molded their “capacity” and ensured different forms of behavior on the Korean peninsula.

**Public Ordinary Schools as Power Structures**

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2 Foucault, “The Subject,” 787.
3 Foucault, “The Subject,” 787.
4 Foucault, “The Subject,” 787.
As controlled spaces with strict rules and regulations, public ordinary schools constituted their own “block of capacity-communication-power.” Korean students had the “capacity” to be molded by the various lessons, relationships, rituals, ceremonies, and other activities enforced in these academic institutions. First, these students were only six to seventeen years old, an age range susceptible to outside influences. Unlike Korean adults who harbored strong anti-Japanese sentiments from decades of political strife, children posed little resistance. The colonial government understood that educating Korean students who were more likely to accept Japanese values could define the character of the nation for several generations, so it imposed age limitations within educational policies. According to Shino Toyoshima, ordinary schools encouraged older students to graduate early and denied the enrollment of those over a certain age. Clearly, the colonial government focused on young children because they had the most potential to internalize the lessons and morals embedded in the curriculum and to become disciplined subjects of the Japanese empire (1868–1945). Second, Korean students grew up in a hostile and degrading environment, making them more vulnerable to Japanese ideology and propaganda. On 15 November 1905, Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) and Hayashi Gonsuke (1860–1939) gathered a group of Japanese troops and stormed the imperial palace of Korea. They forced King Kojong (1864–1907) and his cabinet to sign a treaty rendering their country a protectorate of the empire. Five years later, the situation only worsened with an official annexation. As children of the protectorate and colonial eras, Korean students were always second-class

5 It is important to note that the demand for ordinary school education increased with time, so age limitations helped create space for new, younger students. For more information, see Shino Toyoshima, “State Schools and the Local Community in Colonial Korea,” International Journal of Korean History 5, no. 1 (2003): 133-34.
7 Toyoshima, “State Schools,” 133.
citizens in their own country; they faced discrimination in their everyday lives. These experiences made them the perfect targets of pro-Japanese ideas and narratives circulated in public ordinary schools.

When dealing with “capacity,” one must also look beyond the Korean children themselves and consider the physical location of these schools. To take advantage of the local community and its financial resources, the colonial government transformed pre-existing provincial schools (K. hyanggyo C. 鄉校) into public ordinary schools.\(^8\) More specifically, it targeted reputable academic institutions with strong ties to neighboring villages to foster a higher level of engagement between the school and the people. This allowed the colonial government to take advantage of the community’s time, money, and labor when it expanded education. At Imp’i Ordinary School, for example, local officials and volunteers helped construct and maintain new buildings and facilities.\(^9\) Similar movements occurred throughout the Korean peninsula. Both urban and rural areas experienced growth at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. The primary level, however, had the largest increases with 343 schools in 1912 to 3,122 schools in 1942.\(^10\) Regardless of region or education level, schools and communities became intertwined: although ordinary schools were meant to be standardized, they started “reflect[ing] the involvement and values of their respective communities.”\(^11\)

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\(^8\) During the Koryŏ (918–1392) and Chosŏn (1392–1910) dynasties, the government established provincial schools throughout the Korean peninsula. For more information, see Toyoshima, “State Schools,” 128.


students were more likely to attend these schools because they were tailored to their specific tastes. The physical location, thus, increased the “capacity” of Korean students.

The colonial government used an ensemble of regulated communications—lessons, lectures, and marks of value—to shape the “capacity” of Korean students. The official wording of the Chosŏn Education Ordinance of 1911 reveals that the colonial government knew language learning was a key component of assimilation.\(^\text{12}\) As fluent Japanese speakers, Korean students could consume more propaganda and develop a stronger personal connection to the empire. As such, the Japanese language became the most important subject in public ordinary schools. It was considered the national language, occupying over 37 percent of the curriculum in 1911 and 40 percent in 1922.\(^\text{13}\) In contrast, the Korean language became less important throughout the colonial period: 21 percent (1910s), 14 percent (1920s), 11 percent (early 1930s), 9 percent (late 1930s), and 0 percent (post-1941).\(^\text{14}\) As these statistics show, ordinary schools initially taught Korean as a second language, but they banned it from the curriculum following the start of the Pacific War (1941–45). Foucault’s theory provides a useful framework to analyze this shift. By forbidding Korean students from learning or speaking their native tongue, the colonial government removed a source of resistance and limited their field of possible actions.

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\(^\text{13}\) These numbers indicate the percentages for ordinary elementary schools. The figures for ordinary high schools were lower: 23 percent in 1911 and 20 percent in 1922. For more information, see Toby, “Education in Korea,” 58.

Public ordinary schools included lectures as another line of communication. In *Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood*, Richard E. Kim recalls a geography class where his teacher showcased a color-coded map that highlighted “who is with us and who is against us.” Germany, Italy, and Japan (along with their territories and colonies) were in red; England, France, and Russia (along with their territories and colonies) were in blue. Kim’s teacher made a clear distinction between the Allied and Axis powers. He used the lecture to transmit a specific message to Korean students—that is, Koreans and Japanese belong to one collective group. They face the same enemies and share the same fate, making their loyalty and commitment crucial for their own survival. Similarly, Kim remembers weekly lectures where the school principal assembled students in the gymnasium, explained the progress of the imperial army, and urged everyone to devote themselves fully to the war effort. Although these types of speeches were supposed to provide general information, they actually relayed implicit and explicit commands. Children were to internalize the material and behave accordingly, demonstrating, once again, how ordinary schools used education to influence the actions of students.

It was also common for principals and teachers to value Korean and Japanese students differently. Before the Education Policy of 1922 integrated all public ordinary schools, the colonial government divided education based on ethnicity. On the one hand, the curriculum of Japanese primary schools (*J. shōgakkō; K. sohakkyo*) stressed benevolent

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15 In the author’s note, Kim explains that “all the characters and events described in this book are real, but everything else is fiction.” His book, therefore, is not only a memoir but also a work of fiction. I have decided to strip the fictional elements of the story, such as the plot, style, and theme, and focus solely on the main characters and events. For more information, see Richard E. Kim, *Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 198.

16 Kim, *Lost Names*, 72.

17 Kim, *Lost Names*, 72.

18 Kim, *Lost Names*, 62.
governance. It taught Japanese children important sentiments, such as kindness, compassion, and accountability, so they could fulfill their future responsibility of expanding the empire and developing its colonies. On the other hand, the curriculum of Korean primary schools emphasized obsequiousness. It taught Korean children agricultural skills, as well as qualities like discipline, obedience, and love for industry and manual labor. The consequences of these stark differences carried over to the newly integrated ordinary school system. Most principals and teachers valued Japanese students over Korean students, so they granted them special privileges. In Kim’s school, for example, the two groups attended different classes and morning assemblies. Based on the previous information, Japanese students most likely received an elite education that prepared them for several post-graduation opportunities. This example affirms the inherent contradictions in Japanese colonial discourse: while the central government created “separate but equal” institutions, they never enforced the equality aspect of them.

In addition to these lessons, lectures, and marks of value, power relations improved the colonial government’s ability to shape the “capacity” of its subjects. Foucault argues that a whole series of power processes “ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behavior.” Consider the strict pyramidal hierarchy between principals, teachers, and students. Although ordinary schools hired both Korean and Japanese teachers, they were required to have a Japanese headmaster. The top authority

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20 Uchida, “A Sentimental,” 713.
22 Foucault, “The Subject,” 787.
23 All public ordinary schools were to have a Japanese principal and teachers, but the colonial government could not meet this requirement in some circumstances. Ch’ango and Nap’o Ordinary Schools, for example, had only Korean teachers until 1944. For more information, see Toyoshima, “State Schools,” 130.
figure represented the colonizing power—or the “more superior” ethnicity—and showed his natural biases by allowing Japanese teachers to occupy higher positions than their Korean counterparts. The ability to control his subordinates, as well as favor one group over the other, reinforced power dynamics in the minds of observing children. Furthermore, by the late 1930s, students created their own social hierarchy. In his memoir, Kim writes that his class assembled in the gymnasium “very much like a military formation,” where he was “a mere private or maybe a corporal.”24 This example clearly reveals the structured nature of public ordinary schools.

The teachers and students reinforced power relations through internal surveillance and a system of rewards and punishments. During the first period of colonial rule, Japanese teachers were not only academic instructors but also the enforcers of their school’s rules and regulations. They “wore police uniforms and carried swords,” making them indistinguishable from Japanese government officials.25 Their dress and weapons confirm that public ordinary schools were highly monitored institutions. In addition, students reported each other, especially in the late 1930s and early 1940s when school policies became much stricter. In his book, Kim writes:

I am gathering up my cap and the book bag when a big, tall man in a teacher’s uniform strides into the room, accompanied by two small boys. The teacher has short, cropped hair and a big mustache. I stand up. He comes right up to me and stands glowering at me, his legs apart, his hands on his hips. His small eyes peer into mine and taking me by surprise, he grabs my shoulder and wheels me around…He slaps me on the check, so hard that I stagger and crumple back into my seat. He pounces at me, pulls me up by the back of my neck, and when I am on my feet again, he slaps me again on the other cheek.26

26 Kim, *Lost Names*, 41.
The Japanese teacher physically assaulted his student without warning. Kim initially did not understand the reason for the attack, but he soon realized that his Korean classmate had reported him for singing an English song in class. This memory proves that deviation from social and political norms resulted in severe consequences in public ordinary schools. Actions were even more regulated across ethnic lines. Korean and Japanese students formed their own cliques and policed each other within their circles. At the high school level, for instance, Korean students avoided their Japanese peers in fear of being branded pro-Japanese. The combination of internal surveillance and punishments, therefore, cemented the relationships in the block of capacity-communication-power and conditioned Korean and Japanese students to survey each other.

Within this block of capacity-communication-power, the colonial government directed the actions of Korean and Japanese students. Foucault argues that power is not a relationship between different people or groups; rather it is “a way in which certain actions modify others.” This means that governments exercise power by shaping the behavior of their subjects. It comes as no surprise, then, that public ordinary schools forced their students to perform daily, weekly, and yearly rituals. Every morning, students recited the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890)—a practice that Jun Uchida describes as “a pledge of allegiance to the emperor, which stressed loyalty, filial piety, and other ‘Confucian emotions’ to foster affective ties to the patriarchal head of the Japanese family-state.”

This ritual, along with other religion-based rituals like bowing to the imperial palace and

27 Yang Sŏng Dŏk, a Korean high school student during the colonial period, explains: “It was impossible to have friends among the Japanese students. If I did that, I would be branded pro-Japanese and persecuted by my classmates.” For more information, see Uchida, “A Sentimental,” 718.
28 Foucault, “The Subject,” 788.
29 The Japanese government initially passed the Imperial Rescript on Education for schools on the archipelago, but the colonial government adopted it in 1911. For more information, see Uchida, “A Sentimental,” 713.
visiting Shinto shrines, was intended to invoke a sense of Japanese nationalism and, more importantly, a sense of belonging within the Japanese empire. Ordinary school students felt detached from the mainland; they lacked the necessary energy and spirit to devote themselves fully to the emperor and the war effort. This makes sense for the Koreans, but the Japanese struggled with this problem as well. After several years on the Korean peninsula, they no longer felt connected to their counterparts on the Japanese archipelago. In the late 1930s, for example, Aoki Etsuko, a schoolteacher and graduate of Keijō Women Teacher’s College, “identified more closely with Koreans than with metropolitan Japanese.”

She grew up in a foreign country, adopting a new culture and interacting with new people. It became clear that the colonial government needed to maintain long-term control and power over students. Recurring rituals served as a solution to this problem because they could instill social and political ideologies through routine practice. Constantly engaging the same structured activities created discipline. In theory, the children would begin to accept and appreciate the rituals without resistance.

In a similar manner, the colonial government held various ceremonies designed to acknowledge and affirm the authority of the Japanese state. In 1930, for instance, the faculty and staff at Kaechōng Ordinary School assembled students in the school playground to read a copy of the Education Ordinance. They stopped classes and dedicated a specific time to celebrate the educational policy and reinforced its main points through physical action. The timing—more specifically, the middle of a school day—suggests ordinary schools valued ceremonies over classes and other activities. In addition, the colonial government required all students, as well as their parents and local volunteers,

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30 Uchida, “A Sentimental,” 721.
to attend admission, commencement, and completion ceremonies. The Korean and Japanese people sat through these programs three times a year as active participants rather than passive supporters. They celebrated as a collective group, so most ceremonies occurred in high-energy environments, which facilitated the social conditioning process. As we shall see in the next chapter, the colonial government wanted all elementary-school-aged children to attend its public ordinary schools, and in order to achieve this ambitious goal, it needed the whole community involved. These ceremonies, therefore, were extremely important. They symbolized unity, acceptance, and progress in transforming the Korean people into loyal and obedient imperial subjects.

As the political situation intensified with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the colonial government started mobilizing ordinary school students for the war effort. It added physical education courses that emphasizing “renewed militarisation” and “spiritual mobilisation.” Prior to the colonial period, the 1895 Royal Edict on Education declared that Korean schools should develop “the physical, spiritual, and intellectual capabilities of individuals,” so physical education was used to build strong and healthy bodies. Middle and high schools, for example, taught gymnastics with military drill exercises. The colonial government feared that these activities would lead to a fighting spirit and nationalism, so it demilitarized physical education by incorporating playful elements and apparatuses. After the invasion of Manchuria, however, this approach completely changed. Ordinary schools hired special instructors who focused on military

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training to prepare children mentally and physically for war. The GGK and his officials believed in a connection between body, mind, and spirit. A strong physique would lead to both sharpened focus and heightened aggression, allowing Korean children to channel their energy for the needs of the empire. Eventually, militaristic elements seeped into everyday life. Kim recalls a school assembly where a boy “turn[ed] around on his heels, salute[ed] the teacher on the platform…[and] shout[ed], ‘At ease!’” Ordinary schools began resembling military compounds more than academic institutions. This change became more obvious when the colonial government prepared school children for the “decisive battle”—or kessen—at the end of the Pacific War.

Along with military-style gymnastics and instruction, ordinary school students performed manual labor for the Japanese empire. Kim states that the colonial government forced him and his classmates to contribute their time, energy, and bodies to the war effort. They traveled throughout their town to collect leaflets distributed by American planes. The class leaders stacked the leaflets and handed them to the school principal. In addition, they went to people’s homes to collect rubber balls.

The Japanese imperial army needed natural resources in the late 1930s and early 1940s, so it began taking them from the people. Finally, Kim and his classmates constructed a refueling station for kamikaze pilots flying

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37 The “decisive battle” refers to the last stand that the Japanese and their colonial subjects should take if the Allied powers invade Japanese home islands. On 15 August 1945, however, Emperor Hirohito (1926–1989) surrendered unconditionally to the Allied powers, and the “decisive battle” never took place. For more information, see Samuel H. Yamashita, *Daily Life in Wartime Japan, 1940–1945* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2015), 172.
38 The Allied powers dropped leaflets to inform the Korean people that they would not bomb their country. For more information, see Kim, *Lost Names*, 120-21.
39 Kim refers to the rubber balls that the Japanese government distributed throughout colonial Korea after colonizing Singapore, Malaya, and Borneo. These three countries were the world’s largest producers of rubber at the time, and the Japanese government celebrated their victory by giving each child a rubber ball. For more information, see Kim, *Lost Names*, 125.
from Manchuria to the Japanese archipelago. The colonial government deployed thousands of children to complete increasingly demanding tasks as the war persisted. Considering these three activities, public ordinary schools not only served as academic institutions but also supplied free laborers for the empire.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, public ordinary schools were complex power structures. They had specific lessons and activities, as well as principals and teachers who enforced strict rules and regulations. The colonial government clearly established these academic institutions for indoctrination purposes rather than general education. To produce loyal and obedient imperial subjects, it created controlled educational spaces and exercised power over Korean and Japanese students.

By analyzing the information presented in this chapter through a Foucauldian theoretical lens, one recognizes how this process took place. Public ordinary schools constituted their own “block of capacity-communication-power.” First, Korean children had the potential to accept colonial education because of their young age and social circumstances. Most of them were unable to distinguish between pro-Korean and pro-Japanese sentiments, and as a result, they consumed information without fully understanding its short and long-term effects. Second, the colonial government controlled the ordinary school curriculum and transmitted various messages through lessons, lectures, and marks of value. Korean students were to adopt the Japanese language, to support the endeavors of the Japanese empire, and to consider themselves inferior to Japanese students.

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The Japanese government planned to use these runways as a fueling station for kamikaze pilots traveling from Manchuria to Japan. For more information, see Kim, *Lost Names*, 143.
Third, the tense social and political circumstances formed power relationships that allowed Japanese principals, teachers, and students to dominate their Korean counterparts. In a more general sense, however, they watched and reported each other regardless of ethnicity. The combination of “capacity,” “lines of communication,” and “power processes” shaped the actions of Korean students. They completed different rituals, ceremonies, military drills, and manual labor assignments. The power of colonial education, therefore, laid within its ability to influence the thoughts and actions of others.
CHAPTER II
Education as an Instrument of Power: Japanese-style Language Textbooks in Colonial Korea

The previous chapter described the overall structure of public ordinary schools (K. kongnip pot’ong hakkyo, C. 公立普通學校). A thorough analysis, however, requires a deeper look at the specific lessons taught in these academic institutions. Although the curriculum prioritized the study of Japanese, a small percentage of class instruction was devoted to Korean language learning. The Governor General of Korea (hereafter referred to ask GGK) published Japanese-style language textbooks and implemented them in all ordinary schools. As a result, even while learning their native tongue, Korean children consumed pro-Japanese propaganda and ideology. This proved to be both an important and effective method of subjugation.

To understand the information that the colonial government deemed essential for Korean students, I will examine the main themes, morals, and stories in three elementary school textbooks—more specifically, the first (1915–18), third (1923–24), and sixth (1930–35) volumes of the Korean Governor General National Language Textbooks (K. Chosŏn Ch’ongdokpu kugŏ kyogwasŏ, C. 朝鮮總督府國語教科書). Using Michel Foucault’s conception of power as a theoretical framework, I will explain their potential effects on young readers, as well as highlight their important trends and changes. In the end, I argue that the overall goal of ordinary school education remained consistent throughout all periods of colonial rule. It always sought to exercise power over Korean children to meet the everchanging needs of the Japanese empire (1868–1945).

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section sheds light on the different types of lessons taught in the military period (1910–19); the second section
explains the lessons influenced by major social and political changes in the cultural period (1919–30); the third section reveals the most important lessons circulated in the wartime period (1930–45); and the fourth section focuses on revisions of the same passages across these textbooks.

Ordinary School Korean and Chinese Textbook (1915–18)

The most frequently mentioned themes in volume one of Ordinary School Korean and Chinese Textbook (1915–18) are education and duties of a student. It presents these themes in a subtle manner early in the text. One passage, for example, reads: “The time is 7AM. I should hurry and go to school. Mother, please give me breakfast. The food is good today. Bring the rice water. Clean the table.” This excerpt presents a brief early morning conversation between a mother and her son. As a student, the boy’s first thought is school. He makes sure to eat, clean, and leave his home in a timely manner. Through this passage, the colonial government teaches young children to prioritize education.

The duties of a student become more explicit later in the textbook. Consider the following conversation between a mother and her son: “What did you learn in school today? I learned how to read and write. What lesson did you learn? I learned Lesson 40 today. How many texts did you read? I read two texts today. Make sure to practice what you have learned every day.” [Figure 1.1] The passage concludes with the mother commanding her son to practice his studies daily. It does not allow readers to interpret the meaning of the

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1 The Governor General of Korea, “Ordinary School Korean and Chinese Textbook (1915–18),” in Chosón Ch’ŏngdokpu kugŏ kyogwasŏ (Seoul: Ch’aek Sarang, 2007), Volume 1: 32, 54, 56, 60, 61-2, 64-5, 71-2, 73, 95-6, 97, 105-9, 111-13, 118-19, 120.
text; rather, it clearly expresses the importance of retaining information learned in public ordinary schools. The boy has an obligation to follow his mother’s orders. Furthermore, the textbook couples the passage with a workbook activity that reads: “Answer the following questions: 1. What subjects are taught at your school? 2. How many hours are you taught?” These two questions not only force students to see themselves as the boy who must study daily but also command them. One can assume that the students answered these questions aloud, silently, or on the page itself. Whatever the case, the colonial government attempted to direct the actions of its subjects. Foucault states that “power exists only when it is put into action.” The ability to influence an individual’s behavior—either in the present or in the future—gives one power over the other. Indeed, this exercise does just that.

The importance of education becomes most evident in the textbook’s lengthiest story titled “Two Children.” Its translation is provided below:

There are two roads: one leads to a school, and the other leads to a field. One morning, Kim Su Ch’ol and Lee Pok Tong met at the crossroad. Su Ch’ol said, “I don’t want to go to school. Come here. Let’s go to the field and play.” “Why don’t you like going to school?” Pok Tong asked. “What’s better than learning new things every day?” “Why should we learn Korean? Let’s just go to the field and have fun,” Su Ch’ol replied. After this exchange, Su Ch’ol went to the field, and Pok Tong went to school. Twenty years later, on a cold winter day, a man wearing one layer of clothing stood in front of a gate begging for food. The landowner came out wearing beautiful clothes. Once the beggar saw the man, he became embarrassed and lowered his face. Who do you kids think these two people are? [Figure 1.2]

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6 While the rest of the passages in this textbook are one to three pages in length, “Two Children” is five pages. The Governor General of Korea, “Ordinary School Korean and Chinese Textbook (1915–18),” Volume 1: 105-9.
This passage is important for several reasons. First, it reveals two kinds of students: a bad student who neglects his studies and a good student who values education and enjoys learning new school material. The consequences of their decisions become obvious after the twenty-year time skip. The former will become a poor and shameful beggar, whereas the latter will become a wealthy landowner. Second, it implies that students who choose the wrong path will regret their decision. After recognizing Pok Tong, Su Ch’ŏl feels embarrassed and hides his face rather than asking for food. He clearly understands the severity of his past mistakes. Third, the passage concludes with a question that directly addresses readers. The line “who do you kids think these two people are?” not only makes the students reflect on the moral of the passage but also incorporates them into the text.  

Fourth, it contains a workbook activity that reveals the main purpose of the passage. The exercise reads: “Answer the following question: Why is the beggar embarrassed?” In case readers did not grasp the moral of the passage fully, the textbook offers an opportunity to reflect further. They are asked to tackle a question with two logical answers. Students may initially conclude that the beggar feels embarrassed because of his need to ask for food, for it is the more immediate and surface-level answer. Upon further reflection, however, they may conclude a deeper, more thoughtful answer: the beggar feels embarrassed because of his past decision to skip school and play in the fields. Finally, the passage shows how the colonial government subjected its students. Poor schooling habits do not guarantee a beggar’s life in the future, and good schooling habits do not ensure future success. The textbook, nevertheless, implies that these are the only two paths for students at public

ordinary schools. In doing so, it creates a clear distinction between “good” and “bad” students. Foucault refers to this as a “dividing practice” that objectifies individuals by categorizing them into groups.⁹

Confucianism—represented by the five cardinal social relationships and filial piety—is the third most frequently mentioned theme in this textbook.¹⁰ The text clearly determines the roles and responsibilities of students, parents, siblings, and friends. One passage, for instance, states that “[students] can be loyal, parents can teach, brothers can love, and friends can trust each other.”¹¹ In the practice portion of the same page, “loyalty” is coupled with “monarch and his subjects”; “teaching” and “respect” are coupled with “father and son”; “love” is coupled with “brothers”; and “trust” is coupled with “friends.”¹²

The colonial government communicates different qualities that one must exhibit according to one’s position in society. Unlike the other Confucian principles, however, “loyalty” belongs to two groups: “you” (as in the student) and “subjects.” Undoubtedly, the colonial government viewed students and subjects as one and the same, and it conveyed this point of view through this passage. The message becomes clear: Korean children, as imperial subjects, must show loyalty to the Japanese emperor.

This textbook establishes teacher-student relations as well. One passage reads: “Teachers teach. Students learn. Teachers love their students. Students respect their teachers.” [Figure 1.3]¹³ Both groups have an obligation to one another, which emulates a

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⁹ Foucault, “The Subject,” 777-78.
common aspect in all five cardinal Confucian social relationships, but the “love” portion of the passage is intimate in nature. The relationship between a teacher and student resembles that of a parent and child. Foucault writes that a series of power processes ensures “the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behavior.”¹⁴ The colonial government uses this textbook to build a specific power structure within classroom—one that forces students to consider teachers as parents and to treat them with respect. As a result, students become subject to Japanese authority.

One should expect Confucian ethics in the Korean education system. Ronald Toby explains that the Japanese people emphasized respect, filial piety, and the ruler-subject relationship in their schools.¹⁵ Because the colonial government adopted a “Japanese-style” education, the same ideology can be seen in this textbook. More importantly, Koreans understood and valued Confucian ethics. After centuries of Chinese influence, Korea became one of the most Confucian countries in East Asia. It informed the decisions and practices of nearly all men, women, and children. Thus, incorporating its fundamentals ensures a much greater possibility of understanding and acceptance.

Agriculture is the fourth most frequently mentioned theme in this textbook.¹⁶ There are two types of agricultural passages. The first type refers to farming or crops in general. A line from one passage, for instance, explains that the Korean people “plant seeds in the spring and harvest them in the fall.”¹⁷ It does not contain implicit or explicit morals; instead, it informs readers of popular agricultural practices. As a non-industrial country, most

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¹⁴ Foucault, “The Subject,” 787.
Koreans farmed, so the inclusion of these kinds of passages should come as no surprise. Children understood the value of agriculture, making it an obvious subject to use in lesson plans. In contrast, the second type of agriculture-themed passages encourages action. A passage in the middle of the textbook reads: “Today’s weather is nice. The farmer harvests rice. Since the weather was nice this year, the rice grew well. One must harvest rice on sunny days because one cannot do so on rainy days. Farmers work diligently on days they harvest rice.” [Figure 1.4]¹⁸ This excerpt stresses the need for Korean farmers to cultivate crops. Foucault asserts that the exercise of power “is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions.”¹⁹ The colonial government, once again, uses lessons to influence the actions of its readers. Elementary-school-aged children—most likely the son or daughter of Korean farmers—have the “capacity” to help their parents in the fields. Learning the importance of such activities urges them to do just that.

In addition, the use of the word “farmer” (K. nongbu, C. 農夫) instead of “peasant” (K. nongmin, C. 農民) is noteworthy. The former suggests commercial farming, whereas the latter implies subsistence farming. Japanese leaders and scholars debated the trajectory of colonial education in the early twentieth century. While some believed that public ordinary schools should educate Korean children in Japanese literature and drama, others—like Ishimori Hisane (the publisher of the Chosŏn Review)—argued that it would be more beneficial to emphasize agricultural production. Ishimori wanted the colonial government to focus on rural villages, so the Korean people could “grow more rice and potatoes.”²⁰ They were to produce a surplus of crops, so they could provide more natural resources to

¹⁹ Foucault, “The Subject,” 789.
²⁰ Toby, “Education in Korea,” 57.
Figure 1.1 “Make sure to practice what you have learned every day.”

Figure 1.2 “Who do you kids think these two people are?”

Figure 1.3 “Teachers love their students. Students respect their teachers.”
Figure 1.4  “Farmers work diligently on days they harvest rice.”

Figure 1.5  “When [the flag] waves fiercely in the wind, I am pleased.”
the Japanese empire.

The encouragement of action becomes more explicit as the textbook progresses. The narrator of a later passage, for instance, states that “tomorrow is a free day, so I must follow my father and help him.”21 By including several passages that show children helping their parents, the colonial government instills an expectation within readers. The characters in these stories view helping their family as a personal responsibility and fulfill it without hesitation. Korean students are to follow in their footsteps. Since all the characters in this textbook are young boys, male students are to help their fathers in the fields.

Japanese nationalism is the fifth most frequently mentioned theme.22 Despite the limited number of these passages, the integration of proJapanese sentiments is significant. The textbook, for example, pairs the word “flag” with a picture of the Japanese flag and a text that reads: “beautiful flag.”23 The connotations associated with this insertion are obvious. First, the colonial government wanted its subjects to accept the Japanese flag as their national flag. Indeed, educational lessons served a specific purpose: to transform Korean children into loyal and obedient imperial subjects. The nationalistic sentiments found in this textbook communicates this idea to readers. Second, the Japanese flag is depicted in a positive light. The example phrase—used to help Korean children remember vocabulary words in context—characterizes the Japanese flag as “beautiful.” By doing so, the textbook communicates admiration to its readers, so they feel a sense of nationalism and pride whenever they see the flag.

The theme of Japanese nationalism is subtle at first, but it becomes more explicit further in the textbook. Consider the following passage: “We drew a sun on our country’s flag. On ceremonial days, people place flags outside their doors. We placed a big flag on the main gate of our school. When it waves fiercely in the wind, I am pleased.” [Figure 1.5]24 Compared to the first example, this excerpt contains more direct pro-Japanese sentiments. The use of the word “we” implies that all Koreans view Japan as their mother country, and as a result, they willingly perform rituals that glorify the Japanese empire. The passage also indicates a communal action. Foucault refers to the exercise of power as “an action upon another action,” meaning a higher authority must shape the behavior of its subjects to hold power over them.25 The textbook reveals how the colonial government directed the actions of its subjects. Members of the Korean community placed flags outside of their doors to celebrate a particular day. By including this lesson, the colonial government hopes to ensure future cooperation in the next generation. Most importantly, the last line of the passage communicates how Korean children should feel when they see the Japanese flag waving fiercely in the wind. They ought to be proud and pleased. This implies that the success of the empire should move the hearts of colonial subjects. The writers of the textbook also couple the passage with a workbook activity that reinforces pro-Japanese sentiments. The exercise reads: “Answer the next questions: 1) On what day do you put up the flag? 2) When is the emperor’s birthday? 3) What is the meaning of the emperor’s birthday?”26 These three questions ensure that children understand the ritual.

They ask for specific dates and interpretations in order to assimilate Koreans into the empire.

The majority of passages in this textbook relate to the themes of education, duties of a student, Confucianism, agriculture, and Japanese nationalism. As one of the first colonial textbooks, it stresses the need for children to attend public ordinary schools and learn the material thoroughly. The characters enjoy their education and encourage others to join them. The textbook also uses Confucian ethics to build power relations both inside and outside of the classroom. Lastly, it includes the themes of agriculture and Japanese nationalism to direct the behavior of readers. The agriculture and nationalistic-themed passages encourage Koreans to cultivate farmland and embrace Japanese colonialism, respectively.

*Ordinary School Korean Textbook (1923–24)*

On 1 March 1919, thirty-three nationalist and religious leaders led a group of over 3,000,000 Koreans to demand independence from the Japanese. Protesters marched in the streets and shouted “Independence! Long Live Korea!” When they reached downtown, the peaceful movement suddenly turned violent. The Japanese police opened fire on the crowd, killing over 7,000 people and imprisoning over 50,000 others.27 Although Korea did not gain independence on this day, the large-scale protest put the colonial government on notice. The GGK and his officials could no longer ignore the demands of their subjects. As the first independence movement after World War I (1914–18), the March First Movement captured the attention of the international community. President Woodrow Wilson’s

principle of national self-determination inspired “a new era in which brute force would have no place.” A new international order pressured the Japanese government into giving more rights and liberties to the Korean people. As a result, GKK Saitō Makoto (1919–27, 1929–31) started the cultural period, which introduced a softer, more lenient form of governance. The colonial government, therefore, countered the movement with other mechanisms that did not appear to be so brutal.

Not surprisingly, the colonial government’s approach toward education changed in the early 1920s, and volumes one, two, and three of *Ordinary School Korean Textbook* (1923-24) reflect it. The most obvious change is the addition of more playful passages. In fact, the most frequent theme in the third textbook is fun activities. One passage tells a story about two boys flying kites early in the morning. It uses playful words such as “glitteringly” and mentions how much fun the boys experience. Unlike those in the first textbook, the fun-themed passages in this textbook express a much more playful tone. It encourages readers to take advantage of the opportunities around them and to enjoy themselves. In addition, the characters in the second textbook engage in fun activities outside of school. They go to fields, lakes, and other sights, whereas those in the first textbook only participate in fun activities on school grounds as part of their physical education.

This does not mean, however, that the second textbook eliminates school-related fun-themed passages. The excerpt titled “Field Day” describes children running around on

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31 For more information on fun-themed passages in the first textbook, see The Governor General of Korea, “Ordinary School Korean and Chinese Textbook (1915–18),” Volume 1: 36-7, 118.
a field, playing competitive sports, and enjoying themselves as part of their education.\textsuperscript{32} This communicates the different facets of a public ordinary school: it is not only a place of study but also a place of fun and entertainment. The picture associated with the passage conveys that message; it expresses motion rather than stillness. [Figure 2.2]\textsuperscript{33} As mentioned in the previous chapter, the colonial government forced all schools to demilitarize physical education and implement playful elements.\textsuperscript{34} Field days epitomize the outcome of that change.

The second most frequently mentioned theme is education.\textsuperscript{35} A few of these passages—much like the ones in the first textbook—emphasize the need for children to attend public ordinary schools and bring others along with them. Consider this excerpt from volume one. It reads:

There were two children: the older one was Syu Nam, and the younger one was Pok Tong. Syu Nam is in third grade, whereas Pok Tong is in the first grade. Syu Nam is currently taking Pok Tong to school. Pok Tong is happy to be attending school. Isn’t Syu Nam such a genial child? [Figure 2.3]\textsuperscript{36}

As the older child, Syu Nam is responsible for taking Pok Tong to school. He must set a good example for younger students and encourage them to continue with their education. The direct question at the end of the passage aims not only to praise the older child for his actions but also to make readers admire him. Moreover, the phrase “Pok Tong is happy to be attending school” implies that education brings joy to children, so readers should feel

\textsuperscript{35} The Governor General of Korea, “Ordinary School Korean Textbook (1923–24),” Volume 1: 29, 46, 53, 58-9, 67-8; Volume 2: 7-10, 17-9, 25-7, 33-6, 36-9, 46-9, 63-5, 66-8, 77-9; Volume 3: 1-5, 6-9, 21-5, 43-5, 45-8, 65-6. The majority of these passages mention “school,” but they do not center the passage on schooling itself. For that reason, I have deemed it the second most frequent theme in the textbook.
the same way. Once again, the writers of the text communicate a specific feeling to elementary-aged children in an effort to increase and retain school attendance.

Most education-themed passages, however, do not focus on children attending school itself; they simply mention it in the text while expressing different morals. The passage titled “Su Nam’s Good Deed,” for instance, reads:

After cleaning the classroom, Su Nam walked home late at night and saw a crying child on the side of the road. The child had chased an animal and fell to the ground, causing him to cry. Su Nam immediately ran to the child, held his hand, and told him to stop crying. He helped the little boy find his way home. The little boy’s parents were really grateful. [Figure 2.4] The main purpose of this passage is to highlight Su Nam’s kindness and teach children to help those in need. The older boy acts swiftly, consoles the crying boy, and takes him to safety. The parents thank him for this good deed. Nevertheless, the textbook slips in Su Nam’s status as a student. Several excerpts follow a similar pattern in which students come back from school in the first half of the story and exemplify great moral character in the second half of the story. The writers of the textbook no longer focus on school attendance; rather, they imply that children are already enrolled in public ordinary schools.

In addition, the second textbook includes female students. It introduces them in a subtle manner in the first volume. The picture associated with the phrase “raise hands” contains both male and female students—distinguishable only by the length of their hair. They actively participate in the classroom by answering the teacher’s questions. The incorporation of female students become more obvious in the second volume. The passage

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Figure 2.1 "Kite"

Figure 2.2 "Field Day"

Figure 2.3 "Syu Nam and Pok Tong"
Figure 2.4  “Su Nam’s Good Deed”

Figure 2.5  “The Kind Schoolgirl”

Figure 2.6  “Hanshik”
titled “The Kind Schoolgirl,” for example, reads:

One morning, an elderly man was walking on a street in front of a school when the wind blew the man’s hat away. It rolled further and further away. Because the old man was unable to chase after his hat, he asked the two schoolboys nearby to pick it up for him. The two schoolboys, however, laughed at the situation and simply watched. A nearby schoolgirl felt bad for the old man, so she decided to help him. She picked up the hat, pulled out a handkerchief, wiped the dust, and gave it back to him with two hands. The old man felt thankful. The teacher saw this event unfold inside the school. He complimented the schoolgirl and rebuked the schoolboys. [Figure 2.5]41

This passage proves important for two reasons. First, a female student is the main protagonist for the first time in the textbook. Although the first volume depicts schoolgirls, it does not include them in the lesson material. This student not only appears in the story but also becomes the center of attention. Second, the schoolgirl exhibits good moral character and wins the admiration of her superior. The teacher praises her but rebukes the schoolboys. As a result, she suddenly becomes the “good student” that every reader must strive to follow. This is a sharp contrast to the first textbook where schoolgirls are never mentioned.

These two changes correspond with the statistical data on ordinary schools in the late 1910s and early 1920s. According to Patricia Tsurumi, the number of Korean children who received an ordinary school education rose dramatically a few years after annexation. By 1918, the Japanese government established 464 ordinary schools with an estimated attendance of 88,000 pupils (one-seventh of whom were female).42 Enrollment numbers

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42 It is important to note, however, that 88,000 is a relatively low number compared to the total number of elementary school-aged children in colonial Korea (1910–45). According to Patricia E. Tsurumi, “the combined private and public ordinary school populations amounted to about four percent” of the total. For more information, see Patricia E. Tsurumi, “Colonial Education in Korea and Taiwan,” in The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945, ed. Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 299.
increased because the colonial government encouraged both boys and girls to attend its academic institutions. Before the colonial period, Korean girls were allowed to receive an education, but they never had the same resources or opportunities. This opened new doors for them, which eventually increased the popularity of public ordinary schools and the colonial government’s ability to exercise power over Korean children.

Most importantly, the second textbook explains Korean holidays and history. One passage, for example, pertains to Hanshik, the 105th day after the winter solstice. It reads: “Today is Hanshik, a national holiday in Chosŏn. In our house we set out food, and my father and older brother go to the mountains to pay respects to our ancestors by bowing and offering food to them. My dad tells us that one must perform ancestral worship with a true heart.” [Figure 2.6] By devoting a textbook passage to this holiday, the colonial government not only recognizes a distinct Korean identity but also allows readers to learn about their customs in the classroom. Similar passages do not exist in the first textbook. In addition, this is the first time the textbook explicitly mentions the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Its reference to a pre-colonial dynasty and independent Korea undermines the colonial government’s authority. Nevertheless, it appears in the text.

The Korean tradition passages become more detailed in the next volume. They touch on multiple themes. Consider the passage titled “Ch’usŏk.” It reads:

Today is Ch’usŏk. It is often referred to as a farmer’s favorite holiday and Korean Thanksgiving. The weather is neither hot nor cold; the wind is clean and cool, which refreshes my mind; and the grains are mixed together like a picture, making a beautiful sight. The farmers spent the summer working on the fields tirelessly, but they are able to eat their crops now. Is it not such a happy day?...The farmers share their crops with one another and enjoy their time together. This is a custom. Today is a free day for me. I will take father to grandmother’s grave and bring rice cake and fresh fruit. The night

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of Ch’usŏk is known to have the brightest stars of the year. I will bring Ah Oo and Nu Ui to see the stars and sing songs with me.\textsuperscript{44}

The textbook describes Ch’usŏk—one of the most important Korean holidays—in a positive light. First, it describes the beautiful weather and scenery associated with this day. The narrator states that the weather is just right, the breeze allows him to clear his mind, and the grains come together to form a pleasing picture. By describing the weather and scenery in this way, the passage gives Ch’usŏk a connotation of perfection. Everything, including nature, comes together on this day. Second, it portrays Koreans as hardworking and kind individuals. The farmers make sure to share their precious crops with one another. They do not keep the products to themselves or sell them for profit; instead, they allow others to indulge in the harvest. They are, in short, communal people who care for those around them. Third, it touches on a traditional Confucian practice. The narrator and his father pay respect to their ancestors. They place rice cake and fresh fruit from the harvest on the grave, so the dead may indulge as well. Fourth, it argues that the night of Ch’usŏk has the brightest stars of the year. The children stargaze and sing songs to conclude their day. The passage, once again, makes the holiday seem superior to every other day.

The influence of the March First Movement becomes clear when analyzing the passages in this textbook. The inclusion of more fun-themed passages suggests that studying and playing are not mutually exclusive, so students can attend school while enjoying themselves. The education-themed passages offer similar morals as those in the first textbook. They do not, however, stress attending ordinary schools to the same degree because their contents imply that children are already receiving an education. Finally, the

incorporation of Korean holidays and traditions allows readers to learn material related to their Korean identity.

**Ordinary School Korean Textbook (1930–35)**

Like the first textbook, the most frequently mentioned themes in volumes one, two, and three of *Ordinary School Korean Textbook* (1930–35) are education and the duties of a student. Many passages mention the word “school” at some point in their story. Characters either go to school for class or come back from school before completing their chores. In volume one, a short passage describes a schoolgirl and schoolboy bowing to their mother before departing for school. By incorporating these types of passages, the textbook suggests that enrollment in public ordinary schools is a given for both boys and girls. This follows the trend set by the second textbook.

The duties of a student initially prove simple. A young boy, for instance, receives a postcard from his older brother in Seoul. The older brother reminds him to “take care of [his] body and study hard.” People expect the younger brother to study and perform well in his studies. As a student, he has an obligation to strive for academic success and live up to those expectations. This is a similar idea seen in all three textbooks. In later volumes, however, students begin to take on a much larger role that is not seen in the first two textbooks. One passage begins with these lines: “Older brother became the teacher. In Su

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and Sŏng Ok became students. They are studying arithmetic.”

Indeed, the duties of a student become more complex as time passes, especially for older children. In Su’s and Sŏng Ok’s older brother takes on the role of teacher and helps his younger siblings learn basic arithmetic. Thus, the text encourages older children to become both teacher and student—the former at home and the latter at school. They must help educate the younger generation and learn new material for themselves. By providing an example to follow, the colonial government can influence the future actions of its colonial subjects.

Agriculture is the second most frequently mentioned theme. Unlike the other textbooks, both men and women take on agricultural responsibilities. On the one hand, males cultivate crops. One excerpt highlights the hard work performed by a father and his son. It reads: “The father and son have been working since the morning, and they are now returning home. While looking at his son, the father says, ‘Ch’ang Kŭn, you’re tired, right? Ride the cow.’ The child replies, ‘No, the cow is also tired, so I cannot ride it.’” The father’s question suggests that the two worked diligently all morning, and the son’s answer confirms it. On the other hand, women participate in a different form of agriculture. The textbook includes a passage focused on five women planting flowers in the ground. Women who perform this type of work do not appear in the first two textbooks. It is a new concept designed to engage schoolgirls in agricultural work.

The colonial government’s goals for colonial Korea in the 1930s explain the significant increase of agriculture-themed passages compared to the last textbook. GGK

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Kazushige Ugaki (1927, 1931–36) criticized knowledge-oriented subject matter like literature and the sciences and emphasized vocational and practical skills. Subjects like agriculture and sewing comprised more than 320 hours of study over a span of six years in public ordinary schools. Clearly, Japan used Korea for its natural resources. A few lines from the passage “Rice and Beans” proves this fact. One sentence explains that “Korea’s climate is good for cultivating crops” while another sentence states that Koreans “are not the only ones eating their crops, but the Japanese empire and foreign countries do as well.” The colonial government, therefore, takes advantage of Korea’s climate, land, and workforce by stealing the colony’s food. The textbook does not hide this fact from readers; instead, it uses it as motivation for children to help their parents in the fields.

Passages that contain the themes of education, duties of a student, and agriculture all communicate the need for hard work. They emphasize not only one’s role but also one’s duty to prioritize it above all else. Take the passage “Our House” for example. It reads:

Recently, Father and older brother wake up early every day and work on the field. Mother and older sister do needle work and laundry at the front of the house. My younger sibling and I feed the chickens before and after school, and we clean the house. These are the chores assigned to us. We also do these chores while studying. Once we have completed them, our family can finally meet and talk about fun things. Father says, “The best thing in the world is when the people in the house are healthy enough to do their jobs well and live harmoniously.”

This story proves noteworthy for multiple reasons. First, all members of the family—men, women, and children—have a specific role that they must fulfill before enjoying themselves. They prioritize their chores to benefit the whole family. Second, the parents

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Figure 3.1  “These are the chores assigned to us.”

Figure 3.2  “I will sweat too. I will sweat for myself and those who sweat for me.”

Figure 3.3  “The whole nation congratulates him with sincerity and good faith.”
“assigned” these chores to each person, giving them job-like connotations. The members of the house do not complain; they all understand their tasks and complete them without hesitation. Third, the last line of the passage reveals the motives of the colonial government. The father states that his family members must cultivate a strong physique and complete their assigned tasks, so they can achieve happiness. The colonial government believes that Korean children will have a role in the future, and when the time comes, they should not waver or question themselves in fulfilling that role.

As the textbook progresses, the benefits of working hard shift from the family to the Japanese state. In the passage titled “Sweat,” a schoolboy and his father walk together on a hot day. They see a traffic officer guiding people on an intersection, a man pulling a wagon in front of a hospital, and a farmer working in a field. The son notices that all these men sweat profusely. The father explains that they sweat to complete their jobs. If the traffic officer did not direct the traffic, there would be accidents; if the man did not pull the wagon and bring supplies to the hospital, there would be more people in pain; and if the farmer did not cultivate crops, they (him and his son) would starve to death. The father then points to a train in the distance and explains that there is a man hauling coal to ensure it runs properly. After hearing this, the young boy reflects. He swears, “I will sweat too. I will sweat for myself and those who sweat for me.” [Figure 3.2]56 The boy’s final thoughts reveal a sense of urgency to help the state. He believes that each person works for the benefit of a whole, so he has an obligation to push through hardship and ensure the greatest possible future for the people in his community. Individuality disappears, collectivity fills

the void, and children become spokes on a wheel. They must fulfill their roles and work hard to benefit the state.

Korean history and geography are other important themes present in this textbook. The consequences of the March First Movement show even a decade later. One passage, for example, tells a story about King Pak Hyŏkkŏse (57 BCE–4 CE), the founder of the Shilla dynasty (57 BCE–935 CE). The inclusion of a respected Korean historical figure seems counterproductive toward the colonial government’s goal for moderated assimilation, yet it appears in the text. The children have an opportunity to learn about Korean history rather than Japanese history. It is important to note, however, that these stories resemble myths rather than real events, giving children only a small and modified taste of their actual history.

Despite this change, the colonial government reincorporates nationalistic passages within the textbook. Consider the following:

Today is November 3rd, so it is Cultural Day. Every household has a flag outside of their house. These flags wave fiercely in the wind. There was a ceremony at school in the morning. The principal told us a praiseworthy story about the Japanese emperor. The Japanese emperor is going to become a grandfather. He helped our country make rapid progress and changed it into a praiseworthy country. For that reason, November 3rd has been designated as Cultural Day. The whole nation congratulates him with sincerity and good faith. [Figure 3.3]

In this passage, the Korean people engage in a community-wide ritual by placing flags outside of their homes and congratulating the emperor. The passage asserts that the emperor paved the road for rapid progress and transformed Korea into a praiseworthy country. By doing so, it seeks to help readers accept Japanese imperialism. These types of

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pro-Japanese sentiments should come as no surprise. As mentioned, the government wished to control the thoughts and actions of Korean students, so they could adopt a form of 'Japaneseness.'\textsuperscript{59} This objective became even more important during the publication of this textbook. The late 1920s and early 1930s marked Japan’s militaristic aggressions toward Manchuria: Kwantung Army officers secretly engineered the assassination of the Manchurian warlord Chang Tso-lin on 4 June 1928; invaded Mukden on 18 September 1931; and established the puppet state of Manchukuo on 18 February 1932.\textsuperscript{60} Loyal and obedient imperial subjects would ensure military success. The exercise of power, as Foucault puts it, consists in “guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome.”\textsuperscript{61} The colonial government attempts to do just that by implementing nationalistic passages in its textbooks during these trying times.

The most frequent themes in this textbook are education, duties of a student, agriculture, Korean history and geography, and Japanese nationalism. The first three themes urge Korean children to work hard, so they can help the empire prosper. The next two themes seem at odds with one another. One helps cultivate a Korean identity, whereas the other undermines it. Korean history and geography passages inform readers of the past and present situation of Korea rather than present a particular moral. Finally, nationalistic passages push readers to accept the Japanese empire.

**Passage Revisions**


\textsuperscript{60} The Kwantung Army was a Japanese military unit stationed at the Kwantung Territory in southernmost Manchuria. For more information see Alvin D Coox, "High Command and Field Army: The Kwantung Army and the Nomonhan Incident, 1939," *Military Affairs* 33, no. 2 (1969): 302, doi:10.2307/1983925.

\textsuperscript{61} Foucault, “The Subject,” 789.
The evolution of colonial textbooks becomes clearest when analyzing the revision of specific passages found in two or all three volumes. Certain passages resemble one another, but their contents differ in both subtle and obvious ways. Take the Confucian-themed passage found in all three volumes as an example. It explains how one should say “goodnight” and “good morning” to one’s family members. Textbooks #1 (*Ordinary School Korean and Chinese Textbook, 1915–18*) and Textbook #3 (*Ordinary School Korean Textbook, 1923–24*) are nearly identical: the father and mother receive the highest level of respect, the older brother receives the second highest level of respect, the older sister receives the third highest level of respect, the brother-in-law receives the fourth highest level of respect, and the pet receives the lowest level of respect.62 The pictures associated with the passage also resemble one another with a male child bowing to the father and mother.63 Textbook #6 (*Ordinary School Korean Textbook, 1930–35*), in contrast, divides the same lesson into two sections—one for a boy and the other for a girl. The speech levels used to address the family members remain the same. The textbook writers do not implement any drastic changes to the contents of the passage; they simply provide both a male and female perspective for the children. As previously stated, an increasing number of girls attended ordinary schools in the 1920s and 1930s. The revision of this Confucian-themed passage reflects that trend.

The revisions seen in the passage titled “Swallow” from Textbook #3 and Textbook #6 reveal a more conspicuous change. Both texts focus on a conversation between two

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young boys who see a swallow’s nest. In Textbook #3, one child explains to the other that
this bird feeds its children and migrates to a different location at the end of the year.64 The
boys acknowledge the uniqueness of the bird and stare at it for a considerable amount of
time. In Textbook #6, however, the child provides a much deeper and detailed account of
swallow’s migration. He admires it for its ability to travel “long distances”65 in “rainy and
windy weather.”66 The passage even includes an additional character who claims that his
own will becomes stronger every time he sees the bird.67 The two excerpts resemble one
another in many ways: they include identical topics, titles, main characters, and pictures.
But their contents differ in regard to the swallow’s migration. The former passage has a
matter-of-fact tone, whereas the latter has an admiring one. The children praise the bird for
its willingness to work hard and overcome many obstacles. This idea appears frequently in
the last textbook due to the political climate in the 1930s.

The most noticeable revision comes from a passage centered on New Year’s Day
in all three textbooks. The one in Textbook #1 reads:

On the first day of the New Year, the flag is waving under the newborn sun.
Children gathered at school and sang songs to celebrate the emperor’s
birthday.68

The version in Textbook #3 reads:

Today is the first day of the New Year. We woke up early in the morning,
dressed up, and ate rice cake soup. After coming back from school, we gave
our neighborhood elders a New Year’s bow. Our teacher says we are one
year older starting today, so we must study harder…69

The version in Textbook #6 reads:

68 The Governor General of Korea, “Ordinary School Korean and Chinese Textbook (1915–18),” Volume 1:
97.
My younger brother, Chong Hak, is four years old this year, but he still makes funny remarks. Today, Mother said, “New Year’s Day is near.” “How many more nights until the New Year?” Chong Hak asked her, “Only five more nights,” Mother replied. “Woah, so amazing.” Chong Hak exclaimed. “I will wear my new clothes and bow to the New Year.” After hearing this, our whole family began to laugh.70

The passage in the first edition is short and straightforward. It contains the most nationalistic contents despite its short length. The passage shows that Korean students must perform a certain ritual celebrating the emperor on New Year’s Day, and the passage’s coinciding picture depicts a highly regulated event where children line up in a formation and teachers observe from the sidelines. The same passage in the second edition provides more detail and does not reference the Japanese emperor. It not only reveals a typical routine on New Year’s Day but also includes Korean traditions. The narrator eats rice cake soup in the morning, bows to his elders, and turns one year older. Koreans practice these three customs on this day, whereas the Japanese do not. The passage in the third edition contains neither pro-Japanese nor pro-Korean sentiments. It merely presents an amusing conversation between family members before New Year’s Day. When one considers the political atmosphere on the publication dates of each edition, these changes should come as no surprise: the first passage appeared during the first stages of colonization. The colonial government wanted to communicate the message of loyalty to its subjects. The second passage emerged after the March First Movement. The colonial government decreased nationalistic ideas and increased cultural knowledge in the lessons. The third passage came eleven years after the independence movement and two years after the

assassination attempt in Manchuria. The inclusion of pro-Korean ideas was no longer a top priority.

**Conclusion**

The colonial government constructed thousands of public ordinary schools in colonial Korea. These academic institutions used *Ordinary School Korean and Chinese Textbook* (1915–18), *Ordinary School Korean Textbook* (1923–24), and *Ordinary School Korean Textbook* (1930–35) in their curriculum. A Foucauldian reading of these texts reveals how the colonial government exercised power over Korean children through primary school education. Their themes, morals, and stories communicate certain actions and develop power relations within the classroom, thereby molding the capacity of students. By analyzing these language textbooks within their social, political, and historical context, one can see how the colonial government used education to achieve its goals.

It is clear that the colonial government wished to transform Korean children into loyal and obedient imperial subjects. It urged every elementary-aged-child to attend ordinary schools and receive a standardized, modern-style education. By doing so, it hoped to control the flow of information and directed the present and future actions of Korean students. The contents of language textbooks reflect this goal. Passages centered on education and duties of a student are frequently mentioned across all three volumes. They inform children to attend ordinary schools and study diligently. Passages centered on Japanese nationalism are also present. They not only depict the Japanese emperor in a positive light but also encourage children to participate in rituals and ceremonies that glorify him.
The colonial government, furthermore, wanted Koreans to contribute agricultural resources to the Japanese archipelago. It believed that Koreans should devote their time and energy to ensure the prosperity of the empire. The contents of these three language textbooks reflect this idea. Passages centered on agriculture are frequently mentioned in the first and third textbooks. They highlight the different ways in which Korean children can contribute to the state by working hard and helping their parents.

Without a doubt, the Japanese used ordinary school education to achieve its short and long-term goals in colonial Korea. The GGK and his officials adjusted educational policies in accordance with the social and political situations of the time—most notably after the March First Movement—but the main themes, morals, and stories of language textbooks stayed relatively consistent over time. The colonial government simply changed its methods to accelerate the assimilation and resource gathering process.
CHAPTER III
Putting Ideas into Practice:
Elements of Colonial Education in Modern Korean Literature

On 15 August 1945, Japan surrendered unconditionally to the Allied powers. This decision ended the Pacific War (1941–45) and dissolved the Japanese empire (1868–1945), leaving a large power vacuum on the Korean peninsula. The Soviet Union and the United States seized this opportunity and split the country along the 38th Parallel: the former controlled the northern half, whereas the latter controlled the southern half. The two superpowers helped establish new governments with different political ideologies. Their policies clashed, especially in regard to Japanese collaborators—Koreans who either played an active role in the colonial administration or benefitted from Japanese imperialism. On the one hand, North Koreans considered them traitors and purged them from the country. They imposed the most severe punishments, including lifetime imprisonments and executions. On the other hand, South Koreans placed pro-Japanese Koreans in positions of power and relied on their skills and experiences to lead the country, making any attempt at retribution impossible. With the rise of democratic movements in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, historians began to address the issue more thoroughly and exposed a contradiction in the post-liberation political discourse. Although Koreans pride themselves on their shared struggle against Japanese colonialism, many influential leaders and intellectuals had not only assimilated into the empire but also colluded with the colonial government.

The existence of Japanese collaborators suggests a complex social sphere in colonial Korea (1910–45). While most Koreans fought for national independence, others worked alongside Japanese lawmakers and officials. This dualism raises a key question:
Why did Koreans help their oppressors? Considering the large number of collaborators, the colonial government must have had successful laws, programs, and institutions to facilitate the assimilation process. This leads me to investigate the effectiveness of public ordinary schools (K. kongnip pot’ong hakkyo, C. 公立普通學校). They were, after all, designed to produce loyal and obedient imperial subjects. But providing an accurate assessment is no easy task. Education influences the thoughts and actions of children through repeated lessons and morals embedded in the curriculum. It is a subtle and time-consuming process—and, even if it is successful, the results may not be so obvious. To overcome this obstacle, I will focus on the cultural realm and examine six short stories written by Ch’ae Mansik (1902–50), Kim Yoo Jung (1908–37), and Yi Hyo Sŏk (1907–42). All three of these authors attended public ordinary schools, making them and their works the perfect vehicles for showcasing the long-term effects of colonial education.

In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1970), French philosopher Louis Althusser provides a theoretical framework to appreciate the true power of fiction stories. His theory of interpellation argues that social and political institutions ingrain specific ideologies in the minds of free individuals, so they think and act according to their will.\(^1\) The process is an extremely subtle method of subjugation. In fact, it is most effective when individuals internalize ideas and accept them as their own. They change their opinions, attitudes, and actions without realizing the full implications and consequences of what they are doing. Authors, intentionally or unintentionally, interpellate readers through their writing: they encourage them to think and behave a certain way by offering full and detailed

descriptions of what characters look like, what they feel, and, above all, what they do. Through these descriptions, authors prescribe roles and responsibilities, provide commentary on social norms, and instill underlying ideas and morals. Readers begin to see themselves as the characters in the fiction stories and imitate them in everyday life. A pro-Japanese Korean student, for example, may not only study in Japan and thus master Japanese but also serve in the Japanese military or join a volunteer labor brigade.

By analyzing popular short stories with a Althusserian theoretical lens, I argue that public ordinary schools effectively exercised power over their students. Ch’ae, Kim, and Yi not only embedded elements of colonial education in their works but also transmitted the same ideas to their readers. This chapter has three major sections. The first section presents a general overview of modern literature in colonial Korea. It is both important and necessary because it provides the socio-political context in which these authors wrote their fiction stories. The second and third sections discern colonial education in realist and proletarian literature, respectively. I will examine these primary sources with the underlying assumption that the overall goal of ordinary school education stayed consistent over time. This allows me to search for themes, morals, and stories from all periods of colonial rule rather than from the specific years in which these authors were enrolled in their respective schools.

**Literature in Colonial Korea**

In the early twentieth century, Korean intellectuals discussed the role of literature in a rapidly changing society. According to Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950), a well-known fiction writer and essayist, modern short stories, novels, and poems were more than expressions
of emotion and feeling. They served a much greater purpose: they sought “to discover truths of the universe and existence, investigate ways of living, and explore the condition of emotion.”² He argued that literature should arouse intense feelings, so it can have a lasting influence on its audience. This approach became popular after the official annexation of Korea. Upon losing their country to a foreign power in 1910, Korean intellectuals used literature to promote ideas of nationalism, modernization, and enlightenment. The country’s first literary magazine Sonyŏn (Youth), for example, published works that propagated these ideas to urban youth.³ Their authors, like many others at the time, expressed themselves with metaphors and allegories to avoid negative attention and censorship from the colonial government.

After the March First Movement (1919), however, Korean intellectuals advocated a different literary direction. Kimberly Chung explains that they no longer considered Yi’s approach suitable for “the new environment of mass-centered politics.”⁴ Debates ensued. Two approaches garnered the most attention: art-for-art’s sake and Marxist realism. Advocates of the former felt disappointed and defeated after the failed independence movement. They argued that Korean literature should be “a separate realm reserved for the refined entertainment purposes of the upper classes.”⁵ Advocates of the latter experienced national self-awakening. They wanted to build on the independence movement, using

⁵ Chung, “Proletarian Sensibilities,” 40.
literature as a means to create “an aesthetic propagating culture for and about the masses.”6 These two views laid the foundation for realist and proletarian literature, respectively.

Realist literature depicted the everyday realities of colonial Korea.7 In 1919, Kim Tongin (1900–51) established the magazine Ch’angjo (Creation). It declared that the purpose of literature “lay not in political propaganda but in the depiction of life as it was.”8 Thus, it published short stories offering detailed descriptions of everyday life. Korean realist writers viewed men as “prey to forces such as sex, anger, poverty, the marriage system, and the political system.”9 It comes as no surprise, then, that their works focused mainly on the dark realities of the time. In addition, higher education introduced Koreans to European writers—more specifically Zola, Maupassant, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev. According to Kevin O’Rourke, Koreans and Europeans suffered from a shared pessimism, causing the former to internalize the latter’s ideas and include similar sentiments in their works.10 Ultimately, Korean realist authors strived to write “not of life as it could or should be but of life as it was.”11 They removed the “artistry” in fiction and provided the most accurate representation of colonial Korea.

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6 Chung, “Proletarian Sensibilities,” 40.
7 Although realism increased dramatically, it is important to note that a similar literary trend existed prior to the 1920s. Yi Kwansu writes: “authors, equipped with a newly serious attitude, try to plumb the depths of their imagination and meticulously observe reality in their works.” For more information, see Yi and Rhee, “The Value,” 290.
9 O’Rourke, “Realism in,” 652.
10 The French suffered from political pessimism after the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71); Russians endured a corrupt Tsarist government; and Koreans experienced hopelessness after the colonization of their country. For more information, see O’Rourke, “Realism in,” 652.
For its part, proletarian literature highlighted class struggles, creating a more political literary trend. Although urban workers and peasants started local labor movements in the 1900s, Korean intellectuals began adopting socialism in the 1920s. There were two main reasons for this shift. First, a group of nationalists, who still believed in their country’s chances at independence, admired the newly established Soviet Union. The state’s collectivist and anti-imperialist values, as well as its Marxist-Leninist doctrine, appealed to those who opposed Japanese imperialism. Second, the gap between the lower and upper classes widened. Sunyoung Park explains that the colonial government’s export-oriented agricultural policy favored large-scale commercial farming, which benefitted upper-class landlords and hurt smallholders, semi-tenants, and peasants. The economic inequality invigorated labor movements throughout the colony. As a result, a number of Korean intellectuals—living on and off the peninsula—accepted leftist ideas and implemented them in their works. Their style of literature did not deal with everyday realities; instead, it shed light on class struggles in colonial Korea.

The so-called “New Tendency” literature was an early form of proletarian literature. Writers, who would later become members of the Korea Artista Proletarian Federatio (KAPF), published several short stories between 1924 and 1927. According to Park, these works often endorsed an “individual’s rebellion against political disenfranchisement and the abuse of authority.” The main characters served as symbols of colonial subjugation, so their deaths not only revealed the harmful effects of imperialism but also criticized the

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15 A combination of ideologies comprised leftist culture. Sunyoung Park argues that Marxism, anarchism, liberalism, nationalism, and feminism all played a role. For more information, see Park, *The Proletarian*, 46.
colonial government. As a whole, New Tendency literature attempted to find a balance between politics and culture. Chung argues, however, that it failed to “[inspire] an ongoing social consciousness that would lead to revolution.” The common theme of death ended the possibility of mobilization: Korean readers felt unmotivated and unwilling to act, defeating the purpose of the movement.

Despite its slow start, proletarian literature reached new heights with the establishment of the KAPF. On 17 August 1925, the leaders of six leftist groups convened at a restaurant in downtown Seoul and welcomed the Japanese writer Nakanishi Inosuke (1887–1958) to colonial Korea. By the end of the night, PASKYULA and Yŏmgunsa (Spark Society)—two cultural organizations whose main goal was to develop socialist literature—merged into one. The KAPF was born. Its members focused on class conflict, especially the tension between wealthy landlords and poor peasants. The specific political circumstances of the time helped facilitate the major comeback in engaged literature. Park explains that the Korean Communist Party struggled to establish a concrete base in colonial Korea, which allowed KAPF authors to “use their best judgment in applying socialist doctrine.” They, in short, led the proletarian wave, but their works failed to achieve the end goal. Although socialist ideology began permeating throughout the colony, it failed to shape the overall political landscape. Leftist writers “had serious difficulties in mastering the fundamental tenets of Marxist-Leninist theory.” They had neither the knowledge nor expertise to inspire a successful class movement.

17 Chung, “Proletarian Sensibilities,” 47.
18 Park, The Proletarian, 55-6.
20 Park, The Proletarian, 44.
It is important to note that both realist and proletarian literature could not have flourished without the rise of a new print culture. In the first decade of colonial rule, Governor General (hereafter referred to as GGK) Terauchi Masatake (1910–16) censored the press and popular media. His office closed private newspapers, including Korean and Japanese-owned ones, and created one centralized newspaper called the *Maeil sinbo*.\(^{21}\) It published heavily regulated and biased information, making it an official organ of the Japanese state. In addition, the Company Law (1911) required all new companies to apply for a printing permit.\(^{22}\) It became clear that businesses could not mass-produce content without the direct consent of the GGK’s office. As such, the colonial government effectively controlled most of the printing industry on the Korean peninsula. There were, however, a few exceptions. First, religious organizations were able to obtain publishing permits and establish their own printing companies. The Ch’ŏndogyo religion led the way with Posŏn’sa—a company that published monthly bulletins and books.\(^{23}\) Second, Shinmun’gwan published scholarly books, novels, and translations for Korean readers.\(^{24}\) Despite their initial success, these two printing companies remained relatively small compared to their Japanese-owned counterparts.

After the March First Movement, however, GGK Saitō Makoto (1919–27, 1929–31) implemented the cultural policy and relaxed restrictions on popular media. The number of Korean-owned print shops tripled, their capitalization nearly tripled, and their value of


\(^{23}\) In 1905, Yi Yongik (1854–1907) founded Posŏn’sa, one of the most advanced publishing companies on the Korean peninsula. It eventually merged with the Ch’ŏndogyo-owned Pomun’gwan, allowing the leaders in this religion to take full ownership. For more information, see Shin, *Korean National*, 57-8.

\(^{24}\) In 1905, Choe Namsŏn (1890–1957) founded Shinmun’gwan, a printing company known for its major contributions to Korea’s modern print world. For more information, see Shin, *Korean National*, 57.
production doubled. They served the needs of people in the capital, as well as those in other provinces. Furthermore, Koreans established private newspapers, such as the Tong’a ilbo and Chosŏn ilbo, which led to an overall increase in readership. According to the GGK’s official records, there were 84,440 newspaper subscribers in 1926. Korean authors seized this opportunity and submitted short stories and novels to daily presses. As a whole, they were successful in reaching a larger audience: newspapers serialized roughly one hundred novels and short stories by 1945. The cultural realm also saw an increase in both political and entertainment magazines. Korean scholars attempted to sway political opinion with intellectual journals. Kaehyok, for example, was one of the most politically progressive and sold an average of 7,000 to 8,000 copies per issue. These types of magazines failed to make profits. Unlike their counterparts, entertainment magazines were “large, well-financed, and commercially viable.” They garnered a much larger fan base, and as a result, Korean publishers experienced unprecedented financial gains. Their publication permits increased each year as well, reaching 600 and 947 permits by 1929 and 1939, respectively. Soon, people rushed to local bookstores and libraries to read.

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30 These financial gains benefitted publishers rather than authors. Copyright law protected “the rights of publishers and printers who provided the necessary capital,” so writers could not legally secure their intellectual property. As a result, the majority of them struggled to make a living. This may help explain the common theme of poverty in their works. For more information, see Jongsoo Kim, “The Development of Copyright and the Status of Writers in Korea from the 1880s to the 1930s,” Korea Journal 56, no. 4 (2016): 126.
Realist Literature

During the colonial period, Korean intellectuals used realism to express their thoughts and feelings without a specific political affiliation. Most of them received a formal education at public and/or private schools. After obtaining the necessary literary knowledge and skills, they capitalized on the new print culture and published essays, novels, and short stories. When analyzing these works alongside the lessons taught in government-run public schools, one notices elements of colonial education embedded in them. As a result, the following section will highlight and explain these connections by focusing on short stories written by Ch’ae Mansik and Kim Yoo Jung.

Ch’ae was a well-known and influential writer in colonial Korea. Ch’ae grew up in a small coastal village in North Chŏlla Province, learning classical Chinese at a local sŏdang and receiving a modern-style education at Imp’i (1910–14) and Chungang (1918–22) Ordinary Schools. As such, most of his childhood education came from government-run academic institutions. Ch’ae also attended Waseda University’s college preparatory school in Tokyo, Japan, but the Great Kanto Earthquake cut his time there short. Upon returning to Korea, he became a writer and reporter, making his literary debut with the publication of “Toward the Three Paths” (1924). A few of his other short stories include “Age of Transition” (1923) and “A Ready-Made Life” (1934). Ch’ae died of tuberculosis in 1950.

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32 Imp’i was originally a private ordinary school until GGK Terauchi converted it into a public ordinary school in 1912. It is currently located in Gunsan, South Korea (North Chŏlla Province). Chungang was originally a private high school, but it became a private ordinary school in 1921. It is currently located in Seoul, South Korea (Kyŏnggi Province).
33 Kwadogi [Age of Transition] was Ch’ae’s first attempt at publication. It was eventually published posthumously in 1973. “A Ready-Made Life” was published in a monthly magazine in the Tong’a ilbo called Shindonga.
“Age of Transition” reveals the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as the struggles of Korean intellectuals within the larger Japanese empire. It is written from the third-person omniscient point of view and follows the lives of three Korean students—Pong’u, Hyŏngsik, and Chŏngsu—who study abroad in Japan. After experiencing a new lifestyle, they begin to question Korean tradition, culture, and women. They prefer their more “sophisticated” and “educated” counterparts on the Japanese archipelago. These students, in short, become infatuated with all things Japanese.

From the beginning of the short story, education is an important topic. The narrator explains: “When Pong’u was fifteen years old, he left home to attend ordinary school in Gunsan and Seoul.”34 This information reveals two points. First, Pong’u’s interest in colonial education started early.35 He understood the value of ordinary schools and enrolled in them. His young age, and the inexperience that comes with it, did not stop him. Second, Pong’u felt unsatisfied in his hometown. He travelled to faraway cities to fill a void in his life—one that readers presume could only have been filled by ordinary school education. The narrator also implies that these feelings are self-motivated. During one conversation, Pong’u’s mother asks: “Why don’t you quit studying or whatever and take care of the house? Are you planning on studying your whole life?”36 She neither encourages nor supports her son’s educational pursuits. The use of the phrase “or whatever” suggests she never forced him to attend these schools.

34 Mansik Ch’ae, “Kwadogi” [Age of Transition] (Seoul, South Korea: Kyobobook MCP, 2020): 5.
35 It is important to note that the Korean age system is similar to the Chinese one: a newborn baby is considered to be one year old, and everyone turns a year older on New Year’s Day. The original text indicates that Pong’u was fifteen years old when the year started, so he was most likely thirteen years old internationally. If his real birthday was on New Year’s Day, however, he would have been fourteen years old. For more information, see Ch’ae, “Kwadogi,” 5.
36 Ch’ae, “Kwadogi,” 10.
Ch’ae describes a typical Korean boy’s enthusiasm for education and creates characters who affirm the values, practices, and culture of the colonial regime. The ideal student Pong’u becomes a vehicle for interpellation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the colonial government wanted all school-aged children to attend its academic institutions. Education and the duties of a student are the top themes in almost every language textbook. Several passages imply that hard working and diligent students, as well as those who do not skip class, will succeed. Pong’u embodies these qualities: he sacrifices everything to attend ordinary schools. In addition, he consistently goes to class. One passage reads: “Always traveling to places faraway, Pong’u did not spend much time with his family. He would usually return home a few times a year during school breaks. Sometimes, however, he would only come back once a year.” It is clear that the main character values education—perhaps more than time with his family. He only visits on special occasions when there are no classes. Pong’u’s actions mirror those of “good” students in the textbooks. The inspiration for the character is clear: Ch’ae interpellates his readers, urging them to do as Pong’u does and to take full advantage of the educational opportunities.

Furthermore, the short story expresses displeasure with Korean customs and women. In the first chapter, for instance, Pong’u lashes out against his mother: “‘So why did you force me into marriage? I wasn’t going to say this but…. Aigoo. Don’t you realize that you and father ruined not only your son’s life but also your daughter-in-law’s life by rushing our marriage? Ugh! How frustrating!’” The centuries-old tradition becomes a

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37 While education and duties of a student are the top themes in Textbooks #1 and #6, they are second most frequently mentioned themes in Textbook #3.  
38 Ch’ae, “Kwadogi,” 5-6. 
39 Ch’ae, “Kwadogi,” 12.
source of suffering for Pong’u who, as a married man, cannot indulge in a new and modern lifestyle abroad. He has a moral and legal commitment to his wife, and it infuriates him. From the opening paragraph, Pong’u contemplates a divorce. He asks himself, “What should I do now? Should I just kill this bitch by snapping her neck?” These thoughts are emotionally charged—the combination of self-pity and anger consumes the main character. He spends time thinking about the divorce rather than raising the issue with his wife. In the end, Pong’u cannot follow through with his plan.

As the story progresses, however, the narrator reveals that Pongu’s feelings are unwarranted. His wife plays the role of a traditional housewife perfectly: she cooks, cleans, and behaves according to social norms. This becomes most apparent in a conversation between Pong’u and his mother. She says:

And why are you treating your wife so poorly? For goodness sake, stop acting like this and start treating her better. If you two had a normal relationship, you could live long enough to see your children get married. My heart breaks for the two of you, so much so that I can no longer bear it. If you want me to hate her or kick her out of the house, she needs to have done something wrong. Honestly, anyone in the world would be lucky to have a wife like her; they would live without any worries. For goodness sake, stop acting like this. How do you think your wife feels?

This quotation is important for several reasons. First, it affirms that the wife is not the problem. Pong’u mistreats her without a valid reason, causing others to question his decisions and moral principles. Even the mother sides with her daughter-in-law, which is uncommon in the 1920s, and demands better treatment. Second, it states that Pong’u and his wife’s relationship is unusual. Unlike other married couples, they neither talk nor sleep.

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40 Ch’ae, “Kwadogi,” 1.  
41 Ch’ae, “Kwadogi,” 10-1.  
42 The traditional relationship between Korean wives and their mothers-in-laws is full of tension. Korean women marry into their husband’s family, meaning the whole extended family lives under one roof. As time passes, animosity naturally develops.
with one other. The narrator describes the wife as “Korea’s typical country girl,” so the anomaly must be Pong’u—more specifically, the combination of his education and experiences abroad that makes their relationship different.⁴³ Third, it claims that every man would be lucky to have this kind of wife. Pong’u, however, prefers the “‘well-informed, cute, and docile beauties who were much younger than him.’”⁴⁴ Although the narrator never specifically identifies these individuals, readers can assume that they are Japanese women. The most desirable Korean wives, therefore, pale in comparison to their counterparts on the Japanese archipelago.

By starting the story in this manner, Ch’ae communicates pro-Japanese sentiments. Japan, as a colonizing power, possessed advanced technology and education. It makes sense for young intellectuals to express interest in its modernity, especially in realist literature. But, as mentioned in the previous chapter, language textbooks associated the Japanese flag with beauty and glory. They instilled Japanese nationalism in the minds of Korean children, hoping to influence their future thoughts and actions. As a pupil of Imp’i and Chungang Ordinary Schools, Ch’ae could not have avoided these lessons. Although it is impossible to determine or measure his willingness to accept them, it is possible to analyze similar trends in his work. In “Age of Transition,” for example, Ch’ae creates Korean characters who become infatuated with Japanese life and women. His own ordinary school education may have influenced this decision.

In the early 1930s, Ch’ae’s attitude toward education changed. The Korean economy suffered a major recession, so most writers, especially those who specialized in realist and proletarian literature, lived in poverty. According to Jong Soo Kim, the colonial

⁴³ Ch’ae, “Kwadogi,” 17.
⁴⁴ Ch’ae, “Kwadogi,” 5.
government failed to enforce copyright laws properly, so authors lacked financial security and creative ownership.\(^{45}\) They never received profits worthy of their time, effort, or skill. The tense political climate also led to an increase in government censorship which restricted people’s freedom of expression. Under these circumstances, Korean writers lost pride and confidence in themselves, ultimately selling their works for low prices and developing a pessimistic outlook on life.\(^{46}\)

Unlike the previous story, “A Ready-Made Life” criticizes education for its inability to provide a better life. It is written from the third-person omniscient point of view and follows the life of a poor writer, P, who is unemployed and cannot provide for his family. His everyday interactions and thoughts reveal that P is not the only one struggling: other college graduates cannot find work, and young girls sell their bodies for only twenty chŏn. The 1930s, therefore, is not a period of rapid progress and prosperity. In the end, P encourages his son to abandon his educational pursuits and take an apprenticeship position at a local printshop.

From the beginning of the short story, Ch’ae highlights the plight of Korean intellectuals. The opening scene focuses on a conversation between P (the main character) and K (the president of a newspaper). The former desperately asks for an opening at the company, but the latter declines his request blaming the poor economy. According to the narrator, the rejection comes as no surprise, for P is “an old hand at being turned down in his job-hunting campaign.”\(^{47}\) Thousands of college graduates faced this same problem:

\(^{45}\) Kim, “The Development,” 127.
\(^{46}\) Kim, “The Development,” 131.
their liberal arts education became useless in the early and late 1930s, making them “dispirited and jobless, a powerless, cultured reserve force.”

Korean intellectuals were well educated, but they struggled to find opportunities and bridge the social, political, and economic gap between Koreans and Japanese. In chapter three, Ch’ae further criticizes education. He writes:

Hot-blooded patriots toured the countryside villages, clamoring for education with all the eloquence at their command. “Study! Learn! Even a humble man can become a yangban.” “Teach your children—even if you have to sell the paddies and the house! And if you can’t do that, then work your way through school.” “Confucius and Mencius have had their day. Cut off your topknots and take up the new learning.”

After the opening scene, readers realize that higher education is useless. It leads to humiliation rather than success and prosperity. This passage, therefore, should be read satirically: only the foolish would sell their land and sacrifice their time for formal schooling. Although Ch’ae makes these criticisms, he focuses on tertiary education. His concerns pertain to college graduates “with no technical know-how” and “some commonplace knowledge.” This works in favor of the colonial government because it never wanted Korean children to receive a higher education. Instead, it wanted them to learn lower-level practical skills.

The moral of this short story, thus, encourages readers to

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49 Ch’ae, “A Ready-Made,” 60.
52 In 1929, the colonial government introduced a mandatory vocation course which taught weeding, plowing, sowing seeds, webbing straw ropes, building barns, feeding cattle, rearing silkworms, and harvesting and selling vegetables at local markets. For more information, see Seong-Cheol Oh and Ki-Seok Kim, “Japanese Colonial Education as a Contested Terrain: What did Koreans do in the Expansion of Elementary Schoolings?” Asia Pacific Education Review 1, no. 1 (2000): 85.
reject higher education and accept the same vocational lessons taught at public ordinary schools.

As the short story progresses, Ch’ae emphasizes physical labor over education. The main character’s son, Ch’ang Son, plays a key role in the interpellation process. As explained in the previous chapter, the colonial government wanted students to attend its academic institutions and contribute natural resources to the Japanese empire. Ch’ang Son is an elementary-school-aged child who wants a modern-style education, but P claims, “It would be better in many respects to let him work as a manual laborer in the countryside.”[^53]

This view contrasts drastically with the one in “Age of Transition” but still aligns with the lessons in ordinary school education because it encourages readers to value agricultural production.

A similar connection between fiction and colonial education can be seen in the works of another realist writer. Kim Yoo Jung had a short but influential literary career, writing over twenty-five short stories in two years. Kim was born in the village of Chungni in Kangwŏn Province. He received a formal education at Chaedong Ordinary School (1920–23) and Whimoon Ordinary School (1923–29).[^54] Upon graduation, he enrolled in Yonsei University’s literature department but failed to complete his degree. As an advocate of art for art’s sake and realism, Kim wrote multiple short stories addressing the dark realities of everyday life. Most of them take place in rural settings, giving the audience an authentic representation of the countryside. In 1935, Kim made his literary debut with “Downpour” (1935) and “Bonanza” (1935). With a combination of wit and irony, Kim

[^54]: GGK Terauchi transformed Chaedong into a public ordinary school in 1910, and GGK Hasegawa Yoshimichi (1916–19) transformed Whimoon into a private ordinary school in 1918. Both schools are currently located in Seoul, South Korea (Kyŏnggi Province).
captivated his readers, and his popularity led to the publication of other short stories such as “Spring, Spring” (1935) and “Wife” (1935).\textsuperscript{55} Kim died of tuberculosis in 1937.

To assess the effectiveness of Kim’s ordinary school education, we focus our attention to “Spring, Spring.” It is written from the first-person point of view and describes a farmer’s efforts to marry a young woman in the countryside. The main character agrees to work for the village bailiff, and in return, he gets to marry his daughter once she reaches a certain height. After three years, however, the daughter has not grown at all, causing problems for both parties.

Throughout the short story, Kim emphasizes the importance of manual labor for those living and working on Korean farmland. All three major characters—the son-in-law, the father-in-law, and the prefect—understand their roles in enforcing or contributing to agricultural production. The son-in-law, for example, argues that the failure to reap the spring harvest would be no worse than death.\textsuperscript{56} This comparison sheds light on the Korean people’s perception of farming; they understand it is the most important job in the mid-1930s. The prefect, however, takes it one step further. In a conversation between him and the protagonist, he explains:

“If you say that you’re not going to work, or that you’re running off home at the busiest time of the year for farming, you could be sent to a gaol for the crime of damages!...Did you see that recently someone was sent to gaol for having started a fire up on the hill at Ginseng Field? At a time like this, when you can be sent to prison for starting a fire on a hill, what a much more serious crime it is to spoil somebody else’s farming!”\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55}“Spring, Spring” was published in a monthly magazine by the Chosèn ilbo called Chogwang, and “Wife” was published in a literary magazine called Sahae gongnon.
\textsuperscript{57} Kim, “Spring,” 178.
This paragraph clarifies three points. First, the colonial government maintains strict control and surveillance of Korean farmers. Any damage to agricultural land results in severe punishments. Second, the mid-1930s marks a crucial time in Japanese colonial rule. The phrase “at a time like this” suggests these rules were enforced because of new social and political developments. The Japanese government, preparing for wartime mobilization, could not allow Korean farmers to waste any natural resources. Third, the failure to work warrants arrest. Until this point in the short story, the main character’s thoughts and actions violated a moral obligation to fulfill his end of an agreement, but the prefect asserts that they are crimes against the state. The message is simple: if Korean farmers do not work, they will suffer severe consequences.

Beyond the obvious emphasis on farming, Kim creates characters who value hard work. Ordinary school education taught perseverance, particularly for jobs involving manual labor and agriculture. It is one of the overarching themes in Textbook #6. It comes as no surprise, then, that the son-in-law and the father-in-law become vehicles for interpellation. They are designed to influence readers in two different ways. On the one hand, the former embodies characteristics of a good farmer. He shows signs of rebellion, but eventually accepts his role and works without further objections. This change proves noteworthy. The son-in-law’s frustrations are reasonable: the father-in-law clearly exploits him, using his daughter’s height as an excuse to delay the marriage and to profit from free labor. But, in the end, the son-in-law chooses not to resist. The spring harvest becomes his top priority, and the wedding becomes an afterthought. These actions resemble the ones

58 In his own words, the son-in-law swears, “Father-in-law, sir, I’ll never do such a thing again.” Then, he puts an “A-frame on [his] back and set[s] out for [his] place of work.” For more information, see Kim, “Spring,” 184.
taken by the family in Textbook #6’s passage “Our House.” Each person completes his or her respective task before focusing on anything else. By portraying the main character in a similar manner, Kim is encouraging readers to follow in his footsteps—that is, to work hard and to set aside personal issues for the Japanese empire. On the other hand, the father-in-law represents the ideal farmer. He has an agriculture-first mentality and is willing to do anything for a successful harvest. When the son-in-law takes a short break, for instance, the father-in-law yells, “Blast you, are you trying to ruin me…I ought to smash your head in.”\(^{59}\) Although colonial education never condoned violence, it did encourage Koreans to contribute natural resources to the empire. Kim has internalized these ideas and interpellates readers by describing a model for them to follow.

“Spring, Spring” also encourages readers to accept the colonial social hierarchy. Since the beginning of the short story, the protagonist feels frustrated with his situation, causing him to contemplate different ways to challenge his father-in-law. Initially, he has simple thoughts of disobedience.\(^{60}\) As time passes, however, these thoughts turn into actions. First, the son-in-law demands a marriage order from the prefect.\(^{61}\) Second, he physically attacks his father-in-law, pushing him to the ground and grabbing the crotch of his trousers.\(^{62}\) Although these two instances indicate insubordination, the main character’s overall attitude toward the colonial social hierarchy does not change. This should come as no surprise, for ordinary school education embedded the concepts of loyalty and obedience in its rules, rituals, and classes. Kim accepted them and created a character who personifies

\(^{59}\) Kim, “Spring,” 173.

\(^{60}\) Throughout the short story, the son-in-law exhibits five of thoughts of disobedience. They include measuring the daughter with a ruler, quitting work, and pushing the father-in-law to the ground. For more information, see Kim, “Spring,” 172 and Kim, “Spring,” 174.

\(^{61}\) Kim, “Spring,” 175.

these qualities. After the first act of disobedience, for example, the son-in-law works “without another word of protest.” He respects authority by listening to the prefect’s orders and reaping the spring harvest. The hierarchy is clear: farmers obey government officials. A similar situation can be seen following the second act of disobedience. The son-in-law apologizes to his father-in-law, who is also the bailiff of Square Pac, and swears, “I’ll never do such a thing again.” By describing these moments of compliance, Kim urges readers to accept the social hierarchy created and maintained by the colonial government. He acknowledges that humans naturally resist systems of oppressions, but, in the end, they must return to the right path—one consisting of law and order.

Kim, furthermore, communicates gratitude toward Japanese colonizers. Colonial education taught students to feel grateful to their oppressors. In Textbook #6, for instance, the passage “Cultural Day” suggests Korean children should thank the Japanese emperor for colonizing their country. Love, respect, and gratitude were always associated with the imperial family. As a graduate of these institutions, Kim consumed these ideas and embedded similar ones in “Spring, Spring.” The son-in-law, once again, becomes a vehicle for interpellation. The short story first references gratitude in a conversation between the protagonist and the prefect. The latter explains the father-in-law’s kindness and asks, “So are you grateful? Then get along and get the seedlings planted, or whatever it was you were doing. No more grumbling now. Off with you!” The rhetorical question lingers in the back of readers’ minds; they wonder if gratitude is expected—or even appropriate—in this situation. By the end of the short story, however, Kim provides an answer. He writes, “[the

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64 Kim, “Spring,” 184.
son-in-law] felt so grateful to [his] father-in-law that [he] almost cried without realizing it.” By following the main character’s actions, readers, too, were to feel grateful to their oppressors who exploit them for free labor and resources.

The interpellation process proves more effective when one considers the parallels between the protagonist and Korean readers. The former lives a rough life, enduring physical and emotional hardships, to please those who will never truly accept him. This leads to a strong sense of the “Other.” It comes as no surprise, then, that the son-in-law refers to his father-in-law as the “enemy.” Likewise, as imperial subjects, Koreans provide free resources and labor to the Japanese empire. Although the colonial government encouraged assimilation, it maintained a clear distinction between “Korean” and “Japanese.” The inequality and mistreatment led to several independence movements, most notably the March First Movement and the Kwangju Student Movement (1929). Korean readers, therefore, see themselves in the protagonist; they feel compelled to follow his footsteps: to work hard, to accept the colonial social hierarchy, and to feel grateful to their oppressors. Interpellation is doing its work.

The influence of Kim’s ordinary school education is evident in his other short stories. Within the same year, he published “Wife.” It is written from the first-person point of view and focuses on the struggles of a poor family in the countryside. On the verge of poverty, the husband releases his frustrations by physically and verbally abusing his wife. The vicious cycle continues until they brainstorm ways to improve their living situation. Throughout the story, Kim uses explicit language to communicate the husband’s thoughts,

leaving nothing to the imagination. His frankness provides a realist representation of the countryside.

“Wife” sheds light on the role of “New Women” in a rapidly changing Korea. In the beginning of the short story, the wife learns modern songs at a nearby night school, a small institution designed to teach farming children reading and writing skills, and establishes a profitable booze peddling business. Immediately, the husband notices a change in her behavior. He states:

But now get this: she’s fumbling with the front collar of her jacket, and lo and behold, out comes a pipe. She peeks front and back, left and right, looks once more for good measure. No sign of yours truly. She sticks her face into the firebox, lights up, and takes a puff. Then all of a sudden it’s ahchoo, ahchoo, ahchoo, and she blows her nose—quite a fit! Day before yesterday I caught her pinching my tobacco again…

The wife challenges traditional gender roles established in the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). She not only shoulders the financial burden of her family but also smokes tobacco—an uncommon, and often looked down upon, habit for traditional Korean women. The phrases “peeks front and back” and “looks once more for good measure” suggest the

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68 In the early twentieth century, Korean society distinguished two groups: “New Women” and “Traditional Women.” Chu Yosŏp attempts to define these terms in a feminist journal. He explains, “Perhaps the most convincing distinction is that those who have received Western-style education are called New Women, whereas those who have not are considered Traditional Women.” For more information, see Chu Yosŏp, “Characteristics of New Women and Traditional Women,” in New Women in Colonial Korea: A Sourcebook, ed. Hyaeweol Choi (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 43.

69 According to Shino Toyoshima, the colonial government offered mobile classes, night schools, and private seminars to provide education for people who could not afford tuition or enroll in an ordinary school due to age limitations. Although Kim does not specify the details, it can be inferred that the wife attended this type of institution. For more information, see Shino Toyoshima, “State Schools and the Local Community in Colonial Korea,” International Journal of Korean History 5 (2003): 134.


wife understands the implications of her actions: they violate social norms, making her vulnerable to criticism and, more realistically, physical and emotional abuse from her husband. She, nevertheless, follows through with them.

Kim’s creation of a competent and independent female character is aimed at female readers. They are to pursue their interests regardless of potential criticism from others. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the colonial government encouraged both boys and girls to attend public ordinary schools. By the 1920s, the enrollment numbers for female students increased, prompting noticeable changes in Textbooks #3 and #6. A minority of Koreans, however, questioned the necessity and practicality of these institutions. They argued that schoolgirls could not apply their knowledge and skills post-graduation, so homeschooling may be a better option. These views created a divide between the colonial government and some of its subjects: the former wanted all children to attend its academic institutions, consuming the lessons and morals that will facilitate the success of the empire, whereas the latter challenged the notion that schools should be accessible to female students. Women’s education, therefore, became a hot topic in socio-political discourse. In “Wife,” Kim contributes his own views to the conversation. He initially depicts the main character as a submissive housewife, but she blossoms into a strong, independent woman. After starting a successful booze peddling business, she has “places to go” and “things to do,” perplexing the husband who has never seen this type of behavior from her. It is precisely her night school education that allows this transformation to occur. Though the

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72 Pang Chŏnghwon, for example, explains that schoolgirls do not learn useful skills in middle or high school. He recommends homeschooling, so they can learn and complete their domestic responsibilities. For more information, see Pang Chŏnghwon, “Even if I have a daughter, I won’t send her to school: Request for the reform of girls’ school” in New Women in Colonial Korea: A Sourcebook, ed. Hyaeweol Choi (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 59-63.

73 Kim, “Wife,” 130.
development of this character, Kim suggests female readers can—and should—receive a modern education. In doing so, they can improve their skills and lives.

It is important to note that Kim interpellates all Korean women, urging them, regardless of their appearance, social class, or innate ability, to enroll in a school and challenge traditional gender roles. Constant references to the wife’s unattractiveness and low socio-economic status suggest she is a less than average person. Yet, Kim chooses her to represent progress and change. The message is clear: all Korean women can elevate themselves with a proper education.

**Proletarian Literature**

To assess the effectiveness of ordinary school education through works of fiction, one must consider the other major style of literature in colonial Korea. Like their realist counterparts, proletarian writers received a formal education in government-run public schools. Although they focused on prevalent social and economic issues, their works should reflect the same ideologies and morals in colonial education. This section will investigate the connection between colonial education and short stories written by Yi Hyo Sŏk.

In a span of thirteen years, Yi became an established writer known for his lyricism and criticism of urban life. Yi was born in the county of Chinbu-myŏn in Kangwŏn Province. He received his primary education at P’yongch’ang Ordinary School (1914–20) and his secondary education at Kyŏngsŏngjeil Ordinary School (1920–25). After

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74 Kim, “Wife,” 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 129, 130, and 131.
75 P’yongch’ang became a public ordinary school in 1912. It is currently located in P’yongch’ang-gun, South Korea (Kangwŏn Province).
76 Kyŏngsŏngjeil became a public ordinary school in 1922. It is currently located in Seoul, South Korea (Kyŏnggi Province).
obtaining an English literature degree at Keijō Imperial University (1925–30), Yi became a professor at Sungshil Junior College, as well as a professional writer. His literary career can be divided into two parts. The first half contains short stories, such as “The City and the Ghost” (1928) and “Encounters” (1929), that propagated leftist ideology by highlighting the stark differences between the rich and the poor. They directly criticized modernization for its contribution to inequality in colonial Korea. The second half include short stories, such as “Pig” (1933) and “When the Buckwheat Blooms” (1936), that worshipped nature. This indicates the adoption of an art-for-art’s sake literary approach.

Yi died of meningitis in 1942.

In order to identify the different ways in which colonial education influenced proletarian literature, I will focus on short stories from the first half of Yi’s literary career. “The City and the Ghosts” is written from the first-person point of view and sheds light on the socio-economic consequences of modernization in Korean cities. It follows a poor manual laborer who lives life oblivious to the country’s growing inequality. After meeting a crippled mother and her son, however, he becomes critical of it. He refers to impoverished folks as “ghosts” because they roam the city streets as lifeless human beings. As the capital and center of modernity, Seoul has more “ghosts” than people.

From the beginning of the short story, Yi clearly distinguishes between the rich and the poor. Consider the following passage:

After a long day of the summer heat beating down on me, I was grateful for the night. City dwellers have parasols that float like rubber balloons in the streets, fans that cool their sweat, beers that quench their thirst, and ice cream that is served on a silver platter, as well as summer resorts near the

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77 Both “The City and the Ghost” and “Encounters” were published in a socialist magazine called Chosŏn jigwang.
78 “Pig” was published in a literary magazine called Chosŏn munhak, and “When the Buckwheat Blooms” was published in a literary journal called Chogwang.
cool mountains and clear waters. They have Sŏgwangsa, Inch’ŏn, and Wŏnsan. As someone who could never dream of these things, I was satisfied with the faint smell of cold ice. For this reason, I did not mind wandering at night.\textsuperscript{79}

Although Koreans occupy the same space, they do not enjoy the same luxuries. On the one hand, the rich have access to fancy items, drinks, desserts, and summer resorts. They reap all the benefits of rapid modernization and urbanization, which exacerbates the problem of inequality. On the other hand, the poor have nothing. They struggle to make a living regardless of technological advances. The protagonist is no exception. He belongs to the lower class: his daily routine consists of working a manual labor job, drinking at a local tavern, and sleeping on the streets. These experiences increase his sympathy for fellow “ghosts.” Filled with resentment, the main character asserts: “As Seoul expands and flourishes, the number of ‘ghosts’ increases…It is truly illogical and unbelievable!”\textsuperscript{80}

Modernization should help everyone, but it only benefits a select few and leaves everyone else in worse positions. To solve this issue, Yi asks readers for their “awareness, wisdom, and power.”\textsuperscript{81}

In the process of criticizing inequality, however, Yi creates a main character who obediently fulfills his role as a manual laborer. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the colonial government created loyal subjects by embedding the notions of obedience and hard work in the ordinary school curriculum. According to Textbook #6’s passage “Sweat,” for example, Korean children were to sacrifice their time, energy, and bodies for the

\textsuperscript{79} Hyo Sŏk Yi, “Toshiwa Yuryŏng” [The City and the Ghost] in Ihyŏksŏng tan’pyŏnsosŏl: taep’yøjakp’um 10 sŏn (100 nyŏn, ppuri kip’un hyŏndaemunhang shiriju) [Yi Hyo Sŏk Short Stories: Top 10 Representative Works (100 Years, Deep-Rooted Contemporary Literature Series)], (Deep-Rooted Contemporary Literature, 2017), 67, Ridibooks Online Application.
\textsuperscript{80} Yi, “Toshiwa” 73.
\textsuperscript{81} Yi, “Toshiwa” 73.
Japanese empire. The main character embodies these same qualities. First, he digs cement until “his entire body is covered in sweat.”\textsuperscript{82} This phrase, as well as the constant references to “sun,” “heat,” and “hot summer,” suggests the main character endures harsh working conditions. Through the portrayal of low status workers, Yi shows readers that physical labor requires self-sacrifice, so his characters must push the limits of their bodies to fulfill their roles properly. Second, the main character “work[s] from morning to night without complaining to [his] superior.”\textsuperscript{83} Devoid of any acts or thoughts of disobedience, he is the perfect worker for the Japanese empire. Yi provides this type of description with a matter-of-fact tone, implying that the combination of hard work and obedience is to be expected, and, more importantly, accepted by the audience.

The short story “Encounters” contains elements of ordinary school education as well. It is written from the first-person point of view and sheds light on the unfortunate lives of impoverished Korean women. Over a span of eight years, Chan Ho (the male protagonist) and Kye Sun (the female protagonist) meet three times. In the first encounter, Chan Ho hires a matchmaker to find him a suitable wife. She arranges a meeting with a poor girl named Kye Sun. In time, however, Chan Ho realizes that she is the daughter of a former hotel owner and respectfully declines the marriage proposal. In the second encounter, Chan Ho visits a bar before embarking on an overseas adventure. He recognizes Kye Sun as one of the workers, but before any reunion, Japanese authorities arrest her for the possession of illegal alcohol. In the third encounter, Chan Ho roams the streets of Harbin, China until he wanders into the red-light district. He finds Kye Sun who has been sold into sexual slavery. She is sick and decides to commit suicide. Yi embeds leftist

\textsuperscript{82} Yi, “Toshiwa” 56.
\textsuperscript{83} Yi, “Toshiwa” 44.
ideology in the third encounter but uses the first and second encounters to build suspense. It is in these two situations where one can see the influence of his colonial education.

During the first encounter, Yi links education with admiration and desirability. As previously explained, the colonial government built public ordinary schools to disseminate a standardized ideology. In order to increase enrollment numbers, it stressed the importance of education to Korean and Japanese students. As a former pupil of P’yongch’ang and Kyŏngsŏngjeil Ordinary Schools, Yi bought into this idea and relayed the same message to his readers. The matchmaker becomes the primary agent for interpellation. She attempts to arrange a marriage between Chan Ho and Kye Sun. But it is no easy task: the former belongs to the middle class, whereas the latter belongs to the lower class. Their socio-economic differences hurt marriage prospects, so the matchmaker highlights Kye Sun’s modern education—more specifically, her fluency in English and Japanese—to even the playing field. It is, therefore, one of the few qualities that can transcend wealth and status. By creating characters who value education, Yi tries to make readers feel the same way.

During the second encounter, the short story continues to interpellate readers by encouraging obedience to the new colonial order. When a Japanese police officer and detective raid the bar, for example, Chan Ho explains: “I did not move or say a word. If they had arrested me, I would have accepted my fate.” As a Korean civilian, he feels compelled to remain docile in the presence of Japanese authorities who have the power to arrest and punish anyone. Although he had done nothing wrong, it is in Chan Ho’s best


interest to accept his fate. In the end, however, the Japanese authorities arrest Kye Sun. The male protagonist wants to chase after her, but he concludes: “What difference will I make? I am powerless.”

This phrase is important because it reveals that he understands and accepts his inability to change the outcome. Korean readers are to follow in his footsteps—that is, to buy into the idea of powerlessness and to remain obedient subjects within the new colonial order.

The short story also affirms the acceptance of Japanese language and customs. Since the start of colonization, public ordinary schools prioritized the study of Japanese by making it the number one subject in their curriculum. The most effective way to assimilate Koreans was to ensure that everyone read, wrote, and spoke the same language. Yi, like many other authors of the time, incorporates both Korean and Japanese seamlessly in his works. It forces Korean readers not only to use the foreign language in everyday situations but also to learn it. Additionally, Kye Sun wears a kimono and changes her name to “Yuriko.”

Despite the on-going tensions between Koreans and Japanese, Yi does not ridicule the adoption of Japanese culture. He glosses over the details, making it both normal and acceptable in the minds of readers.

Conclusion

Modern Korean literature cannot be generalized into one category. In the early twentieth century, a combination of social, political, and cultural changes created a diverse literary world. It comes as no surprise, then, that Korean writers belonged to various intellectual circles with different literary approaches. This eventually led to a divide between realist

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87 Yi, “Kiu,” 27.
and proletarian writers: the former emphasized art-for-art’s sake, whereas the latter pushed for economic and social reform. Both groups relied on the new print culture to publish their works in popular newspapers and magazines. Ch’ae, Kim, and Yi participated in this movement. By reading their short stories with an eye to discerning the themes, morals, and stories presented in the previous chapter, one recognizes a clear connection between the short stories and the ordinary school curriculum.

As an alumnus of Imp’i and Chungang Ordinary Schools, Ch’ae expresses enthusiasm for education, as well as appreciation for Japanese traditions, customs, and women. This becomes most obvious in his first attempt at publication. In “Age of Transition,” the main character, Pong’u, values schooling and loathes his Korean wife. A detailed description of his feelings and actions interpellate readers to follow in his footsteps. In the early 1930s, however, Ch’ae changes his attitude toward education. The economic depression forced him to reflect on the struggling lives of Korean intellectuals. In “A Ready-Made Life,” the main character, P, discourages any attempt to receive a college degree and encourages the Korean people to work manual labor jobs. Both Pong’u and P embody the characteristics that the GGK and his officials wanted Korean children to adopt.

As an alumnus of Chaedong and Whimoon Ordinary Schools, Kim consumed a specific ideology designed to benefit the Japanese empire. In “Spring, Spring,” the three main characters—the son-in-law, the father-in-law, and the prefect—value physical labor and agricultural production. They work hard to replenish the food reserves in colonial Korea. In “Wife,” the female main character attends night school. Her education allows her to start a successful booze peddling business and transcend her position in a patriarchal society. Readers are to read these short stories and behave like these characters.
As an alumnus of P’yongch’ang and Kyŏngsŏngjeil Ordinary Schools, Yi internalized colonial education. In “The City and the Ghost,” the main character works in extreme conditions without any complaints. He considers himself lucky to have a job, remaining completely oblivious to the growing inequality in urban areas. In “Encounters,” the main character, Chan Ho, not only values education but also remains obedient in the presence of Japanese officials. Although these short stories were written to emphasize the social and economic problems in colonial Korea, they also encouraged readers to become docile imperial subjects.

Considering the connection between these short stories and colonial education, one can argue that public ordinary schools were effective in shaping the thoughts and actions of Korean children. These three authors, intentionally or unintentionally, created characters who embodied the exact qualities that the colonial government deemed necessary for their imperial subjects. By reading these stories, readers would behave in ways that benefitted the Japanese state. This is not to say that these authors’ past experiences in government-run academic institutions were their sole source of inspiration; rather, it is to say that they played a role and should not be overlooked.
CONCLUSION

The colonial period (1910–45) marked one of the darkest times in Korean history. Despite several centuries of conflict, the Korean people had never lost their independence to a foreign power. The rapid modernization and expansion of the Japanese empire (1868–1945), however, changed that by shifting the power dynamics in East Asia. Japan started colonizing other countries and creating new administrations. On the Korean peninsula, the Governor General of Korea controlled all aspects of life. He established an education system composed of government-run public schools—or public ordinary schools (K. kongnip pot’ong hakkyo, C. 公立普通學校). In this thesis, I argued that these academic institutions effectively influenced the thoughts and actions of Korean children. Using Michel Foucault’s theory of power and Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation, I asked and answered the following questions: How did the colonial government organize and operate its ordinary schools? What themes, morals, and stories were embedded in the ordinary school curriculum? And how did these themes, morals, and stories influence the writing of Korean intellectuals?

Chapter one explained the different ways in which public ordinary schools operated as, what Foucault called, a “block of capacity-communication-power.” Using information from Richard E. Kim’s memoir and secondary sources, it revealed that the colonial government implemented strict rules and regulations to create educational spaces for indoctrination purposes. A series of communications (lessons, lectures, and marks of value) and power processes (pyramidal hierarchy, internal surveillance, and a system of rewards and punishments) shaped the “capacity” of Korean children who were more willing to accept pro-Japanese propaganda and ideology. This ultimately resulted in a wide range of
directed actions: Korean children performed rituals, participated in ceremonies, engaged in military drills, and conducted manual labor for the Japanese empire.

Chapter two provided a deeper look at the ordinary school curriculum. It detailed the major themes, morals, and stories in the first (1915–18), third (1923–24), and sixth (1930–35) volumes of the *Korean Governor General National Language Textbooks* (K. Chosŏn Ch'ongdokpu kugŏ kyogwaŏ, C. 朝鮮總督府國語教科書). Each represented a different period of colonial rule: the first volume follows the strict nature of the military period (1910–19); the second volume reflects the more relaxed and lenient policy of the cultural period (1919–30); and the third volume highlights the urgency of the wartime period (1930–45). Although these language textbooks were published in separate socio-political contexts, they had both obvious and subtle similarities, suggesting the overall goal of ordinary school education remained consistent over time. As a result, it should be considered a single disciplinary mechanism that met the everchanging needs of the Japanese empire.

Chapter three addressed the “consumption” issue—or the reception of colonial education by Korean students. It examined elements of the ordinary school curriculum in six short stories written by Ch’ae Mansik (1902–50), Kim Yoo Jung (1908–37), and Yi Hyo Sŏk (1907–42). As former pupils of public ordinary schools, they internalized the most important lessons and embedded them in their works. This movement coincided with the rise of a new print culture, which allowed these authors to reach a much larger audience through newspaper and magazine subscriptions. Ultimately, these stories encouraged readers to receive a modern-style education, to value work hard, to fulfill their responsibilities, to follow the new social hierarchy, and to obey Japanese authority.
Although this thesis focuses on Japanese colonial education, it adds to a much larger imperialist discourse. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European countries made parallel efforts in their colonies to indoctrinate children with government-run education programs. This thesis reveals how the same process occurred in East Asia. Moreover, modern-day governments use education to ingrain a specific ideology into the minds of students. A standardized curriculum affirms certain values, institutions, and people while condemning others; includes some historical events while never mentioning others; and teaches young children the difference between “right” and “wrong.” This thesis, therefore, enables readers to be aware of the various power dynamics within educational spaces.

Of course, this thesis is not meant to be a comprehensive work. It only scratches the surface of a much larger issue. To build a stronger argument, it is important to provide a fuller analysis of each author’s work by reading more of their short stories and novels. This would establish a trend in their literary careers rather than a few select pieces. In addition, one must not forget that both boys and girls attended public ordinary schools. Their enrollment numbers increased dramatically in the 1920s and 1930s, making it is necessary to apply the same methodology on female intellectuals. A common thread between their fiction works and those of male intellectuals would further confirm the effectiveness of colonial education on Korean children. Considering these limitations, this thesis is only a preliminary study, but I hope its main points and arguments will encourage others to explore different methods when investigating abstract topics like “consumption.”
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