This paper started out as an entirely different endeavor; I initially wanted to center my research on a specific Korean female artist active during the Japanese Occupation period. After spending a significant amount of time searching for any trace of her career on the databases available at the Hollins library, I had to give up. The greatest problem with doing research on East Asian art history at a school of our size is finding sources. The stacks provide limited avenues for information and even sources at Roanoke College are scarce. This problem is of course not just specific to Hollins, but is a greater issue within the field of art history. Plenty of research has been done on East Asian art, but little of it has been done by scholars writing in English and equally little has been translated into English. Sources are painfully limited if you have no reading knowledge of the language of the country in question, especially in comparison to other specializations of art history like Renaissance Europe. Furthermore, information about art from the Occupation period is scarce even in Korea due to Korean cultural suppression by the Japanese, so I was at a loss from the start.

However, this was an important process to go through in the development of the paper I did write. I not only got a better understanding of the type of information available to me about Korean art, but I also made the decision after this experience to continue pursuing the role of women in the development of Korean art. Recalling an art paper I wrote earlier in my college career about works from the Chinese Qing dynasty and the rapid development of art and active trade between the East Asian nations of this period, I decided to turn to the contemporaneous dynasty in the Korean peninsula, the Joseon dynasty. I have often admired genre painting traditions and thought it would be the best avenue for finding women depicted in Korean art. I quickly found examples of Sin Yun-bok’s images of kisaeng after flipping through art surveys of the period. He was well-known enough to show up in more than one survey and his work was complex enough that there were many elements that still needed to be discussed. After already being forced to retreat once, I was determined to make it work.

I amassed books from the Hollins and Roanoke College libraries, searched Worldcat and requested books via ILL until I ran out of options, and tracked down every related article I could find on multiple databases, including a few extremely helpful Masters’ theses with excellent bibliographies. I was able to mine enough sources through sheer determination that I was able to write my paper, learning in the process that the best research is done with a good deal of struggle and the willingness to forge new ground.