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Shopping, Sex, and Lies: Mimong/Sweet Dreams (1936) and the disruptive process of colonial girlhood

Originally released in 1936, Mimong/Sweet Dreams (Yang Ju-nam) is one of the earliest surviving Korean films to have emerged from the China Film Archive in 2010. For decades it was presumed that most of the cinema from pre-1945 Korea was lost to the sands of time but the discovery of a small cache of films and the Korean Film Council's restoration and distribution of them, has allowed scholars and audiences alike a chance to gain a small insight into the cinema of this period. The re-releases of a dozen newsreels and feature films have allowed a new academic engagement with the early cinema of Korea to take place. This new engagement has not only taken place as a result of the practical availability of products. There has been a steadily growing shift in the approach to the early period of Korean cinema that has been informed by the dialogues and questioning of colonial and post-colonial studies (See Choi 2003; Taylor-Jones, 2017). The early period in Korean film history was, for many years, consigned to a small paragraph lamenting Korea's colonial status and there was a dismissal of any products made under Japanese rule as more part of Japanese cinema than Korean. However, film scholars in the last couple of decades working across several languages now understand this period as both an innovative time in its own right and the complex birthplace of the modern Korean cinematic moment (Baskett 2009; Yecies and Shim 2011; Kim 2017).

Sweet Dreams is based around unhappy and unfulfilled housewife Ae-sun's affair with a silver-tongued lothario. The affair begins, appropriately enough, in a department store as Ae-sun demands more and more expensive merchandise to be brought before her. It is not only her spending that that is out of control. Her desire

for the new, the modern, and the exciting, leads her away from the marital home and her child, Jeong-hui, into the arms of an ostensibly wealthy playboy who shares her desire for all forms of urban fun. She will later learn that her consumerist romance is built on lies and deceit, as her lover is nothing more than a laundry man with a side-line in minor criminal activity. Horrified at his lack of wealth and her growing boredom with him, she turns him into the police without even a second thought and proceeds to focus on her new love object, a visiting dancer who is not keen to pursue the relationship. She finally realizes the error of her ways when her speeding taxi hits her own daughter as she hurries to the station to catch a train to begin a new life. At the hospital, after reconciling with her child, she commits suicide whilst holding her injured daughter's hand.

The rollercoaster of lust sex, crime and tragic coincidence ensures that Sweet Dreams operates as a good marker of the complex melodramatic narratives surrounding the Korean colonial modern female experience. This article will examine the film via two interlinked discourses; the first examines the consuming female's acts as a site of affective, although illicit, pleasure. I will explore how the film constitutes a process by which the adult woman is rendered into the mutable category of girl. As bell hooks notes, women of a colonized nation are doubly colonized, not only by the Imperial nation but also by men of their own nationhood (1992, 157-179), and this double oppression has often resulted in female silence both during and after a period of colonialism. As Miriam Silverberg (1997, 225) has observed, the moment of the colonial modern in which this film is positioned, 'was not some coherent system that would be imported with marginal adaptations', rather, the interlinked forces of the moment of the colonial and the moment of the modern were 'shifting, contradictory and deeply ideological'. With this in mind, using the discourse of

girlhood studies, I will argue allows for a visualization of gender that is both expansive and fluid and opens the female Korean colonial cinematic figure to new modes of understanding. This article speaks to the increasing academic scholarship that is taking place on this area. Large-scale multi-site academic studies such as The Modern Girl Around the World (2008) have explored the cross-cultural presentation of 'modern' girlhood as a globally shared narrative based in a specific moment of modernity, colonialism and cultural shift, 'the underlying structures of commonality and difference specific to various states, to different colonial and semicolonial regimes, and to diverse national and international corporate strategies' (2-3). It is key however to still take the individual texts as a singularity of experience. Despite the commonalities that can be mapped, no two film texts are alike and, via a 'digging down' into particularity of a text we can see both the local specificity of a girl culture alongside her participation in and contribution to, wider socio-historical debates.

With this idea in mind, secondly, I will explore how the colonial modern articulates a [non]space that allows both the act of consumption and the act of 'doing' gender to undermine the moment of the colonial modern. Sweet Dreams takes place in the moment of the compressed, and enforced, colonial modernity that Korea was undergoing. Korea had been officially occupied by Japan in 1910 and had undergone a radical process of modernisation. The nation was restructured with a series of land, legal, monetary, educational and linguistic reforms that were all designed to transform Korean into a model colony. As will be explored, women played an important role in Japan's aims and ambitions for the citizens of her colony and new modern vision of womanhood that often came into conflict with the traditional Korean Confucian-based vision of the female status. As will be argued, Sweet Dreams offers a rupture to the colonial narratives and reveals the very artifice on which they were built.

I: Pleasurable Girlhood and illicit consumption

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Figure 1: the image of the songbird is returned to on multiple occasions in the film.

Sweet Dreams opens with a telling image - a songbird in a cage (figure 1). This visual is returned to on multiple occasions and is the metaphoric centre of the filmic narrative. We first meet the lead character Ae-sun as she engages her husband in a debate about her standing in his eyes. She comments that in his desire to reduce her to nothing more than a passive object, her husband denies her basic humanity. As she retorts to his comment on his desire for her to remain in the home environment, 'I am not a bird in a cage. Do you think I am not a human?' The narrative that begins from this moment revolves around Ae-sun's attempts to find a life that she feels is more suited to her aims and ambitions beyond being a wife and mother, in short, her desire to escape the cage.

This tension between visions of caged beauty versus self-determining subject speaks to the wider continuing debates that Korea had been undergoing for a couple of decades since formal Japanese occupation. Before 1910[1], Korean women had traditionally been constructed as the site of danil minjok or one homogeneous Korean nation, so it was their job to be 'chaste and vigilant against foreign males' (Choi 2009:14). Given the focus on chastity as a 'marker' of purity, their national compatriots were keen that 'their' women remain untouched by foreign hands and women and girls had, therefore, limited role in the public sphere. Women in the pre-

colonial period were rarely educated[2] and had few, if any, legal rights (Kim 2009; Choi 2013). Imperialism seriously muddied these waters of internal and external sexual politics and women and girls become a problematic beating heart in the colonial body. Women were both markers of nationhood (via their national status) and living sites of Korean colonial experience (via the position under Japanese rule and the inability of Korean males to control the political, and indeed social, environment in which they live). Women were an important part of the colonial discourse with Japan presenting a series of initiatives to try to engage girls and women in formal education as part of their aim to create obedient and productive citizens. This process of modernization and the importation, from both Japan and beyond, of new ideas about women and their place in society, had a clear impact on traditionally held gender roles. The importance of women as wives and mothers was a central tenet of Japanese cultural ideology since the Meiji period. Women had been cast as 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'/Ry*ōsai* kenbo and this dialogue became the main dynamic in the construction of female citizenship. The 'good wife' would manage prudently the household affairs and enhance and support the success of the adult (male) family members, whilst the 'wise mother' would devote herself to the growth of devoted and compliant citizens of Imperial Japan. Thus, women were presented as having a specific value inside the imperial narrative as the site of modern techniques of household management, family health strategies including nutrition and cleanliness and, unlike in previous generations, they were now key as active players in the education of the future citizens of Empire (Horiguchi 2011). In Korea the terms would be reversed so instead we have 'Wise Mother, Good Wife' or hyeonmoyangcheo, a small but important element that indicated that the Japanese narratives had been given a Korean slant that saw her role as mother to be her

foremost focus. This change developed from the influence of previously held gender norms based on the Confucian vision of womanly virtues (motherhood been the sole marker of a woman's worth) and, too (external to Japanese control), the 'influence of American Protestant missionary notion of domesticity' (Choi 2009, 3). As Hyaeweol Choi notes with reference to the Korean colonial period, women were therefore envisioned in a transcultural context that offered both repression and potential liberation (4).

So how does this woman enter the discourse of girlhood and why is this a useful point lens to read this text through? For this, we need to see girlhood as more than a marker of age. Instead, we need to see girlhood as more than the sum of her parts. The term 'girl' has a discursive and performative volatility, that, as Swindle comments, results in the 'feeling' and 'doing' of girlhood becoming attached to bodies of those other than young females (as in the expression 'like a girl') (2016, np). The bodies of young colonial females who were no longer clearly demarcated as child (or those who were engaging in youth-giving activities, something I will return to later), were a problematic entity as neither wife nor mother, they had no specific social role to play. Their in-between status was, therefore, a point of concern and potential site of disruption. The specific 'girl culture' period that this article engages with is the Japanese colonial period in Korea (1910-1945) but, as will be seen, there is not just one vision of girlhood on offer in this period but multiple. Commonly used terms for girlhood abounded in this period, from the very popular yeohaksaeng/schoolgirl to sonyeo, the translation of the Japanese term *shōjo* (girl). All terms were culturally loaded and carried specific meanings (Choi 2016, 181) but none more so that the idea of the 'modern girl'. Specific to the time frame of Sweet Dreams, the modern girl dominated the popular press of the 1920s and 1930s (as well

as the minds of those who expressed concerns for the nation's failing morals). Modernity had bought a new vision of womanhood that was no longer dependent on her relationship to the men in her life. She was neither wife nor mother but something rather different. Like many of the other terms were also used in the Korean context to reference girlhood modern girl in the Korean context had been imported from Japan. The Japanese Modaru Garu, stylized on the American flapper, had burst on to the Korean cultural scene in the early 1920s alongside other key visions of modernity - jazz, the department stores, wide ranges of new consumer products, café culture, and the motorcar. She quickly became a lampooned figure of social fear and stigmatization inside Korea and was identified with promiscuity, prostitution, drug and drink abuse and, more shockingly, her action and beliefs seemed to be working towards the dismantling of the rigid family and patriarchal structures which had maintained the gender status quo for centuries. Far from being a de-politicized and frivolous figure however, "a middle-class adolescent at play" as Silverberg describes her American counterparts (1991: 226); the modern girl in colonial Korea was a site of potential political upheaval and unrest in her rejection of dominant narratives particular around work and the training of young women as independent citizens. This new female mode of being was both celebrated and condemned in equal measure. Although for some she was a figure of potential liberation, the modern girl in Korean literature in the period of the 1920s and early 1930s was all too often visualized as a damned creature who, for contemporary writer Kim Ki-rim, operated as a "ghost in the daylight" who had sold her soul to the lure of the trappings of decadent modernity (quoted in Jeong 2011,18).

So, girlhood in this sense, not only operates as a marker of age, but more specifically a marker of consumerist modernity and, key here, ambivalence. Anita

Harris (2004) notes that girlhood has come to function as a kind of container for narratives of both anxiety and progress - a situation that holds true even in the early days of cinematic girlhood and which is especially pertinent with reference to Sweet Dreams. Furthermore, this makes the construction of the girl contingent and indeterminate, always necessarily incomplete and in-process. As Judith Butler describes, 'to the extent that the naming of the 'girl' is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain 'girling' is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm' (1993, 232) In short, the girl is in a perpetual state of transition and incompleteness – she can never fully be articulated into a narrative since she herself is a site of flux.

This idea of a failed normative vision is important in Sweet Dreams both internal and externally to the text. What Sweet Dreams creates for the audience is a visualization of a female desiring subject who has not only sexual but also potentially more dangerously, subjective desires. I am using the term desire here to reference a vision of yearning, longing or want and not only in the erotic sense. Whilst her initial move into adultery is based on her ambition for a fun materialism that her husband denies her, her desire for the dancer is based on something quite different. She admires his discipline, his sculpted muscles, his artistic rigour and skill and his physical prowess (figure 2). Physical attraction clearly plays a key role but in the scene straight after she has seen him perform in a show, she questions him about his need to endlessly rehearse. His ability to work hard and devote himself to his art form is something that raises her curiosity. She is entranced by his sense of fulfilment and purpose and his apparent rejection of her as a result. The surviving print of the film has some missing scenes, but piecing together with what remains, it becomes apparent

she has been sending him flowers, visiting him daily and it is the dancer she is following to the station when her taxi hits her child.

Therefore, the film raises the taboo subject of both female sexual desires but also female desire to be fulfilled in other aspects of her internal life. This is the female subject knowing her 'own' desires as distinct from those of others (Radden 1996). Her desire for the dancer may be very much based in the physical but her pursuit of him speaks to something more than that. A desire to join a life that has a rhythm and a purpose that hers lacks. She follows him to the station we assume to join the troupe, to partake in a life that is about art and creation, something more than the play and consumerism that she has, up until now, desired more than anything else. Kellner's comments that 'Pleasure is neither natural nor innocent. Pleasure is learned and is thus intimately bound up with power and knowledge' (1995, 39) is helpful here. As Kellner explains, 'power and knowledge are intimately intertwined and (…) pleasure is bound up with both' (39). This, in turn, opens up the wider discourse of how the desiring female subject is engaged with. As I shall now argue, the pleasure structures of Sweets Dreams are not only bound into gendered dynamics but also colonial ones.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Figure 2: Male body as object of female desire

Pleasure and its interaction with power and knowledge is a key dynamic in Sweet Dreams. Where the pleasure lies is complex and reflective of the social moment for both audience and the intra-film figures. We see Ae-sun gain her delight from her new clothes, bars and restaurants, her new lover and all the urban-fun the cityscape can offer her. For the audience, the pleasure is watching her do these acts. Film is here helping to reproduce the female spectator as a consumer (Hollows 2000,

53) and Sweet Dreams allows the female audience to engage with a series of consumer delights and sexual as well as non-sexual adventures. This is rather remarkable compared to many of the roles that we see women playing around this time in films such as Arirang (Na Woon-gyu, 1926) (raped and her lover goes mad as a result), Jib-eobneun cheonsa/Angels on the Street (Choi In-kyu, 1941) (abused and nearly forced into prostitution) and *Eohwa/Fisherman's* Fire (Ahn Chul-yeong, 1939) (seduced, forced into prostitution and then attempts suicide), where the woman is presented as a passive victim of circumstance.

The film's melodramatic conventions are here important to address. The melodrama has always played an important role in Korea cinema. The melodrama of this period is linked to the influence of sinpa (Korean)/shinpa (Japanese) theatrical style that had been exported to Korea throughout the 1900s and 1920s. Shinpa's key narrative of women suffering through the strict and unbending structures of class and social prejudice would be seen across the films from this period and were clearly informed by, but also contributed to, the popular discourse on the position of women during this period. McHugh and Abelmann in their work on the later South Korean Golden Age melodramas note that we can define melodrama in this context as 'dramatic and sudden reversals, remarkable coincidences, pathos, and sensation' (2002: 2). As McHugh and Abelmann continue, Korean melodrama is key in its 'use of gender for its variable articulations of political and cultural forces within a particular national imaginary in a distinct historical moment" (3). As E. Ann. Kaplan comments with reference to Anglo-American dynamics, 'The melodrama has constructed representations whose purpose is to manipulate women in, and out of the workforce, in accordance with capitalism's needs' (1992:45). In the case of Sweet

Dreams, we need to read capitalism as part of the boom for the tropes of colonial modernity, here defined by the ability to engage with the new consumer moment.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

Figure 3: Consumerist female pleasure and exchange of money in Sweet Dreams.

It is clear that the housewife - in the case of Sweet Dreams, Ae-sun - is being held up as the marker of deviant femininity but she is also echoing many of the materialistic and pleasure-seeking desires of her audience (figure 3). We see the woman fluctuate from visual image to a modern consumer subject. In Sweet Dreams, as with many melodramas, she is never static in meaning. We see the world through the lenses of the female gaze: desiring, passionate and, unlike the good wife, wise mother, this female gaze is both selfish and wanting. She is shown as able to use both her purchasing power to demand new products and gain real pleasure from the exchange of money for goods. But the pleasure does not end here. For, we also see the female subject engage with Ae-sun in the consumerist moment from the shop assistant who admired her decision to buy the most expensive dress to the hairdresser who admires her modern looks and approach to life.

Whilst the film offered a space of female subjective desire it was also keen to engage with cultural trends that related to moral panics involving gender and modernity. Consumer culture, even as early as the 1930s, had an intense focus on beauty and youth, with the beginnings of specifically targeted campaigns and targeted at girls and women emerging in this period. Joan Jacobs Blumberg (1997) suggests that a common trend is that the girl's body has been continually and historically

constructed as a project in need of continual improvement and refinement. In Sweet Dreams, Ae-sun's desire to be new, different and 'better' in some way, places her into this process of (re) construction as she struggles to articulate an identity that she feels can fully explain and explore her own subjectivity. Ae-sun is endlessly trying to create a life for herself that grants her the fulfilment that she feels she needs. However, as the film narrative continues, specifically what type of life she wants seems to elude her. We see her spend a great deal of the film examining her own reflection in the mirror as she considers her social and emotional state. In the opening scene when she is arguing with her husband, she faces a mirror from which she can see him in reflection as well as her own image. The film then chooses to offer a curious shot where the angel of the camera and the position of the actors, means it is her husband images reflected in the mirror rather then Ae-sun's. It is perhaps telling that at this stage, Ae-sun does not even have her own image reflecting back at her as she makes the first move away from the family home and the role of wife and mother that she cannot conform to. This desire to find a new pathway that allows her to realise her dreams and ambitions (however potentially shallow they are), is reflected in this endless searching for her own image. Yet, her attempts at forming the subjecthood are endlessly interrupted. Rather than a moment of narcissism the continual interruption of this reflection via the camera position, narrative interjections and the physical movement of the other players in the respective scenes, seeks to disrupt her process of self-reflection and self-determination. Figure 4 is just one example taken as she sits in the hairdresser contemplating her future. This moment of deliberation is disrupted via the discovering of the lowly (and criminal) status of her lover when the hairdresser receives her laundry delivery. Her husband is frequently disrupting her moments of internal examination in their shared home, and we see her

gaze into the mirror just before she calls the police to denounce her lover. Every time she makes a life transition we witness her attempts to take stock of her own bodily and emotive reflection and yet, this attempted process of self-definition and self-realisation is inevitably interrupted.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

Figure 4: Ae-sun contemplates her existence in the mirror in various moments throughout the film.

The complex process managing the transition from girlhood to womanhood is thus ambivalent, ambiguous, and fraught. Far from the dizzying and celebratory rhetoric of choice, girlhood is theorized as the 'forcible citation of an unachievable norm that disciplines and regulates even as it seems to offer up pleasure and freedom' (Handyside and Taylor-Jones 2009: 9). We can clearly see this tension in the life of Ae-sun, as the desire to be modern never offers the empowerment and life-confirming ambitions she desires. She remains as a trapped bird in a cage despite all her efforts. The momentary pleasures of her escape are futile in the moment of her atonement and punishment at the film's conclusion.

Butler notes, with reference to the interpellation of the identity of girlhood, that via the linguistic and cultural discourses that surround her perceived state, the female subject is 'girled' through a process that 'is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect' (1993: 8). We see the film seek to construct not one, but two, images of girlhood both of which are marked by the simultaneous discourse of reinforcement and contestation on the role that the female should play in the modern space. The film takes Ae-sun's subjectivity to be the central element of the film, but interestingly it is another

girlhood that defines the cost of her actions. Ae-sun's daughter, Jeong-hui, is the living reminder of her mother's failures to conform to social and emotional convention. Girlhood in this way is endlessly positioned between potential change and freedom and anxiety and lack.

The alternative contemporary reference term for girl, yeohaksaeng/schoolgirl, is relevant here. The schoolgirl featured heavily as a vision of young female experience that was based on ideas of a correct, proper and bounded education that Japan had begun to enforce in 1910 (Yoo 2104). There was a movement in this period to focus on Koreans' responsibility to cultivate morality and character through education and cultural activities (Kim 2007: 304–305, Moon 2014, 16) and young girls, as future mothers of the nation, were key in this dialogue. Girlhood thus envisioned, was defined via the figure of the obedient schoolgirl and importantly, Jeong-hui is pre-sexual and therefore 'pure' or perceived as lacking in desire, the very antithesis of the modern sexual and desiring girlhood that her mother embodies. Yet, both roles are seen as negative for the individuals that inhabit them. Usually dressed in her slightly too tight outfit we see Jeong-hui try to find her own position in the social space without the guidance of her mother. Jeong-hui is frequently framed between the internal and external space. She sits in doorways, entrance halls and verandas, in short, in-between spaces that reflect her uncertain and emotionally vulnerable status. Her father is unable to offer her solace or support and her mother is absent. She is both visible and invisible at the same time. Her parents frequently forget about her and ignore her, in school she is nearly indistinguishable from the rows of children sat listening to the safety awareness film and it is this inability to even see her that leads the taxi driver to hit her with his car. In this way Jeong-hui operates as a symbol of confusion and upheaval whose status as girl results in her

inability, like her mother, to find an effective place for herself in the familial and social sphere.

Despite their often-spatial dislocation, Ae-sun and her daughter Jeong-hui are interconnected at several points both via framing and plot devices. Both require new clothes as a marker of development. For Ae-sun the clothes are to be utilized to offer her a way to engage with the modern moment, whilst for Jeong-hui they serve as a marker of her burgeoning physical development. At various points in the film, both mother and daughter suffer from 'strange dreams'; both are searching for their objet petit a, Jeong-hui for a mother who lives and cares for her, Ae-sun for a new mode of life that adequately addresses her desires and wants. At the end, as they lie in the hospital beds, side by side, they are both physically and emotionally broken by their experiences (figure 5). Both mother and daughter are ultimately seen as unable to exist in the urban environment, and this is their major failure. Despite her road-safety lesson Jeong-hui is hit by a taxi whilst crossing the street and Ae-sun is the responsible party due to her inability to listen to the warnings of the taxi driver about the perils of speed.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE]

Figure 5: Mother and daughter are mirror images in the hospital at the end of the film

As Durham notes in her essay on the girling of America, the bodies of the girls are positioned to ensure that the products never deviate from the capital-driven discursive system. Thus, 'the oppositional gestures in the texts are recuperated into the system of commodity capitalism: The moments in which the girls' bodies defy gender norms are incorporated into a larger discourse of traditional positioning's of

girls' bodies as objects of sexual desire and idealized femininity' (2013: 29). Girlhood, therefore, is articulated in Sweet Dreams as a moment between repression and freedom. The girling of Ae-sun is a controlled process that, whilst visualizing a moment of female disruption, actually supports the controlling powers of colonial and patriarchal, authority. Jeong-hui operates, not as marker of disruption but as a tool of control since it is only her injuries that can bring her mother to heel. Jeong-hui is obedient, quiet and passive (the feminine ideal) and serves as a balance to Ae-sun's aggressive desire for personal autonomy.

The film, therefore, acts as a mirror to the tensions and idiosyncrasies of colonial pleasure. Pleasure was possible but it would have to be paid for at a later date. Walter Mignolo (2011) articulated colonialism as the 'darker side of modernity' a concept that is key to a reading of Sweet Dreams as a gendered colonial product. In Sweet Dreams, the tropes of modernity - the car, the promiscuous woman, and the drive for capital gains are rendered abject. For Kristeva the abject, "the traitor, the liar, the criminal, the rapist, the killer' (1982: 4) remains mired by ambivalence. Neither subject nor object, it is neither external nor internal to the social field and as a result, it undermines and destabilizes the established order. In Sweet Dreams, the promiscuous mother is the embodiment of a liar, a potential killer and the site of selfish excess. Her very existence calls into question the positive rhetoric of colonial modernity that was being promoted across the colony and, at the same time, disrupts the gendered narratives that the colonisers were attempting to assert. However, as we see, an active engagement with the colonial modern for the female subject is not life affirming but rather leads directly to her downfall.

In this way, the ending of Sweet Dreams is highly ambivalent. Ae-sun dies by her own hand at the bedside of her injured daughter. Given the film had spent a fair

amount of the diegesis exploring how the daughter desperately needed and missed her mother, the return of the mother to the child only for her to commit suicide beside her sits uncomfortably even inside genre of melodrama. The tragic need to purify the family unit via the death of the mother clearly undermines the role that woman could play in modernity. She sacrifices her desire for the dancer for her love for her daughter but ultimately she can never be forgiven and it's her realization of her lack of a potential future that leads to her death. Yet, the pleasure of the film can be found in the very bad behaviour that we are supposed to be rooting against. The film promotes the idea that the woman is to remain static (caged) in a traditional, predetermined set of values whilst simultaneously undermining this message by offering up a vision of consumerist delight and feminine desire. For women, therefore, the promise of the modern was littered with conflict and tension. The colonial female subject was, therefore, alienated and stymied by the simultaneous desire for her to be modern and at the same time non-modern.

II: Spacio-scapes of non-place in colonial moment

As we have seen, Sweet Dreams provides us with a mise-en-scène of this tension between repression and potential liberation that is a marker of colonial modernity (for more details on colonial modernity see Barlow 1997). The moment of the colonial modern allows for the interlinking of several key discourses that reflect the non-Western experience of Japan and her territories, which are important to understand to read the film world of Sweet Dreams. The first key tenet is that colonialism and modernity are both clear expressions of capitalism's expansion and 'could make visible how globalizing colonial or imperial capital inhabited and reconfigured space, all space; not just some *spaces'* (Barlow,2012 624, my emphasis). This experience and making visible was not a one-way process. As Todd

Henry notes, 'the ways in which Japanese ideologies and projects intersected and interacted with pre-existing institutions and practices in the colony itself' (2005: 641), is vital to understand this period. In short, there was not a case of 'pre and after' but a more involved process of mutation and adaptation. If colonialism and modernity were inescapably entwined then nation, tradition, culture, civilization and other such categories become inextricably interrelated to modernity and therefore, in the Korean context, to colonialism. Modernityin the colonies may have been imported from, and articulated via, Japan but this modernity, in turn, had been appropriated from the West and was not a one-way process. As Laura Ann Stoler states, the colonial is the site of 'the expectant and conjured – about dreams of comforting futures and foreboding of future failures' (2010:1). This sense of expectant futures is something that colonial Korean cinema was heavily engaged with and yet, alongside this, in the tension-ridden process of Imperialism, the foreboding sense of potential failure was never far behind.

Augé's debate on the spacio-scape of modernity is here helpful in a reading of the Korean urban colonial space. He notes that 'if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a place which cannot be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity will be a non-place' (1995: 78). He continues that airports, leisure parks, large retail outlets and shopping mall, rail stations would, therefore, be designated non-spaces (79). These are spaces that reject the option of encounter and dialogue, in short, spaces where subject-hood fails to flourish or be confirmed. For Augé, the non-place 'is the opposite of utopia: it exists and it does not contain any organic society (111-112). Whilst Augé's thesis with relation to contemporary modernity is potentially problematic, (non-spaces, for example, have been utilized by many marginal groups to form a vision of an identity

which is counter the mainstream), in the colonial moment, the designation of non-space offers a clear articulation of colonial ambivalence. He notes that non-spaces, 'unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead, they are listed, classified, promoted to the status of places of memory' and are 'assigned to a circumscribed and specific position' (79). In the colonial moment of Korea, the new infrastructure was built on a cultural rupture that had taken place in the moment of enforced integration into the Japanese Empire. Sweet Dreams articulated itself around non-spaces: hotels, theatre lobby's, the street, the railway station and, key to the films narrative, the road.

In Sweet Dreams, Ae-sun, travels by car to the train station, both transient hubs of non-place that are the key images of a modern colonial city. Via this travel, her subjecthood will come to crisis via the realization that she can never possess a non-socially sanctioned existence. Inside the film space, Ae-sun and Jeong-hui are claimed as the victims of the colonial modern via the car accident. Outside the world of the film, there was a clear narrative that articulated the separateness of the Korean citizen from the colonial infrastructure. This was a world where the Korean citizen was ranked below his or her Japanese counterpart and all aspects of society were geared towards the maintenance of an ethnic hierarchy (see Henry 2014, Kim 2017). For the audience, the clear demarking of space into Japanese and Korean citizen would have been most obvious in the fact they were watching the film in a segregated cinema (Kim 2007). The urban space was not equal and accessible for all, and in the visual raising of this tension, the film was pointing to the real dichotomy that was the clear idiosyncrasy at the heart of the colonial moment. The colonial powers spoke of integration and togetherness at the same time as the everyday bio-politics of Empire minoritised the Korean culture and language.

The potential failure of the colonial project is found throughout the Sweet Dreams. The film itself operates as a warning about the perils of modern living as personified by the tragedy that ensues on the public road network. Throughout Sweet Dreams the urban environment is key. Although Ae-sun is in one respect a very modern woman, the film makes clear that her lack of education about the modern world is, in the end, devastating. Her placement in this very public sphere raises question about the woman as urban flaneur. She moves through the urban space with a confident and unembarrassed desire to experience the new and the exciting. She enjoys the sense of floating freedom that the modern space offered, and yet she is seen as lacking in the necessary skills to actually master, control or direct affect this territory. The one time we hear Ae-sun's identify a specific location for her travel (Yongsan-station), the resultant tragedy and Ae-sun's eventual suicide, is the most effective method of control bought to bear on the hitherto uncontrollable female subject. Her attempts to map and control her own urban environment are therefore thwarted. Thus the film confirms that although the woman may desire the urban space, ultimately the series of poor decisions Ae-sun makes indicate that she, and by extension, any Korean woman deviating from traditional gender roles, does not actually belong to it. This undermining of the inclusivity and potential of the urban space to offer the colonial subject illustrated the real day-to-day realities that saw a vast percentage of the Korean population minoritised and repressed inside their very own nation.

The modern colonial moment was supposed to form a sense of a Korean nationhood that was dependent upon Japan and the Japanese Imperial discourses, however, the symbols of integration, the rail system, the road network, the commercial center, ironically become the site where the idea of identity creation and

confirmation was undermined. Take for example the options open to Korean subjects - you could either remain outside the dialogues of the time as non-modern subjects, or you entered into the colonial moment only via collaboration, therefore becoming non-Koreans (Robinson and Shin 1999). We see therefore that these urban modern spaces are unable to fulfil any notion of identity confirmation. The role of the motor car becomes a two-fold process. The road network in the colonial context can offer no sense of a nation identity confirmation since we see a clear articulation of personal vulnerability and social anxiety via the road safety workshops. For colonial Korea, the road was built by Korean workers in poor conditions under often-enforced labor conscription (Chen 1984: 232). Therefore, as much as it could operate as a positive method of modern transportation, its very existence was imbued with narratives of colonial subjugation. Japan built roads as a better method to control her colony and her resources.

Likewise, the new cityscape had been designed to pay tribute to the Japanese colonial project and was structured to ensure the separation both physical and political between Korean and Japanese citizens (Henry 2014). The names of cities, towns and regions were changed to suit this Japanese colonial machine and its aims (Henry 2014, McDonald 2017). Erica Carter et al. note that space becomes place by being named and these meanings are intrinsic in the names given (1993: xii). In the colonial moment, space has been named via a language and a cultural mapping that is other to the culture and linguistic coding of the colonial inhabitants. This space that has been created via a process of naming in a colonial movement means the aforementioned space is neither welcoming nor nurturing for the colonial subject. In this vein, Bhabha's colonial space is visualized as a non-space from which the ideology of the colonial becomes an original beginning; not a visualization of a continuance (1994:

237, 241,246). In short, the moment of colonial displacement interrupts modernity's myths of progress. In Korea, the need and desire for the new to be written over the old was paramount and a key narrative of the colonial experience as Japan sought to constitute herself as the locus of development over a visualization of a stagnating and unsupportable Korean culture. In this way the colonial environment became an ideal example of a non-place for Korean citizens that was unable to provide a sense of positive identity confirmation – something Sweet Dreams illustrated with its tragic ending.

Conclusion

I will end this article with a consideration of lead actress Mun Ye-Bong's fate and how it in some ways mirrors Ae-sun's tragic ending. The role of Ae-sun is transformed via the woman who was playing her. Together with fellow actresses Kim Sin-jae and Kim So-young, Mun was one of the leading stars of the silent, and then sound era. She featured in multiple films in the 1930s and 1940s and was a regular feature in the movie magazine in the period. Mun starred in twenty-four feature films that we know of between 1936 and 1944. When the total output of Korean cinema from 1936 to 1945 was about seventy-to-eighty films, we can get a good indication of Mun's popularity.[3] The partitioning of Korea would see Mun head North alongside other groups of leftist intellectuals and artists. She performed in one of the first specifically North Korean film Nae Gohyan/My Home Village (Kang Hong-sik) in 1949 prior to the advent of the Korean War. For several years she was a popular cultural figure on the North Korean stage and she was selected as DPRK's cultural ambassador to the International Film Festival in Czechoslovakia in 1951. However, like so many she fell from favour as the regime grew more extreme. She vanished for many years but rather surprisingly, and contrary to many others who vanished in this

period, she did re-emerge. She acted small roles in a couple of feature films during the 1980s and 1990s before dying in 1999. Her work in the colonial era and then her decision to join the North means she operates as a complex reflection of the turbulent history of the Korean nation. It is all too easy to see women such as Mun as trapped by the times that surrounded them, yet their agency is clear. Mun decided to act in colonial features to ensure her career flourished when many Korean stars failed to succeed. Films such as Sweet Dreams open up an image of a Korean woman that was not docile and subservient but also capable of a whole range emotions and actions from selfishness and sexual desire to those considered more female-appropriate such as atonement and sacrifice.

We return to the image that dominated throughout the film – that of the caged songbird. The discourses of gender, modernity, and stardom that are articulated throughout the film interact to create a film that both delights and empowers a vision of a non-normative femininity at the same time as this disruptive womanhood is forced into the established gender dynamics. The female subject's body represents the 'transcoding' of the moment of colonial modernity via an articulation of the simultaneous discourses of gender, urbanization, and consumerism, as a complex and often contradictory process that surrounds the citizens of colonial Korea. The bird does not escape the cage but, in the very existence of that cage, a new frame of understanding has been articulated to counter a colonial discourse that sought to normalize the colonial moment. The disruptive female in Sweet Dreams is both a reflection of the moment and the very means by which these codes are undermined.

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[1] Although the official occupation date was 1910 Japan had controlled many aspects of Korean trade and international diplomacy since the Japan-Korea treaty of 1876. The Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905 was the final act prior to occupation that saw Japan take control of the military and political life of Korea.

[2] Whilst a few upper-class women received classical scholarly education, few lower/middle-class women had any formal educational experience. This would also include what we would now call domestic science and health education. This was something the Japanese authorities would implement in their educational reforms.

[3] The loss of a lot of early cinema makes concrete figures hard to achieve. From magazines, screening bills, official records etc. you can make approximate figures.